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# Turkey and the EU: The Context Changes Again

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One obvious characteristic of world affairs today is rapid – possibly accelerating– change. When I wrote about 'Turkey and the EU' for the Academia Europaea meeting in Vienna October 2012, my subtitle was 'A Changed Context'. In 2012 the EU was still in the grip of the crisis over the euro, which had teetered on the brink of collapse and was only just beginning to look a little more secure. In contrast, Turkey had experienced an amazing economic boom and appeared to have successfully transitioned from an era of secular military rule to a relatively stable elected government (despite some human rights concerns) led by the moderately Islamist Justice and Development (AK) party and its broadly popular Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and President Abdullah Gul. The Middle East was in the throes of the 'Arab Spring'. The developed world was still largely focused on the task of recovery from the 2008–2009 financial crisis and pondering how to respond to the looming failure of Doha trade talks at the global level. Now, only two years later, the context has changed yet again. The EU, Turkey, the Middle East, and even global trends – all are substantially different. Therefore an 'Update' now follows my original text.

## Turkey and Europe

Turkey's initial application for full EU membership came in 1987, at the same time as one from Morocco. The latter was almost immediately dismissed because Morocco was judged not to be sufficiently 'European', and Turkey's application was held in abeyance. However, in 1995 – the same year as Austria, Finland, and Sweden joined the EU – the EU did agree to enter into a customs union with Turkey. After 2004, the number of EU member states expanded rapidly and today stands at 28. Formal negotiations about Turkey's possible accession started in 2005 and immediately encountered serious roadblocks. Austria's Peoples Party and Germany's CDU under Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that Turkey should be content with some form of 'privileged partnership' rather than full membership. French then-President Nicolas Sarkozy also stated that he was against full membership. France and Austria also both took the position that they would have to hold a national referendum on any

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decision to admit Turkey. France's current President François Hollande has recently come around (at least ostensibly) to supporting Turkey's membership but has held firm on the need for a referendum.

In 2012, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement visited Turkey with the mission of restarting negotiations about full membership. He arrived bearing the encouraging news that the EU might soon ease visa restrictions on Turkish citizens and perhaps eventually eliminate them entirely. Accession talks were briefly suspended in June 2013 over concern about political developments in Turkey, but they were reopened in November. The following month the EU and Turkey did, in fact, agree to sign an agreement relating to illegal migration and visa-free travel (more on this below). In January 2014 Prime Minister Erdogan made his first visit to Brussels in five years, which proved to be somewhat tense, and he received a less-than-enthusiastic reception.

Today, Turkish accession to the EU seems hardly any closer, if at all, than it did in 2012. There are 35 so-called chapters or policy areas that set forth standards which applicant states must meet in order to become a full EU member. Negotiation has so far been opened on only 14 chapters and just one has been satisfactorily resolved. Eight chapters have remained completely frozen because of continuing differences over Cyprus. It is noteworthy, for example, that the two leading candidates for the post of President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Junker (elected and assumed office in November 2014) and Martin Schulz, both promised in their final television debate (20 May) that Turkey would never be admitted during their tenure and mentioned Turkey's departure from European democratic values as the primary problem.[1] Indeed, Junker later promised that there would be no new EU members for at least five years.

There have been and continue to be a host of particular issues impeding Turkey's accession to the EU. These include the one that defeated Morocco's application, whether Turkey's history, politics, and predominately Muslim culture are sufficiently 'European'. Turkey's population (2013) reached 76.7 million,[2] which would make their EU Parliament representation the second largest, after Germany's (2014) 82.7 million,[3] and in several years (given Turkey's higher birth rate) probably the largest. The other side of the history and culture coin is whether Europe is already sufficiently – or even too – Turkish. Most estimates are that today there are about 3 million Turks in Europe, over half residing in Germany,[4] with significant numbers in Austria, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and the UK. For instance, some 1.6 million Turks represent about 2% of Germany's 82.7 million;[5] 200,000–300,000 Turks, up to 4% of Austria's 8.5 million;[5] and about 500,000 Turks, less than 1% of the UK's 64 million.[6]

There have been notable shifts in migration patterns from Turkey to Europe over the years.[7] Turks came primarily to South-eastern Europe in Ottoman times. They came from Cyprus after the island became a British Crown Colony in 1914 and again during the Second World War and in the wake of civil conflict in the 1960s and partition in 1974. Meskhetian Turks went to various Eastern European countries when they were expelled from Georgia during the Second World War. Other Turks

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have migrated to Western Europe from Bulgaria, Romania, and Western Thrace. In the 1960s many Turks arrived as 'guest workers' under special agreements and initially found welcome in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, France and Sweden. Many guest workers, not surprisingly, never returned home. Turkish immigration slowed substantially beginning in the 1990s when European policies became more restrictive, alternative supplies of often-better-qualified immigrants became available from Eastern Europe after the end of the (first) Cold War, and the Turkish economy started to improve. However, during the last three decades, partly because of the Kurdish conflict, some 700,000 Turkish asylum seekers came to Europe and – although less than 20% managed to gain formal asylum – many have managed to remain anyway.[8] Currently, overall, according to Fassmann and Içduygu, 'statistical reality' shows 'the inflow of Turkish citizens is decreasing, the net migration nearly zero or negative and the stock of the Turkish immigrant community declining.' For example, as they point out, the net migration in 2008 between Germany and Turkey was –5500 and between Austria and Turkey in 2011 only +629.[8]

Many European countries with aging populations, even in trying economic times, continue to need more workers. On the other hand, many European politicians and especially the strident right-wing parties that have sprung up in most countries profess alarm about the Muslim challenge to traditional Western values and civil order. It is true that chronic underemployment and poverty of unskilled workers in urban ghettos coupled with appeals from radical imams and social media agitators do stoke violence. But Turkish communities generally tend to be more established and much less a threat than recent arrivals from North Africa and the Middle East.

Meanwhile, another concern arises indirectly from the fact that in 2010 – for the first time in 50 years since extensive migration started from Turkey to Europe – the number of migrants *to* Turkey (even excluding an increase in the number of returnees) exceeded those migrating *from* Turkey. Turkey has had the major challenge of accommodating a veritable flood of would-be immigrants and refugees from the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. Turkey's willingness to receive refugees has been commended by the international community from a humanitarian standpoint, although there are complaints about the inhumane living conditions in refugee camps. There are also worries about Turkey's role as a country of transit, offering a 'back door to Europe' for illegal immigrants of all sorts. Turkey's 126-mile border with Greece has long been relatively porous, and the war-torn borders with Syria and Iraq obviously constitute a grave security problem for all concerned. There has been a persistent problem with illegal migrants boating across the Aegean from Turkey to Greece, and Bulgaria (not a member of the Schengen passport-free zone) has had a hard time coping mainly with large numbers of Syrians coming via Turkey.

This background highlights the importance and indeed landmark status of the agreement between the EU and Turkey concluded in December 2013 and ratified by the European Parliament in June 2014.[8] Under the agreement, EU governments will be allowed to send illegal immigrants who arrive from Turkey, back to Turkey, with the expectation that they will be readmitted there. In return, the EU has agreed to

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push ahead with talks about dropping the present visa requirement for Turkish citizens entering Europe. All of this is a significant step in the direction of possible Turkish accession to the EU, but opponents of Turkish membership continue to warn that Turkish immigration may well increase once restrictions are removed and especially should Turkish politics and/or the economy take a turn for the worse.

Another barrier to Turkey's accession is one that has been dragging on for years: the issue of Cyprus. In 1974, supporters of a union of Greece and Cyprus staged a coup, prompting Turkey to occupy a third of the island that, in 1983, declared itself to be the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Successive proposals for reunification have failed, and the EU undertook various measures to ensure that breakaway Turkish Cyprus would be isolated both economically and diplomatically. Despite criticism from some member states, Cyprus was granted full EU membership in 1984. Turkey thus far has refused to recognize any but Turkish Cyprus and has kept traffic from Cyprus from entering Turkey's airspace or ports, which is a blatant violation of the 1995 customs union between Turkey and the EU. A further aggravation came in 2012 when Cyprus assumed the EU presidency and Turkey refused to attend any meetings chaired by Cyprus.

Nevertheless, Turkey–Cyprus peace talks began again with unusually encouraging words from both sides in February 2014. A new dimension is the recent discovery first by Israel and then by Cyprus of what appear to be potentially enormous oil and natural gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean. The most natural routing for the Cyprus portion would be an underground pipeline to Turkey and thence to the world market, fraught as it is currently with uncertainties about supplies from Russia, Syria, and Iraq. At this writing, the old animosities that doomed earlier peace talks seem to be reasserting themselves, but this is definitely an issue to continue to watch.

Yet another roadblock to Turkish full membership in the EU has been the issue of political freedom and human rights within Turkey. This issue has traditionally had two distinct but not wholly unrelated parts: one concerning the evolution of Turkish politics and democracy, and the other, the treatment of Turkey's Kurdish minority. I shall address each of these matters, as well as Turkey's economy and relations with neighbouring countries in the following section.

## Turkey's Politics, Economy and Role in a Post-Arab-Spring Middle East

### *Politics*

The moderately Islamist AK party led by Erdogan and Abdullah Gul (co-founder of the AK) won national elections in 2002, making for a tectonic shift in Turkish politics. When Erdogan was initially barred from office because of allegations that he had read a religious poem during a political rally, Gul became the first AK Prime Minister. The ban soon was lifted, Gul stepped aside to allow Erdogan to become Prime Minister, and Gul contented himself with the largely ceremonial position of President (then appointed by Parliament). In sum, Erdogan subsequently won three successive terms as Prime Minister and in 2014 garnered 52% of the vote to become

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Turkey's first directly elected President. The law making the presidency an elected position had been changed in 2007, and the AK had a three-term limit on its leadership, which obviously influenced Erdogan's decision to run for President. His announced plan is to have the constitution changed to make the President (rather than Prime Minister) the country's most powerful political figure, and until that happens he plainly intends to act as if that change has already been made. He rid himself of Gul, who had become increasing critical of some of Erdogan's policies, and saw to the selection of a close associate, his Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, as Prime Minister and AK leader.

Erdogan's long tenure in public office started with considerable promise. He faced down a serious threat of a military coup in 2007 and a judicial move to outlaw the AK in 2008. His government forced a number of opposition generals to retire. Fears of a radical tilt towards Islam did not initially materialize, although Erdogan did reintroduce middle schools for training clerics as well as a general curriculum that included optional Koran and Arabic-language classes, and women were permitted to wear headscarves. More controversial was his support in 2012 for legislation that permitted children from the age of ten to attend state religious schools. Erdogan also initiated reforms that targeted some forms of corruption and improved the rights of women as well as the Kurdish minority. For instance, women were granted equal legal rights in family matters including divorce, and allowed pregnancy leave and freedom to breastfeed their children outside the home. Kurds were given access to broadcasting media as well as the right to speak Kurdish in public, and there was discussion of teaching Kurdish in schools. Most important for Erdogan's continuing popularity, he helped to inaugurate and then presided over a remarkable period of economic growth and foreign investment that weathered even the post-2008 global financial crisis rather well. This, in turn, helped to create many new jobs, fund a healthy expansion of the public welfare system, modernize national infrastructure, and build new schools and universities across the country.

However, the EU and other observers repeatedly expressed their concerns about restrictions on political freedom and other violations of human rights. Secret peace talks with the separatist Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) were intermittent and (until briefly in mid-2014) made little progress. The party suffered relentless persecution, and, with some justification, its violent rebels were labelled terrorists and hunted down or jailed. But it was not just the PKK and its supporters who faced prison sentences. Critics pointed, for instance, to Article 301, a Turkish law that made it a crime to insult the Turkish nation, State, or Grand Assembly. A particularly notorious case was the 2005 trial of novelist (2006 Nobel Prize winner) Orhan Pamuk, whose 'offence' was spotlighting the deaths of tens of thousands of Kurds and more than a million Armenians at the hands of Turkish authorities. Article 301 was softened in 2008 to forbid 'only' insults to the Turkish nation, to carry 'only' a maximum 2-year sentence, and to give the Justice Minister sole responsibility for starting a trial. Meanwhile, numerous journalists lost their jobs or worse because media tycoons feared loss of government revenue. According to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, by October 2012, some 76 journalists were in jail,

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most of them Kurds who were routinely charged with having links to the PKK.[9] That same year the European Commission noted that 'the European Court of Human Rights received a large number of applications concerning violations of human rights in Turkey,' that many 'writers, academics and journalists' as well as 'scholars and researchers working on the Kurdish issue' had been charged, and that over '2800 students are in detention, mostly on terrorism-related charges.'[10] At the end of 2013 the Committee to Protect Journalists updated their report, noting that for the second consecutive year Turkey had jailed more journalists than any other country, followed by Iran and China.[11]

Also worrying was Erdogan's initially close and shadowy connection with Gulen and his Hizmet movement. Gulen preaches message of tolerance and interfaith dialogue, but many observers regarded his influence in Turkey as a much more sinister one, permeating the courts and police and intelligence services, and prodding them to target government opponents. Gulenists were apparently instrumental in the early retirement of die-hard secularist generals, the pre-emptive defeat of the 2007 coup plot, and again in the high-profile conviction in 2012–2013 of hundreds of military officers for plotting to overthrow the government (the Sledgehammer and Ergenekon cases). Nevertheless, perhaps not surprisingly, what began as a symbiotic relationship between two charismatic personalities over time evolved into an open power struggle focusing on Erdogan's increasingly authoritarian behaviour and competing foreign policy alignments. Gulen has been vehemently anti-Iran and friendlier to the United States and Israel.[12]

Erdogan won re-election as Prime Minister in 2011. However, with the economic boom beginning to cool, his key foreign policy initiatives failing, and municipal elections and the presidency in 2014 already in view, Erdogan began to react to successive political challenges in an ever more stridently demagogic and autocratic manner.

In late May 2013 there was a public outcry and a massive demonstration in Istanbul against government plans to build a modern shopping complex on Taksim Square. Erdogan refused to enter into any sort of dialogue and cleared Taksim Square with water cannons and tear gas, excoriating the demonstrators as ruffians who had been stirred up by Jews and their nefarious foreign allies.

The following 17 December, a major corruption scandal rocked the Erdogan government. Police arrested some 50 people under suspicion of bribery, rigging contracts, and illicit gold transfers to Iran. Implicated in the scandal were the sons of three cabinet ministers (who promptly resigned), an AK mayor, and the manager of the state's second largest state lender Halkbank. Prosecutors ordered a second raid to detain Erdogan's son, who allegedly was involved in shady property deals. Erdogan swiftly responded by dismissing or reassigning hundreds of police chiefs, firing a lead prosecutor in the investigation, and altering existing law to keep the government from probing internal corruption.[13] Once again Erdogan railed against 'foreign mischief makers' inspired by Israel and the United States. Moreover, he stepped up what was already an ongoing (albeit heretofore quiet) purge of Gulen sympathizers from state institutions and publicly accused them of a 'dirty plot' and having created nothing less

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than 'a parallel state.'[14] As another slap at the Gulenists and to help mend relations with the secularists he had earlier undermined, Erdogan also announced that he favoured the retrial of hundreds of military officers who had been convicted of plotting against the government because he believed they might have been unjustly treated by the police and judiciary.[14] He promised that special courts that had been created to deal with coup plotters would be abolished.

Political tensions only increased in the run-up to the March municipal elections. The stock market dropped sharply, the Turkish lira declined to historic lows, Erdogan's job approval at one point slumped to 40% (compared with 71% in 2011), the corruption scandal dragged on, and foreign policy continued to fare badly in Syria and Egypt.[15] Erdogan turned up the rhetorical heat to unprecedented levels and instituted other measures against his 'enemies' real, imagined, and invented. Gulen broke his silence to call for a new Turkish constitution that would protect essential freedoms and institutions that he said were currently under siege. Erdogan replied that he was discussing the closure of Gulenist schools with Pakistan and elsewhere and had talked with President Barack Obama about the possible extradition of Gulen from the United States.[16] Twitter widely distributed allegations of government corruption, and tapes surfaced on YouTube that purported to be recordings of private conversations between Erdogan and his national security advisers. Erdogan gave the orders to ban Twitter and block access to YouTube. Yet, despite all the negative publicity, the AK still captured over 45% of the vote in municipal elections on 30 March.

The AK party won decisively not only across the conservative Anatolian heartlands but also in Istanbul, although only narrowly in Ankara. Erdogan had managed to turn the local contests into a national referendum on himself and his party, and having made a respectable showing, prepared to wage another no-holds-barred campaign for the presidency. In mid-April, Turkey's parliament approved legislation to give the country's National Intelligence Agency (MIT) wider powers of surveillance and extend immunity for its agents. The same law set prison terms of up to ten years for journalists who leak confidential information. On a single day in June, 2224 judges and prosecutors were moved to other posts.[17]

At this juncture, external events (one is tempted to say, for once and only temporarily) gave a significant boost to Erdogan's and the AK's electoral prospects. For several years Turkey had been pushing a plan – for obvious reasons, strongly opposed by Iraq's central government in Baghdad – to secure Iraqi Kurdistan oil and transport it through a pipeline to the world market. Ankara now gained Iraqi Kurdistan's representatives' agreement to a 50-year arrangement to that end. Meanwhile, some anti-Assad forces in Syria had spawned the extremist ISIS, whose militias stormed the Turkish consulate in Mosul and took a large number of diplomats and citizens hostage. Not coincidentally, on 27 June, Turkey's AK party announced to it was prepared to reverse its historic position and support the creation of an independent Kurdish state to be carved out of northern Iraq. With the Kurds natural allies against ISIS, it was also no surprise that the Turkish peace dialogue with the PKK at home gained new momentum.[18] The Turkish parliament lost no time in

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introducing legislation that could in due course grant Kurdish rebels amnesty. Long-imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan expressed his renewed optimism that peace between the Kurds and the Turkish state might finally be achieved.

On 10 August, Erdogan was elected President by a comfortable margin of 52% of the vote, although turnout was relatively low, just 73% compared with 90% in the municipal elections. Presumably voters thought the outcome was a foregone conclusion. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, an elderly diplomat supported by both of the main opposition parties, received only 38%. Erdogan did well not only in the traditional Anatolian regions but also this time in Kurdish territory, despite the existence of a Kurdish candidate, who won less than 10%.

The next step for Erdogan and his party was to try to increase the AK's parliamentary majority – just short of two-thirds after the 2011 elections – in the 2015 elections. A clear two-thirds majority would allow for adoption outright of the constitutional amendments increasing the power of the President. A three-fifths majority could pass the amendments as propositions to be put to a national referendum.[19] The 2015 electoral campaign began and in the by-now all-too-familiar fashion. On 9 September new legislation substantially tightened government control over the internet.[20] Ten days later there was another furore about the publication in the *New York Times* (NYT) of an article and photograph concerning the Islamic State's recruitment of fighters in Turkey. Pro-government newspapers published front-page pictures of the Turkish NYT reporter and suggested that she was a traitor and foreign agent.[21]

### *Economy*

There is no question that much of the sustained political support of the Erdogan and AK government has derived from the impressive economic gains made by the Turkish economy during their tenure. GDP per capita (PPP) tripled to an estimated $15,300 in 2013.[22] By 2011, Turkey's GDP was the 17th largest in the world, where it remains today.[23] Erdogan's goal is for Turkey to be tenth in the world by the 2023 anniversary of Ataturk's establishment of the republic. As Ucer has pointed out, that would require per capita income to grow by 10% per year, which is highly improbable because the national economy currently appears to be in a less-dynamic phase.[23]

But the goal itself is reflective of the vision and sheer dynamism that has characterized most of the Erdogan era. As we have mentioned, there have been substantial improvements in public welfare, the country's infrastructure, and education. The period has seen a boom in construction, automotive, and electronic industries, accompanied by rising domestic consumption and growing exports. The government views the country as a transportation hub and a major player in the field of energy. Reflective of this ambition was the opening with justified fanfare in October 2013 of a sub-sea railroad tunnel under the Bosphorus, and there are plans to build the world's largest airport, its first phase opening in 2017. Several major oil and gas pipelines are in progress or at the conceptual stage,[1] including the one from Kurdish Iraq, that together should easily supply all of Turkey's domestic needs and leave plenty for export.

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Ucer[24] divides 'Turkey's macroeconomic journey' over the last decade into three phases. The first from 2001–2008 began with an almost complete collapse of the country's currency and banking in 2001, but there was steady improvement over the following years and a reform of the banking sector. Both inflation (75% post-crisis) and the public-debt-to-GDP ratios were brought under relative control. The second phase started with an economic contraction of 5% when the global financial crisis hit in 2008, followed by a remarkable turnaround in which annual growth rates averaged 9%. Public and private debt did increase significantly in those years, and the corporate sector's rising gap between foreign currency-denominated liabilities and assets opened up the distinct possibility of another currency crisis. The current phase is one of lower growth (estimated 3.8% in 2013[23]) and one that is highly sensitive to local political risk and global shocks, like the Eurozone crisis and the gradual ending of quantitative easing by the US Federal Reserve. In fact, Turkey helped precipitate a crisis affecting many of the world's emerging market economies in January 2014.

Two factors combined in mid-December 2013 to produce full-blown – albeit mercifully fairly brief – economic turmoil in Turkey. One factor was clearly economic, Turkey's reliance on short-term capital flows to underwrite more than 80% of its $60 billion current account deficit.[24] The second was what market analysts perceived as greatly increased political risk, the corruption scandal that suddenly almost swamped the Erdogan government. The Turkish lira fell to an all-time low, there were urgent calls for the central bank to raise interest rates for the purpose of stabilization, and the situation was so bad that distinguished *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman was moved to coin a new term 'Istanbearish' to describe it.[25] All this only heightened Erdogan's already hyper-reaction to the scandal. He repeatedly denounced what he called an 'interest group lobby' of nefarious market manipulators, Israel, the United States, and a host of other conspirators bent on restraining the country's growth rate and influencing the outcome of elections in March and later in the year. To be fair, as Dombey observed: 'The prime minister's aversion to interest rates is deeply rooted. Lending at interest is proscribed by Islam. Meanwhile, his generation is still scarred from the 1990s, when triple digit interest rates made the country's rich richer while eating into a huge proportion of the country's tax take.'[26] Be that as it may, by late January Erdogan finally had to acquiesce in an interest-rate rise that did help to calm the markets, and the country seemed to settle into an annual growth rate of around 4%.

### *Foreign Policy*

Erdogan and his AK government originally pledged to continue to westernize in appropriate ways while respecting Turkish Islamic heritage, to pursue membership in the EU vigorously, and to honour its traditional NATO defence commitments. The size of the Turkish military is second only to that of the United States in the alliance. Turkey sent troops to NATO's campaign in Afghanistan and, in September 2011, agreed to join the American-designed missile shield. A sophisticated radar system and interceptor missiles were positioned on Turkish territory, which Ankara rather

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ingenuously insisted were not aimed at Iran and that any information gathered would not somehow find its way to the Israelis. Indeed, Turkey stated that it would not attend any NATO meeting where Israel was even an observer.

Turkey's diplomatic stances, especially with regard to Iran, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and other regional issues have frequently been irritating to its NATO allies. Turkey downplayed the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program, opposed sanctions against Iran, and supported an abortive plan (with Brazil) for a complicated swap of nuclear materials as a 'solution' to the impasse. Moreover, Turkey has actively defended the Palestinian cause and tried (but failed) to bring the competing Palestinian factions together. In 2010, Turkish-Israel relations were severely strained for a lengthy period after several Turkish activists were killed by Israeli forces on a ship sent from Turkey to break Israel's blockade of Gaza.

From the outset, a central objective of Erdogan's foreign policy has been to revive 'neo-Ottoman' influence in the Near and Middle East. Turkey has greatly increased its diplomatic representation in the region, but thus far there have been far more policy disasters than successes. At one point then-Foreign Minister Davutoglu seemed to downscale Turkey's ambitions by proclaiming that the overall policy was actually one of having 'zero problems with neighbours,' yet that too has hardly proved to be the case.

Turkey cautiously welcomed the Arab Spring and developed fairly warm relations with the fledgling Morsi/Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt, as well as somewhat less than cordial relations – partly because of the Kurdish oil issue – with the Shia-backed al-Maliki government in Iraq. Apart from Israel, the biggest problems came to be post-Morsi Egypt and Syria. Turkey was sharply critical of the military's overthrow of Morsi, and the restored military regime under General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi responded to Turkish persistent complaints by expelling Ankara's ambassador. Regarding Syria, Turkey – as it had initially done in Libya – opposed any form of Western intervention and in this case energetically attempted to broker some sort of settlement that would allow the fighting to stop and Assad to step down. The United States and the EU both praised Turkey's efforts to achieve a settlement as well as its willingness to shelter rebel representatives and a flood of Syrian refugees.

Then almost everything from Ankara's perspective went to the dogs. Assad clung to power, the civil war only intensified, some of the rebels morphed into ISIS, and Syrian refugees kept coming and coming (for example, an estimated 130,000 over the single weekend of 21–22 September). The border with Syria is now tightening, but its earlier porosity allowed not only rebels and refugees to head to southern sanctuary but also Kurdish fighters and (no doubt) Islamic extremists to join their kindred in Iraq. However, when ISIS forces started to menace the town of Kobani on the Turkish border, the conflict entered a new stage that quickly poisoned Erdogan's newly improved relationship with the Kurds.[27] The central problem from his perspective has been that Kobani is defended primarily by Kurds from the Democratic Union party (PYD), the Syrian branch of the PKK, which Erdogan has consistently equated with ISIS. He refused to let Turkish troops and Kurdish volunteers cross over the border to assist in the defence of Kobani, setting off violent

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Kurdish protests in several Turkish cities. Although Erdogan appeared to be softening his position on the question of Turkish Kurds joining Kobani's defence after NATO warplanes started bombing to impede ISIS's attack on the town, he was starkly critical of a US airdrop of supplies and weapons intended for the besieged Kurds. He said: 'It would be wrong for the United States, with whom we are friends and allies in NATO, to talk openly and to expect us to say yes to such a support to a terrorist organization' – and anyway 'some of the weapons … were seized by the Islamic State.'[28]

Turkey's relations with the United States have come almost full circle during President Obama's terms in office. In 2009, Obama travelled to Turkey and extolled the Erdogan government as a shining example of moderate Islam and democracy. However, subsequent differences over Israel, Iran, Libya, Syria, Egypt – not to mention Erdogan's persistent rhetoric accusing the US and others of a variety of dastardly plots against Turkey – took a serious toll. Turkey also annoyed both the US and NATO by considering the purchase of air defence missiles from China that were not compatible with alliance hardware. However, suddenly up sprang ISIS and Turkey's support seemed to be needed again, to complete a coalition of governments backing and actively contributing to military strikes against ISIS. Turkey at first was reluctant to make any commitment, which was attributed to its concern over its hostages in Iraq. But ISIS finally released the hostages, and US Secretary State John Kerry immediately commented that Turkey now would surely do its part. The US would like Turkey at least to allow the use of its southern military base at Incirlik and also to help train and equip moderate Syrian forces.[29] At the time of writing, Turkey appears to be conditioning any major support on Washington's acceptance of a plan to create a buffer zone along its border with Syria. Such a zone would presumably offer a place to train moderate Syrian rebels, yet securing it would no doubt require establishing a no-fly zone and taking out Syrian government air defence systems. This strategy would dovetail with Turkey's continuing objective of toppling the Assad regime.[30]

## Conclusion

Where, then, does the foregoing analysis leave us with respect to Turkey's future relationship with the European Union? In fact, Turkey has already come a long way towards becoming the sort of 'privileged partner' of the EU that Merkel and others have been advocating all along. Since 1995, Turkey and the EU have had a customs union,[31] and lately the EU has promised seriously to weigh the possibility of visa-free entry for Turkish citizens. However, let us focus again on each of the issues that have stood in the way of full EU membership for Turkey.

Turkey today is unquestionably more economically developed and modern, and in those respects is arguably more Western. To date, there has not been any radical turn in the direction of Islamic fundamentalism, rather the (re)introduction of a moderate brand of Sunni Muslim identity. Indeed, lately, with the purge of the Gulenists and concomitant revival of the fortunes of secular generals and nationalists, religion has not been centre stage.

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During the Erdogan/AK era, Turkish minority communities in Europe have become more established and integrated, however eager right-wing politicians are to lump them with newer Muslim immigrant groups. Meanwhile, Turkish net migration to Europe has dwindled to almost insignificant levels. This is the central fact behind the EU's more open attitude towards visas and its focus on the return of non-Turkish illegals who use Turkey as a backdoor to Europe.

Negotiations over Cyprus have resumed but thus far have made little progress. The current global slump in energy prices – despite the uncertainties of supplies from world trouble spots – makes exploitation of potential Eastern Mediterranean resources somewhat less urgent.

The key issue of democracy and human rights in Turkey has come to the fore. The country today is a textbook case of an 'illiberal democracy', led by a politician who wins elections by a narrow (mainly conservative) majority and proceeds to govern autocratically with contempt for minority rights and opinions. Laws and institutions are manipulated to insure continuation in power. In fairness to Erdogan, Turkey is a Darwinian political environment and he has faced dangerous challenges from secular generals, to Gulenists, to Islamic fundamentalists at the gates. And it is also possible that the opposition will yet rally – now with renewed Kurdish support – and Erdogan will not succeed in his objective to become essentially President for life. However, if he does, Turkey will be far from a model democracy. Will that meet the European standard? Probably not, although that standard recently has itself been eroded by some countries already in the EU fold, most notably Victor Orban's self-proclaimed 'illiberal state' in Hungary.[32] Admittedly, it is hard to argue logically that Erdogan is 'worse' than Orban, and it is equally easy to say one mistake doesn't justify making another.

Over the long haul, much will surely depend in part upon the extent to which Turkey is seen as an 'indispensible' Western ally and bastion of stability in the troubled Middle East. Unfortunately for the EU–Turkey relationship, Turkey lately has been a difficult ally and one that looks much less stable domestically than it did a few years ago. Erdogan's authoritarian ways are part of the problem, but so too are rising ethnic and religious tensions. Gardner observes about Erdogan's failure to defend Kobani:

> He may have taken fright that his peace initiative [with the Kurds] could become a springboard to a pan-Kurdish state. But whatever his motives, he is dividing Turkey. Up to a fifth of its population is ethnic Kurdish, and about a fifth of Turks are (heterodox Shia) Alevis, alienated by the increasingly Sunni supremacist tone of Mr. Erdogan and his neo-Islamist ruling party, as well as his authoritarian behaviour. [He] could open Turkey's gates to the whirlwind of sectarianism roaring across the Levant.[33]

### Update, Turkey February 2016

In my 2012 assessment, I concluded that Turkey would not become a full member of the EU, but I also cautioned against any long-range prediction. Turkey, the EU, the Middle East, and global trends all continue to evolve – with consequences that are

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exceedingly hard to foresee. Since this article was submitted in February 2015 and is not now scheduled to appear in the *European Review* until Summer 2016, the editors of this collection have kindly allowed me to add a short update. I am also scheduled soon to write a new article for the *European Review*, based on my talk on 'Competing Identities and Turkey's Future' at Academia Europaea's September 2015 Meeting in Darmstadt, Germany. Please see that for additional information.

Over the past year, many important developments have occurred both within Turkey and internationally. In June 2015, most observers of Turkish politics believed that the country had stepped back from the brink of authoritarianism. President Erdogan's AK party received only 41% of the vote in national legislative elections, far short of the large majority that would have allowed the AK to change the constitution to turn the President's legally mainly ceremonial position into a sultan-like executive super-presidency. A major factor in the result was the unprecedented success of the Kurdish People's Democratic Party (the HDP) in winning 13% of the vote and passing the 10% threshold for holding any seats in the legislature. Erdogan had been cautiously wooing the Kurds in hopes that many of them would vote for his party, which did not happen. However, when the several rival parties opposed to the AK failed to agree on a government, Erdogan boldly scheduled a new legislative election for 1 November. This time the AK party won 58% of seats in the unicameral legislature, thus allowing it almost free rein, although not quite enough to change the constitution. Erdogan nonetheless decided to act as though his super-presidency had been confirmed and packed the AK party's council with his closest supporters.

The quick turn-around in Erdogan's and his party's political fortunes can best be explained by an acute sense of crisis at home and abroad that Erdogan himself at least partially engineered. The Turkish economy, stock market and national currency have been in a deep slump, although falling oil prices have been some help. Having failed to win Kurdish electoral support, Erdogan resumed the government's longstanding military campaign against Kurdish PKK militants. PKK attacks have escalated, and violence – some of it also ISIS related – has spread even to Istanbul. After much foot-dragging, which annoyed Turkey's NATO allies and anti-ISIS conservative regimes in the region, Turkey joined the war against ISIS – both directly with occasional sorties of its own air force and some troops in the border region with Syria, and indirectly by allowing US planes to use Turkish bases. The Kurds in Syria (some of whom Turkey is bombarding) and in Iraq have proved to be indispensable fighters against the radical Islamicists. Still lacking is any agreed strategy for unseating the Assad regime – if indeed any alternative would be better – and Russia's military intervention in Syria has strengthened Assad and upset all calculations. Turkish forces shot down a Russian fighter violating Turkish airspace on 24 November, and Russia retaliated with economic sanctions. Meanwhile, the EU – facing its own crisis over refugees – has agreed on large cash payments to Turkey if only that country will properly control its borders and adequately support Syrian refugees already there. The EU has also promised faster implementation of visa-free travel for Turkish citizens and more favourable consideration of Turkey's application for full EU

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membership. Merkel has announced she is willing to drop her personal opposition to membership, but EU relations with Istanbul remain fraught with mutual suspicion.

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