

AVOIDING A DIVORCE: A VIRTUAL EU MEMBERSHIP FOR TURKEY

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Turkey's prospects of European Union (EU) membership are more uncertain than ever before. European leaders spent their residual political capital on combating the eurozone crisis and are reluctant to champion the unpopular EU-enlargement project. A framework elevating Turkey to the level of a "virtual EU member" could reinvigorate the relationship.

Key Themes

- Despite commencing EU membership negotiations in 2005, Turkey has opened only thirteen of the 33 chapters that make up the accession requirements.
- Brussels is losing its ability to engage Ankara constructively, and Turkey's interest in the EU is waning to the detriment of Turkey's democratic progress.
- The present environment constrains the scope of EU-Turkey cooperation in support of ongoing transitions in the Arab world.
- A virtual framework would complement the accession process and include policies to foster a common approach to international relations and the EU's internal market.

Policy Pillars of Turkey's Virtual Membership

Foreign Policy: Turkey is increasingly aware of the limits of its unilateralism, and the EU can benefit from Turkey's growing power in the Arab world. Acknowledging those trends, more comprehensive foreign policy cooperation should be undertaken.

Neighborhood Policy: Turkey should be associated with the EU's southern Neighborhood Policy. Turkish experts can participate in the meetings of individual regional task forces, and Ankara and Brussels can cooperate on regulatory capacity building, private- and financial-sector development, and banking- and housing-sector reform.

Security: The EU should give Turkey a more substantial role in the planning and implementation of EU-led missions. Ankara should be more flexible on EU-NATO strategic cooperation. But the disagreement over Cyprus's status must be addressed before remaining difficulties in the EU-NATO relationship can be fully overcome.

Trade: The EU-Turkey customs union should be deepened. The European Commission can take steps to involve Turkey in its negotiations with third-country trading partners, include a Turkish observer in its Trade Policy Committee, and open a round of trade negotiations aimed at incorporating the services sector into the customs union.

Mobility: Visa liberalization is an irreplaceable core component of the virtual membership. The prospect of free travel to Europe is necessary to build popular support for the relationship among Turks.

Climate Change: Turkish participation in the EU's Emissions Trading System can benefit both parties. For Turkey, linking to the EU system would introduce a new and potentially rich source of carbon financing. Such a linkage would also lower the cost for EU industries of fulfilling their emissions targets and boost their international competitiveness.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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