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Senat No. 273 on Political Issues

**Turkey and the European Union:
Announcement of the Membership Talks**

On October 3, 2005, the European Union declared its intent to begin membership talks with Turkey. The European declaration, which received Ankara's blessings, stated that the purpose of the talks was to explore Turkey's full integration in the EU although it was explicitly noted that such membership could not be guaranteed at so early a stage.

The European declaration also made it clear that Turkey would first be required to promote democracy, the rule of law and respect for human right; in addition, it would be required to eliminate torture in its prisons, limitations on freedom of expression as well as discrimination against women, trade unions and religious minorities. Other stipulations included stabilization of Turkey's governing institutions, introduction of a free market economy and adjustment of its foreign and defence policies to those adopted by the Union's members. With respect to foreign policy, the Cyprus issue received special stress: Turkey was asked to support efforts to reach a comprehensive solution of the conflict within the framework of the UN's Cyprus plan and to normalize its relations with the island republic (Turkey has yet to express official recognition of the Cyprian government).

The European declaration is the apex of a process continuing over 40 years, in the framework of which Turkey has attempted to clear a path leading to the European Union (formerly known as the "European Common Market"). The process, born in the Ankara Agreement of 1963, was extended with the Turkey-EU Customs Union between Ankara and the EU (1996) and the EU declaration of Turkey as a candidate for full membership (late 1999).

The Substance and Process of the Negotiations

Negotiations between the EU and Turkey are expected to continue until 2014. In the course of these talks, all the international pacts and covenants signed by Turkey will be adjusted to European policy; the reforms recently introduced Turkey in compliance with the 1993 Copenhagen Declaration, stipulating conditions for joining the Union, will also be implemented. In the interim, Turkey is likewise obligated to improve management of its public institutions – the legal system, financial services, mass transit system, tax system, education system, internal security and so forth – to European standards.

It is assumed that full implementation of the Turkish reforms will eventually lead to Turkey's full partnership in Europe's economic and monetary union, including adoption of the Euro as its national currency. Integration into European security systems appears relatively simple given Turkey's membership in NATO for the past 50 years.

At this very moment, EU experts have initiated review of conditions in Turkey. The issues to be monitored have been divided into 34 various spheres of daily activity, with each arena screened separately, to await confirmation by EU institutions. Only after activity in all 34 spheres has been adjusted to European standards can Turkey be accepted as a full member. This means that Turkey has set out on an extended race marked by 34 hurdles to be jumped. As indicated in the Turkey-EU declaration: Turkey's progress in these spheres will determine the pace of negotiations.

The Main Hurdles

The main hurdles to be overcome lie in the spheres of economics and human rights.

In the *economic* sphere, Turkey has made considerable advances in recent years. The Turkish economy survived the acute crisis that befell the country in 2001. Progress toward entry into the EU has already assisted Turkey, just as it did Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia in the 1990s and Spain, Portugal and Greece in the 1980s. If foreign investment in the Turkish economy reached only a few million dollars in 1992, when the economy was considered at high risk, foreign investment had reached \$6.5 billion in the first 8 months of 2005. Moreover, by October 2005, foreign investors held two-thirds of the value of all the stock shares sold on the Istanbul exchange, a clear statement of foreign investors' faith in the market.

Turkey has also succeeded in overcoming inflation, one of the chronic ills plaguing its economy during the past year. Price increases declined from an average annual rate of 70% during the 1990s to 8% in 2005, a rate quite close to the 4% allowed new EU entrants. Similar success remains to be achieved in other areas of the economy, those in which Turkey lags considerably: for instance, unemployment (the official rate is above 9%), the trade deficit (about \$40 billion annually), but primarily the state's strangulating grip on several economic branches, including agriculture and energy.

In the sphere of *human rights*, numerous weighty hurdles remain despite the considerable reforms introduced. Europe has not desisted in demanding modification of the special status enjoyed by the military in Turkey's civil arena; the issue of the civil and cultural rights allowed to the Kurdish minority remains; the historic rift between Turkey and the Armenian people remains to be bridged, including Turkey's taking of responsibility for the events of 1915/6, which several EU members treat as acts of genocide. Freedom of speech, one of the most sensitive internal issues (the Kurdish and Armenian issues head the list), has drawn significant attention in Europe, especially in wake of the trial of Orhan Pamuk, Turkey's leading post-modern author.

The European Stance

A serious gap has developed between the official stance taken by the EU together with the majority of member governments and the position of the European public. Europe's political establishment generally favours Turkey's integration into the Union (for reasons that include fear of losing a partner should the process collapse) whereas the public, which is quite apprehensive, objects to this step. Public opinion surveys indicate that only one-third of the public in Western Europe supports Turkey's integration into the Union. In France, Austria and Greece, the public is especially jittery – only one-fourth supports integration, with the demand to hold a national referendum a permanent item on the agenda.

The public's fear flows from an amalgam of sources, with different issues perturbing the Right and the Left. The Right is especially anxious over rising Christian-Muslim tensions, the anticipated economic burden (i.e., the possibility of Turkish labourers flooding Europe and the scope of assistance required to raise Turkey's standard of living) as well as the strengthening of Turkey's political power within the Union due to its being the most highly populated country in Europe. Other issues disturbed the Left, especially the weakness of Turkish democracy, the strong position of the military in comparison to other civil political institutions and the continued disrespect for human rights, primarily towards minorities.

Notwithstanding the pressures, the process of determining Turkey's membership, together with the screening process accompanying the talks, has been drawn according to an almost mathematically tight scheme, reducing the possibilities for Europe to withdraw almost nil. Europe has firmly placed its hurdles (in the form of the Copenhagen Declaration) and Turkey has geared up to run the race. If Turkey successfully overcomes the hurdles, the European public will find it difficult to halt the process. The countries most problematic with respect to Turkey's integration (Austria, Greece, France and perhaps Germany under the leadership of Angela Merkel) are expected to raise additional hurdles but the success of such efforts is doubtful. Confirmation of the fact that no individual country has the capacity to stop the process was received just recently, with Austria's failure to prevent initiation of the membership talks. Unless something quite extraordinary occurs, Turkey will be a member of the EU within a decade. Yet, it is doubtful if the EU, which will number 35 members by the time of Turkey's integration, will be quite the same organization in the future that it is at present.

Possible Implications for Israel

Turkey's coordination of its foreign and security policies with those of the EU may somewhat jeopardize its bilateral relations with Israel. This concern is relevant primarily in the area of security due to the anticipated damage to the Turkish military's autonomy (the military is considered to be highly pro-Israeli) as well as to the fact that Israel's military industries are liable to lose contracts in the future given Turkey's increased obligations to European industries, ties emanating from its European commitments.

Yet, despite these qualifications, Israel should support Turkey's integration into the Union (which it does in practice) primarily due to the long-term strategic benefits of this move. Full membership in the EU of one of the world's most important Muslim nations will establish for the Middle East a border shared with Europe and will create a European showcase available to the citizens of Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, with all that implies. The long-term success of the Turkish model – secular and pro-Western – may more acutely stress to the Arab world the gap between the accomplishments of Kamalism and the failures of Khomeinism.

In all matters relating to the possible integration of Israel into the European Union, progress is dependent first and foremost on future developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As such, the fate of the EU's negotiations with Turkey will have minimal if any influence on the realization of this option.