

The Promise of Turkish EU Membership: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

In 2005, the EU invited Turkey to begin accession negotiations based on the application for membership that Turkey had submitted in 1987. Even after four years of negotiations, the outcome remains uncertain, as the prospect of Turkish EU membership has caused much controversy and apparent unease among governments, as well as the general public, of the current member states. EU Commission and Council documents, newspaper editorials, and speeches suggest numerous ways in which Turkey is "different" from all previous applicants—often as reasons for denying Turkey full EU membership. This paper analyzes these alleged differences, from geography, population size, and economic backwardness to religious differences and the youth and fragility of Turkey's democracy. We consider each of these concerns comparatively, focusing primarily on Spain and secondarily on Greece and Portugal as the most comparable prior candidates for succession. We find not only that virtually every argument put forth against Turkish accession has been made against one or more of the current Southern European members of the EU in the past, but also that Turkey is today, on most dimensions, very similar to these countries when they were candidates. Turkey should therefore be able to benefit from accession in similar ways. Moreover, the comparison with prior candidates for accession allows us to identify ways in which the EU can help Turkey achieve key objectives, such as democratic consolidation, as well as ways in which Turkey can help the EU achieve long-cherished objectives. The "promise" of Turkish membership thus exists in the dual sense of a promise made to Turkey and the promise that Turkey holds for the EU.

Turkey: A Unique Applicant for EU Membership?

Turkey has had an Association Agreement with the EU (then EEC) since 1964.¹ It applied for formal membership in April 1987, barely three and a half years after the November 1983 return to democracy—a path suggested to Turkey as early as the 1950s by the first European Commission President, Christian Democrat Walter Hallstein. After initially declaring accession negotiations premature and the Turkish application an unwelcome distraction from achieving the single market (Commission 1989a:2f), the EU changed its position in the 1990s. It confirmed Turkey's "eligibility" for membership (e.g., Council 1997), though it emphasized that economic disparities and political shortcomings remained barriers to beginning accession negotiations at that time. In December 1999, the Helsinki European Council acknowledged Turkey's significant progress toward meeting the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership and officially declared Turkey "a candidate State destined to join the Union,"² though it took another six years before accession negotiations commenced in October 2005.³ Turkey's pursuit of EU membership is thus already the most drawn-out of any country seeking membership, and even now, Turkish membership remains controversial and quite uncertain. Why?

EU documents on Turkey's application and its "progress" toward accession, starting with the Commission's initial "opinion" on the application (Commission 1989a, 1989b),⁴ specify a long list of issues to be addressed—as in other, prior and subsequent accession negotiations. Yet, they also point out a number of ways in which Turkey is said to differ from previous applicant countries. Those differences are still cited by many as reasons why Turkey might not or should not become a regular member of the EU: the geography and size of the country; heavy reliance of the economy (especially for employment) on an inefficient agricultural sector; a high levels of protectionism for certain industries; relative socio-economic backwardness; unresolved external political conflicts and historical responsibilities (concerning Cyprus and the Armenians); human rights violations and lack of protections for minorities; as well as other governance deficiencies associated with having a relatively young democracy and limited civilian control over the armed forces.

We examine these issues through a comparative analysis of Turkey's bid for EU membership with the bids of Greece, Portugal, and Spain. We focus our comparative analysis on these 1980s "Mediterranean accessions," rather than more recent accessions, for several reasons. Like Turkey, Greece, Portugal, and Spain sought EU membership when their level of socio-economic development was well below the EU average. The Mediterranean countries also applied for membership very soon after their respective transitions to democracy from

¹ The "Ankara Agreement" was signed in September 1963; it came into force in December 1964.

² Presidency Conclusions of the 10/11 December 1999 Helsinki European Council, section I, paragraph 12 (http://europa.eu.int/council/off/conclu/dec99/dec99_en.htm, 5/11/2007). The Copenhagen criteria, adopted by the June 1993 European Council, explicitly establish "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for, and protection of, minorities" as "political criteria" for accession/membership. The December 1999 decision had been preceded by the December 1995 establishment of the EU-Turkey customs union, envisioned in the 1963/64 Association Agreement. A detailed chronology is provided, e.g., in Commission 1998:5ff.

³ The decision to begin accession negotiations in October 2005 was taken by the December 2004 European Council.

⁴ Turkey applied for membership under Article 237 (EEC Treaty), which states that membership is open to any European country subject to certain conditions and provides for an initial assessment of any application for membership by the Commission in the form of an "opinion" submitted to the Council.

authoritarian regimes headed by military figures (rather than Communist party leaders, as in the Central and Eastern European countries that became members in 2005 and 2007). Having entered the EU more than twenty years allows for a better assessment of membership's effect on these countries' political economies than an analysis of more recent accession. Moreover, several of the concerns raised about Turkey were also raised about these countries before they entered the EU. Spain, for instance, was also a relatively large country with a high birth rate, and Greece was (and still is) characterized by religious traditions that differ significantly from the Roman Catholic or Protestant traditions in the existing member states.

Our comparative analysis shows that many of the claims about Turkey being "unlike any other" prospective EU member state of the past are greatly exaggerated and often plain wrong. Moreover, the comparative perspective is useful in that it suggests that Turkish EU membership holds great promise for both the EU and Turkey beyond what is commonly acknowledged. The EU helped solidify both elite and popular commitments to democracy and the rule of law in Spain, Portugal, and Greece. It also helped Spain to deal with contentious demands for autonomy for previously suppressed, geographically concentrated ethno-linguistic minorities. Beyond bringing socio-political and economic benefits to the new members states—and economic benefits to the existing member states through enlarging the common market—the successful integration of Greece, Portugal, and Spain has contributed to peace and stability in Europe and beyond. The dual meaning of the title of this paper, "The Promise of Turkish EU membership" is thus intentional: Our analysis shows that membership is in many ways a promise that the EU has already made to Turkey if it is going to apply its own criteria for membership consistently, in line with the European rule of law tradition. We also show that Turkish EU membership holds great promise for the EU itself. We therefore conclude that the EU should continue its "most successful policy" and proceed with working toward full membership for Turkey.

The Costs and Benefits of Membership

Our analysis of the main concerns about Turkish EU membership focuses in turn on the size and geography of the country, economic issues, and political issues. To put the issues into perspective, we conduct a comparative analysis of the situation in Turkey at the time of its application for membership, at the start of accession negotiations in 2005, and today. The appropriate comparison for Turkey is primarily the experience of other states with levels of economic development below the EU average at the time of their accession negotiations. Moreover, a proper comparative assessment of EU accession requires analyses of both the pre- and post-accession period, which leads us to focus primarily on the so-called second or "Mediterranean" accession of the 1980s (Greece, Portugal, and Spain). Table 1 provides an overview of the key dates for these three countries and Turkey.⁵

⁵ Due to the prominence of country size (and religious differences) in official analyses and public debates over EU membership for Turkey, we focus our comparative analysis primarily on Spain (and Greece).

Table 1:
Key Dates of the Accession Process

	Greece	Portugal	Spain*	Turkey
Application Submitted	12 June 1975	28 March 1977	28 July 1977	14 April 1987
Start of Accession Negotiations	27 July 1976	17 October 1978	5 February 1979	3 October 2005
Accession Treaty Signed	28 May 1979	12 June 1985	12 June 1985	?
Accession	1 January 1981	1 January 1986	1 January 1986	?

* Note: Spain submitted an initial application for membership in February 1962, which was rejected by the EU on the grounds that Spain was not a democracy, though it led to a preferential trade agreement by 1970 (Representación Permanente n.d.).

As pointed out by the EU Commission and Council on various occasions, enlargement creates adjustment costs, as well as demands on institutional and financial resources, not just for the prospective member state but also for the EU and its current member states. The "capacity to absorb" or "ability to integrate" new member states is therefore often cited as an important criterion for accession (e.g., Council 2005:2). This capacity is surely different for a community of 27 than for a community of 6, 9, or 10 member states. We therefore relate the situation in Greece, Portugal, Spain, and Turkey during their respective bids to join the EU to the situation in the then-current member states.

Costs and Benefits (I): The Size and Geography of Turkey

The very first issue noted by the Commission in its 1989 opinion on the Turkish application for membership was that Turkey "has a greater geographical area and will eventually have a bigger population than any Community Member State" (1989a:4). Although it is not clear why the EU would care, Turkey's land area of about 770,000 km² was indeed equal to more than 34% of the total land area of the current members at the time of the application (1987). As Table 2 shows, this geographic size made Turkey very similar to Spain when measured relative to the total land area of existing EU member states at the time of the application. By now, after the EU enlargements of 2004 and 2007, Turkey's relative geographic size is well below Spain's at the time of its accession in 1986—and even below Britain's at the time of its accession in 1972!⁶

Table 2:
Land Area of Accession Country Relative to EU Total

	Turkey	Spain
Land Area in km²	770,000 km ²	499,000 km ²
Area as % of EU Total, at time of application	34.4%	33.0%
Area as % of EU Total, at start of accession negotiations	20.0%	33.0%
Area as % of EU Total, at time of accession (for Turkey: today)	18.3%	30.4%

⁶ Britain's land area exceeded 20% of then-current member states' land area in 1972. All data, unless otherwise noted, are from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators* database.

Of greater relevance than Turkey's geographic size is surely the size of its population. We discuss the economic and political implications of this population size below, but the issue also warrants discussion as such, given the prominence of this issue. Turkey's population at the time of its application (1987) was 52.6 million; the *Economist* (3/2009) estimates it will reach 72.6 million in 2009. This would make Turkey the second-largest member state, but again comparison with prior candidates for accession puts the issue in perspective. The population of Turkey is almost four times as large as the current EU average.⁷ But as a percentage of the EU total, Turkey's population is only marginally larger than the population of Spain at the time of its application or accession. Table 3 provides this information in greater detail.

Table 3: Applicant State Population Relative to Existing Member States

	Turkey as a % of EU total	Turkey relative to EU average	...as a % of largest EU member state	Spain as a % of EU total	Spain relative to EU average	...as a % of largest EU member state
Population at time of application	16.3%	1.96	85.9%	14.0%	1.26	59.3%
Population at start of accession negotiations	15.7%	3.91	86.9%	14.3%	1.28	60.5%
Population at time of accession*	14.6%	3.95	87.7%	12.0%	1.43	63%

* for Turkey: in 2009 (Economist Intelligence Unit forecasts); all other data from WDI.

An even greater concern than Turkey's current population size appears to have always been its projected population, given population growth that exceeded the Community average by an order of magnitude in the 1980s. The annex to the 1989 Commission opinion therefore estimated that Turkey's population would exceed 100 million by 2020 (1989b:38,103). This trajectory is clearly not born out. Turkey's population growth rate now stands at less than 1%, down from 2.5% in the 1980s. In Turkey as elsewhere, couples are responding to declining infant mortality and increasing standards of living by reducing the number of children they seek (helped by public and non-governmental education programs about family planning and contraception).

A final question to consider in this section is whether Turkey is "really" a European country—by all indications an important issue for public opinion in the current member states. Critics often point out that only a small part of Turkey is West of the Dardanelles and the Straits of Bosphorus (the opening between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea; Istanbul straddles the Bosphorus). But any attempt to answer this question based on geography seems bound to fail: There is no unambiguous geographic boundary of Europe, at least not in the East.⁸ Even ancient Greek notions of "Europa" were fluid, and Turkish history has for centuries been closely intertwined with the history of all the major and many smaller European states. Much of Turkish history *is* unquestionably East-Central European history.

⁷ Due to the enlargements of 1995, 2004, and 2007, the EU member state population average has fallen since the time of Spain's accession from about 27 million to about 18 million.

⁸ Note also that all of Cyprus—a member state since 2004—is far to the East of the Straits of Bosphorus, while a part of Turkey that is considered to be in "Asia minor" lies, strictly speaking, West of it.

Moreover, the comparison with earlier accessions is again instructive. The prejudiced claim, prior to the Spanish accession, that "Europe stops at the Pyrenees [mountains]" (see Wiarda 1987:158) shows that Europe has always been a cultural and political construct (Malmborg and Stråth 2002). This suggests that Turkey is a European country insofar as it commits to European values, such as democracy, the rule of law, and minority protections (see also Leggewie 2004:esp.13f, 21ff).⁹ We discuss these issues below but first examine the main *economic* concerns raised about Turkish EU membership.

Costs and Benefits (II): Pre-Accession Economics in Turkey, Spain, and Greece

The history of EU enlargement makes clear that accession (including the decision of current members to conclude the accession negotiations with an applicant country) has always been more of a political than an economic decision (e.g., Dinan 2004; Nugent 2003:494ff; Schimmelfennig 2001; though cf. Mattli 1999). Nonetheless, economic concerns are real—not least because sudden and poorly prepared economic integration can destroy much of the economy of the less developed country, as the history of German unification 1990/91 has shown.

Socio-Economic Backwardness: By many indicators, Turkey's level of economic development is far below the EU average. GDP *per capita*, even when measured in terms of purchasing power parity (ppp) as recommended by the Commission (1989b:3, 62), was barely more than one third of the EU average at the time of Turkey's application in 1987, and today is still well below half. That said, as of 2000, Turkey's *per capita* GDP was just above the per capita GDP of then-prospective EU members Latvia and Lithuania (Flam 2004:178), and its 2007 *per capita* GDP was still well above Bulgaria's and Romania's, regardless of ppp-adjustment. Turkey has also exhibited economic growth rates that have exceeded the EU average consistently since the 1980s, albeit with substantially greater volatility.

Moreover, Turkey shows tremendous improvements on other measures of socio-economic and human development—such as literacy, life expectancy, and infant mortality—which are less susceptible to exogenous factors (such as exchange rates) and fluctuate less. While still below the EU average on most of these measures below, Turkey is hardly exceptional when compared with the Mediterranean countries, which also became EU member states in a position of relative economic backwardness.

⁹ As a practical matter, there surely has to be some limit to EU membership, lest it starts resembling the United Nations with all its problems. A proper discussion of this topic is beyond this paper. Our point here is simply that the geography and history of Turkey hardly provides an objective criterion for setting the limit, especially when compared with prior accessions.

Table 4
Measures of Socio-Economic Backwardness

	Turkey	Greece	Portugal	Spain
GDP per capita at accession *				
- in ppp-adjusted constant 2005 \$	11,293		12,036	16,424
- as % of EU <i>per cap.</i> GDP at the time	42%			
Adult illiteracy				
- at application	22.7 %	17.7 %	26.8 %	5.5 %
- at accession	11.0 %	14.0 %	17.8 %	4.3 %
Life expectancy at birth, in years				
- at application	64	73	70	74
- at accession	72	75	74	77
Infant mortality: deaths within 1 year				
- at application	7.7 %	3.9 %	4.0 %	1.6 %
- at accession	2.1 %	2.1 %	2.0 %	0.9 %

* Note: Figures for "at accession" for Turkey are for the latest year for which figures are available (2007 or 2008). GDP figures are purchasing-power adjusted and in constant U.S. dollars (base-year: 2005), from WDI. Adult illiteracy is for persons above 15 years of age. When data specifically for illiteracy were not available, we treated it as equal to the difference between 100% and the reported level of "literacy." Linear inter-/extrapolation was used for years not covered by WDI.

Agriculture: A particular concern is Turkey's large agricultural sector (Commission 1989b:21ff). Agriculture accounts for only a small share of GDP but a large share of total employment (see Table 5). For comparison, agriculture contributes less than 3% of GDP and employs less than 10% of the population in the EU as a whole, even after the 2007 accession of Romania, where agriculture still accounted for more than 10% of GDP and 30% of employment. The discrepancy is partly due to the large number of smallholdings in Turkey, many of which are used primarily to grow agricultural goods for personal (family) consumption. Turkey has undertaken extensive reforms over the past decade, which have reduced the pervasive inefficiencies that had long made much of Turkish agriculture dependent on subsidies and have made those subsidies (now in the form of direct income support for farmers) consistent with the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, CAP (Flam 2004:187f). However, Turkish membership would still greatly increase the size of the CAP budget and thus increase the pressure for fundamental reform of the CAP, complicating the politics of Turkish accession (though arguably strengthening the normative case for it).

Substantial parts of Turkey's agricultural production are specific to Turkey's climate and hence complement production in most current EU countries. For the rest, immediate exposure to the competition from more efficient EU producers would put many Turkish farmers out of business, with potentially devastating effects on unemployment. Yet, Turkey's record of reform since it applied for membership suggests that a transition period would allow a smaller Turkish agricultural sector to become competitive with EU production by the time all barriers are removed. Such transition periods have been a common element of all previous accession agreements (for a discussion of the Spanish case, for instance, see Hine 1989:16ff). Nonetheless, the size and inefficiencies of Turkey's agricultural sector ensure that agriculture will remain a contentious issue (see, e.g., Burrell and Oskam 2005; Commission 2004a:5)—as it has been in almost all prior negotiations over EU accession (e.g., Büthe 1995; Royo 2004).

Table 5: Agriculture's Contribution to GDP and Employment

	Turkey	Greece	Portugal	Spain
value added, as % of GDP				
- at application	17.9 %	11.6 %	24.9 %	9.0 %
- at accession	8.7 %	10.6 %	13.9 %	6.0 %
employment, as % of total				
- at application	55 %	?	?	?
- at accession	26 %	30.7 %	21.9 %	16.1 %

* Note re. data for Turkey: 1987 data are from Commission (1989:20, 69); "at accession" data are for 2007, from the Economist's *Country Profile* 2008.

Macro-Economic Imbalances: A broader and persistent concern has been the extremely high level of inflation, particularly since it has coincided with an unemployment rate of 8-10% for many years (Commission 1989a:6; 1998:24). A series of policy reforms in the late 1990s and early 2000s (encouraged and in part financed by the IMF, the OECD, and the EU) succeeded in bringing inflation down from above 30%, to about 10% by 2004, and further lowered it to under 10% by 2007. This drastic reduction in inflation is an impressive achievement, for which the prospect of EU membership has by many accounts supplied the political will.

There is more good economic news: The indebtedness of the Turkish state, which was still greater than 75% of GDP in the early 2000s, has fallen to less than 40% in 2007 (Commission 2006:27, 2008:31). By reducing the debt-servicing burden on the government budget, this development also alleviates other long-standing concerns and further attests to Turkey's increasing economic "readiness" for EU membership.

Finally, Turkey's population size (discussed in general terms above) has potential economic repercussions for two reasons. First, *per capita* incomes well below the EU average would make large parts of Turkey eligible for EU structural funds for many years to come (European Union 2007). While Turkey already has access to "pre-accession assistance funds" from the EU, membership could make it one of the largest net beneficiaries of the EU budget, imposing a real material cost on existing members. Second, free movement of people is an integral part of EU membership today, which creates the potential for massive migration when economic disparities are large (Commission 1989a:7; Flam 2004:179ff). While the migration of able-bodied, usually relatively young workers tends to bring unambiguous economic benefits to the host country as a whole, such an influx creates adjustment costs and tends to have distributional consequences and hence may generate political opposition to a country's membership. The issue of (potential) migration has therefore been a contentious one in earlier accession negotiations, too.

Both of these economic consequences of Turkey's substantial population size, however, can and should be addressed through a multi-year transition period during which the new member state successively attains full eligibility for EU structural funds and its citizens successively gain full rights of free movement. Transition periods (of up to twenty-two years for some issues in the Greek case, Tsalicoglou 1995) have been part of all previous accession agreements. They work not only because they ease in the changes and thus make them politically more palatable, but also because they provide an opportunity for the new member state to benefit from most aspects of membership already and thus *inter alia* reduce the demand for EU structural funds. Indeed, Greek and Spanish migrants were also predicted or feared to

arrive in Northern Europe in droves after their countries joined (see Preston 1997:57). But most never came, as EU membership offered them new economic opportunities at home.

Costs and Benefits (III): Political Considerations

Political Power within the EU

One of the main *political* concerns raised about Turkish EU membership is that Turkey would wield substantial political power right from the start. As noted above, Turkey's population is estimated to reach 72.6 million in 2009, 14.6% of the current EU total. While large member states tend to be *underrepresented* in the European Parliament as well as in the Council's weighted voting system (see Table 6), Turkey would reasonably expect seats and voting weights at least equal to France, the UK, or Italy, and more if the Lisbon Treaty changes were adopted (requiring 55% of member states and 65% of the total EU population for a "qualified majority").¹⁰

Table 6:
Population Size and Political Weight in the EU in 2009*

	Population in millions	Members of the European Parliament (total: 785)	Weighted Votes in the Council (total: 345)
Germany	82.8 (16.7%)	99 (12.6%)	29 (8.4%)
France	62.3 (12.6%)	78 (9.9%)	29 (8.4%)
Britain	61.9 (12.5%)	78 (9.9%)	29 (8.4%)
Italy	58.1 (11.7%)	78 (9.9%)	29 (8.4%)
Spain	45.8 (9.2%)	54 (6.9%)	27 (7.8%)
Poland	38.1 (7.7%)	54 (6.9%)	27 (7.8%)
...
Estonia	1.3 (0.26%)	6 (0.8%)	4 (1.2%)
Cyprus	0.8 (0.16%)	6 (0.8%)	4 (1.2%)
Luxembourg	0.47 (0.10%)	6 (0.8%)	4 (1.2%)
Malta	0.41 (0.08%)	5 (0.6%)	3 (0.9%)

* Note: Population estimates for 2009 (495.7m total) are forecasts from the *Economist* (*Country Reports*, March 2009). Number of EP seats from European Parliament (2009); council votes from Council (2009).

Even if Turkey were to attain seats and votes equivalent to Germany, however, it would hardly be in a position to dominate the EU. Spatial models of EU politics and the resulting "power indices" (e.g., Carrubba and Volden 2001; Hix 2005:83ff; Hosli 1993; Nurmi and Meskanen 1999) suggest that even the largest member states' "a priori" voting power is rather limited, though every member states' power (as measured by these indices) declines with enlargement (Raunio and Wiberg 1998). Nor would Turkish accession paralyze the EU: Power index analyses conclude that Turkish accession would have a "negligible effect on the EU's

¹⁰ Currently, adoption of a measure in the Council by qualified majority requires at least 255 of the 345 weighted votes. Turkey has indicated that it fully understands and respects the EU's practice of underweighting large countries in the EU's political institutions, as emphasized when Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister (now President) Gül joined their counterparts from Bulgaria and Romania, as well as from the then-25 member states in signing the EU Constitution in Rome on 29 October 2004.

capacity to act" after the Lisbon voting rule reforms (Baldwin and Widgrén 2005:337). And these models probably overestimate Turkey's influence because they make implausible assumptions about the distribution of preferences and ignore other sources of influence in the EU (Garrett and Tsebelis 1999; Rennie 2007). Turkey would, for example, be notably less wealthy than the other large member states for some time. Its policy preferences are neither random nor monolithic, but would in all likelihood be similar to variable sets of current member states, depending on the specific issue. And Pahre and Uçaray-Mangtılı's preference-corrected spatial analysis of a variety of decisionmaking rules in the Council, Commission, and Parliament show that "whenever Turkey has preferences outside the European mainstream, it will have little influence" (2009:358). Turkey's influence may also be lower than its voting power would suggest because, on most issues, it would join existing coalitions of member states (see Snyder, Ting, and Ansolabehere 2005).

On this issue, too, the comparison with the Spanish accession proves insightful. Similar concerns were raised in the early 1980s: Its large and (then still) fast-growing population would, critics claimed, give Spain so much political weight that it would change the dynamic of European politics entirely. Spanish governments, to be sure, quickly proved adept at using the European institutions to pursue their economic interests as much as the governments of "old" member states, but its political leaders also won praise for their political commitment to European integration and their constructive participation at every level of the EEC (e.g., Closa and Heywood 2004 and not-for-attribution interviews by the lead author).

Relations with Greece and Cyprus

Turkey has a history of tense relations with Greece and Cyprus. Well into the 1990s, it was in fact an open secret that the Greek government would veto any Council decision to open membership negotiations with Turkey should such a proposal be put to a vote (e.g. Preston 1997:217), notwithstanding Greece's own pre-accession promises that it would not block Turkish membership (Tsalicoglou 1995:34). In recent years, however, relations between Greece and Turkey have greatly improved, and many conflicts have been resolved, thanks in part to EU mediation. As the Commission's 2006 Report notes (2006:25): "Turkey and Greece have continued to pursue the positive development of their bilateral relations."

Some conflicts of interest have yet to be addressed and new ones are sure to arise occasionally between the neighbors, but most importantly, Turkey and Greece have put in place mechanisms to address those differences without even the thought of military escalation. The Greek and Turkish Prime Ministers meet regularly, and bilateral cooperation has been institutionalized across a broad range of issues. The cooperation entails regular, direct contacts between specialized mid-level government officials and even among the armed forces (Commission 2008:28f). This change was made possible by Turkey's flexibility and commitment to removing obstacles to EU membership, but also by a new approach on the Greek side. Seeking to benefit from the EU's ability to build trust and overcome deeply engrained animosities (such as between France and Germany but also between Spain and Portugal), the Greek government decided that having Turkey in the EU would in fact be preferable to keeping it out (e.g., Yannas in Kazakos and Ioakimidis 1994:220). Greece has therefore become one of the strongest supporters of Turkish membership.

By contrast, the division of Cyprus hardly seems closer to a resolution after the rejection of the UN peace plan by the Greek Cypriots, one week before joining the EU in 2004.¹¹ As a consequence, there has been no substantial reduction of Turkish troops and no withdrawal of Turkish military commitments to the north of the island, which is to be part of a comprehensive settlement prior to Turkish accession. This issue is complicated by the fact that, from the EU's point of view, what it demands from Turkey (such as an end to its veto of Cypriot membership in various international organizations) amounts simply to Turkish compliance with its obligations under international law and UN resolutions. This has made it virtually impossible for the EU to express or show understanding for the Turkish desire not to give up "bargaining chips" in advance of a comprehensive agreement between the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities—even when many in Europe saw the Greek Cypriot rejection of the UN plan for re-unification as a violation of Cyprus' assurances prior to its accession, and even though the Commission recognizes that Turkey remains committed to achieving a comprehensive settlement (2006:24f, 2007:25, 2008:28). Moreover, in consistent application of EU law and precedence, the EU insists that Turkey apply to goods from anywhere in Cyprus the provisions of the EU-Turkey Association Agreement as amended in 1970 (including free movement of goods), before accession negotiations on issues such as customs and external relations can begin. It is hard to see, however, how any Turkish government could pay the political costs of such a policy change other than in the context of an agreement between the two Cypriot communities.

The best chance to resolve this obstacle to Turkish EU membership may thus be the "full settlement negotiations" that were started in September 2008. While described as "painfully slow" in the Economist Intelligence Unit's *Country Report* for Cyprus (March 2009), they are "expected to speed up after the Turkish Cypriot legislative election on April 19 [2009]." Turkey will be directly involved in the negotiations regarding territory and security guarantees. A clear signal from the EU that it will move forward with the accession negotiations if there is a settlement of the Cyprus issue and a tangible improvement in bilateral relations between Turkey and Cyprus would facilitate the acceptance of a settlement by the hawkish elements of the Turkish political and military elite.

Human Rights and Protection of Minorities

Turkey has a history of human rights violations, including restrictions on the freedom of expression and association, the use of torture by police, and extrajudicial killings by military police (e.g., U.S. Commission 1988). Recent years have seen significant improvements on all of these issues, according to Turkish and outside observers. Human Rights Watch (2009) attributes the "dynamic reform process" that characterized the late 1990s and early 2000s at least in part to "the prospect of EU membership" (see also Diez, Agnantopoulos, and Kaliber 2005).¹² More recently, however, progress has stalled, and the Turkish Human Rights Association, as well as transnational NGOs such as Amnesty International, continue to report instances of torture and other human right violations by police and military. Turkey has signed but not yet ratified the 2005 Optional Protocol of the UN Convention against Torture; enforcement of judgments by the

¹¹ The experience raises important questions, beyond the scope of this paper, about how behavioral change can be made to last through socialization or other means, if the initial changes are primarily a rational response to the incentives of membership conditionality (Kelley 2004).

¹² Arikat (2002) pointedly notes that the EU cared little about human rights in Turkey prior to elevating Turkey to accession candidate in the 1990s. For a more charitable view, see Cakmak (2003:esp.72ff).

European Court of Human Rights are sometimes lackluster; and according to the EU Commission, "overall, the institutions for the promotion and enforcement of human rights lack independence and resources" (2008:12). Further substantial improvements—especially in implementing existing human rights protection (Dogan 2006)—are thus necessary before Turkish accession to the EU. Comparative analysis, however, again puts the issue in perspective: In the early years after the end of the Franco dictatorship, the Spanish para-military police force, *Guardia Civil*, continued its "authoritarian practices," including kidnappings and torture, even after the failed coup attempt of 1981 that was led by one of its officers (e.g., Encarnación 2007). The transition to the human rights standards of liberal, rule-of-law democracies is a process rather than an event.

A related issue is the denial of ethno-linguistic differences and minority-rights protection for Kurds, an issue closely tied to fundamental questions of Turkish national identity (e.g., Kramer 2000:esp. 37-54). Here, too, substantial progress from 1999 to 2005 has stalled—a development that Tocci (2008:892) directly attributes to EU's failure to follow through with positive reinforcement when its demands were met because this lack of positive reinforcement weakened those *within* the Turkish government and civil society who have sought better minority-rights protection.

The EU can also make a difference in other ways. Recall that Spain after Franco faced similar issues, with Catalan and Basque demands ranging from regional autonomy in matters of language policy and education to complete political independence. While EU membership might increase the viability of regional parties and autonomy demands (Jolly 2009), the institutionalized opportunities that the EU provided—for learning from other member countries' experience in dealing with similar issues—helped Spanish governments find ways to satisfy parts of the regional-ethnic groups' demands which simultaneously diffused secessionist tendencies (Closa and Heywood 2004:98ff; Liebert 1990).

A final human rights issue of sorts is the conflict over the historical memory of the 1915 mass killings of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire. Here, it is surely not necessary (as some have wished or demanded) that the Turkish government and Armenian groups come to an official, agreed interpretation of past and present. Much more important than an acknowledgment and apology is a Turkish willingness to allow open public discourse over what happened (see also Van Evera 1994). In that respect, the offer by the Turkish government to allow a joint Turkish-Armenian committee of historians full access to archives and research sites is encouraging and warrants supporting.¹³

Religious Differences/Cultural Heterogeneity

The issue that is shaping attitudes toward Turkish EU membership in current member states more than any other is religion, even though it is hardly ever mentioned in EU documents.¹⁴ The majority of the population in the current member states self-identifies as either Roman Catholic or Protestant Christian, even if often not practicing (Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson 2001). Most of Turkey's citizens, by contrast, are practicing Muslims, even if they

¹³ The offer was reiterated by Prime Minister Erdoğan at the April 2009 G-20 meeting (Haber 2009); encouraging signs of a recent thaw in Turkish-Armenian relations are reported by Byford (2009).

¹⁴ Note that using religion as an official criterion for membership would violate the EU's own rules and norms against discrimination on the basis of religion, which is probably why it does not appear in any official documents.

largely treat their religious beliefs as a strictly private affair. And while several million Muslims already live in the current member states, Turkish accession would doubtless increase religious-cultural heterogeneity in the EU. Does it matter?

Two considerations suggest that religious differences do not make Turkey a *sui generis* applicant country, nor should they cause concern about the functioning of an EU with Turkey as a member. First, recall that in his (in)famous "Clash of Civilizations" (which has been invoked in this context), Huntington did not foresee for Europe an immutable cultural-religious divide between Christianity and Islam. Rather, extrapolating loosely from the historical analysis of William Wallace, he asserted that the deep historical and future "fault line" in Europe would (should?) be "between Western Christianity, on the one hand, and Orthodox Christianity and Islam, on the other" (Huntington 1993:29). Based on this logic and the map Huntington drew (1993:30), admitting Greece, as well as Bulgaria and Cyprus, would have been out of the question; Romania would have been at best partially admissible. Indeed, the issue of religious differences was raised in the late 1970s by opponents of the Greek accession. But it did not prevent membership, and studies suggest that its quite different religious traditions in no way impeded Greece's integration into the EU (e.g., Kazakos and Ioakimidis 1994; Preston 1997; Tsalicoglou 1995; Yannopoulos 1986).

Second, Turkey, including its current government from the "Islamic" Justice and Development Party, which has been in power since 2002, practices a stricter separation of religion and state than some governments of current EU countries. There are few policy areas where differences between Turkey and any current member states are due to religious differences as such.¹⁵ The only real issue appears to be freedom of religion (an issue on which Islamic law has historically been, at least toward Judeo-Christian religious communities, exceptionally tolerant). Here, the Commission's *Progress Reports* note about Turkey that "freedom of worship continues to be generally guaranteed" (2007:16) and "respected" (2008:18), though social norms and practices in parts of Turkey still mean that "the environment as regards freedom of religion [more broadly] has not been conducive to the full respect of this right in practice" (2007:17).

Greater (mutual) religious tolerance is surely desirable and may be fostered actively by the Turkish government, but will hardly be achieved by categorically excluding Turkey from the EU. To the contrary, the Greek and Spanish experiences suggest that EU membership may advance religious tolerance by easing the fear of the "other" among traditionalist religious leaders (Wenturis 1994:235). And to the extent that EU membership can help consolidate democracy in Turkey, it would contribute to illustrating for the entire Islamic world the compatibility of Muslim culture and religion with political democracy. We therefore turn, last, to the issue of democracy and EU membership.

EU Accession of an Unstable/Young Democracy?

The quality, short duration, or stability of Turkey's democracy is the final, often prominent concern about Turkey's application for EU membership. The April/May 2007 confrontation between the strictly secularist military leadership and prime minister Erdoğan over the candidates for the Turkish presidency further heightened this concern—while reinforcing the

¹⁵ Religion can of course be instrumentalized to support—or challenge—power structures and social or economic practices of various kinds (Trejo 2010).

unease in the EU about supporting a democratically elected Turkish government from an Islamist party whose commitment to *liberal* democracy is still in question to many in the West. Integrating young democracies with older or more stable ones, however, is hardly new for the EU. Germany, after all, was a founding member of the ECSC barely six years after the end of a totalitarian dictatorship. Indeed, facilitating the consolidation of liberal democracy might be considered one of the greatest successes of the EU and its enlargement policies, from Germany and Italy in the early years to Greece, Spain, and Portugal in the Mediterranean enlargement of the 1980s and the post-Communist democracies in Eastern Europe in the enlargements of 2004 and 2007 (Kelley 2004; Powell 2001). In fact, this is precisely what many in Turkey hope for from EU membership (e.g., McLaren 2000; Önis 2003).

Much of our preceding analysis has found the comparison with the Spanish EU accession to be particularly instructive. We therefore focus on Spain for our comparative analysis of the effect of EU membership on the consolidation of democracy, with only brief mention of the experiences of Greece and Portugal.¹⁶ The prospect of EU membership in the early years after the death of Franco in November 1975, as well as the accession process and actual membership, are widely noted as having contributed to the consolidation of democracy in Spain (e.g., Cloa and Heywood 2004:15f; Crespo MacLennan 2000:188; Jones 2000:39; Morán 1980:289; Powell 2001:297; Story and Pollack 1991:126). Yet, how exactly can the EU help the consolidation of democracy?

During the pre-accession period, the EU has been helpful to the democratization process in prospective member states through its strong symbolic association with democracy, its direct ideational and material support for pro-democracy groups, and its insistence on democracy as a condition for membership—as well as through the opportunities that it offers for blame-shifting. We discuss these issues in turn.

The existence of European democracies whose policies (by most accounts) brought benefits to the vast majority of the population, without threatening the freedom or property rights of the elites, had a powerful demonstration effect for Spain. This effect was particularly strong when democracy proved stable in countries such as Germany and Italy, to whose culture and traditions it had in the 1930s been declared just as unsuitable as to Spain's.¹⁷ More direct diffusion and contagion effects before and during the democratic transition have been attributed to the personal relationships forged in the Socialist International (the international association of socialist and social democratic parties), including the personal friendship between the Spanish leader Felipe González and former chancellor and long-time symbolic leader of the German left, Willy Brandt. These interactions convinced the Spanish left that liberal democracy could give them a fair chance to win elections and form governments, while providing them with important safeguards during periods of opposition (Holman 1996).

¹⁶ Side-stepping a rigorous conceptual debate about "consolidation," which is beyond the scope of this paper, we understand it not as a steady state but (in adaptation of Przeworski's classic definition) as an ongoing process by which any other means to attaining or exercising political power becomes, or is affirmed to be, illegitimate and to most unthinkable. Given space constraints, we must assume here that the reader is familiar with the core arguments and findings from the vast literature on democratic transition and consolidation. For reviews, see e.g. Geddes (1999) and Levitsky and Murillo (2009).

¹⁷ The claim that liberal democracy was culturally alien to Spain had been frequently made to justify the dictatorship of General Franco, established on the rubble of the Republic after the Spanish civil war.

The EU was during all of this not just the coincidental association of the (most prominent) old and new democracies of Western Europe. Rather, it was seen by Spanish political leaders as having strengthened democratic norms and practices in post-WWII Germany and Italy, prompting the Spanish Socialists' strategy of "democratization through internationalization" (Holman 1996:65). Moreover, the EU itself had provided support for the democratic opposition in Spain (and Greece) during the dictatorship (Pridham 2002:190). And EU insistence on democratic political reforms before any intensification of political or economic relations with the Spanish government—as well as criticisms of human rights violations and other autocratic practices of the Spanish dictatorship during the Cold War, when the U.S. refrained from open criticism—had by the time of Franco's death in 1975 made the EU in the eyes of Spanish elites a "symbol" and "incarnation" of freedom and democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996:113; Gibert and Loriente 1993:262). Verney (1990) and Royo (2004) report similar perceptions of the EU among the political elites during the Greek and Portuguese transitions to democracy, respectively.¹⁸ The EU's perceived status as the arbiter of liberal democracy (Closa and Heywood 2004:15; Crespo MacLennan 2000:188) enabled it to provide critical symbolic validation for each of the young democracies, such as when the EU issued its initial favorable opinion on Spain's 1977 application for EU membership (Farrell 2001:3; Powell 2001:297), which in turn gave further "encouragement to the democratization process" (Pridham 2002:191).

Ideas and perceptions among pro-democracy groups played a central role, but EU membership helped the consolidation of democracy in other ways, too. To conservatives and members of the old regime, EU membership offered a guarantee of private property rights and a market economy. To economic and technocratic elites, it guaranteed a relatively liberal foreign economic policy that would ensure continued economic opportunities (Crespo MacLennan 2000:188; Powell 2001:297; Whitehead 1986:23). The goal of EU membership thus provided important common ground to all of the centrist parties in Spain (Álvarez-Miranda 1996:esp. 217ff; Gibert 1993).

The broad consensus on the desirability of EU membership amongst the political elite (in Spain also supported by a clear majority of public opinion from the start) made EU conditionality highly effective, both during and after accession. In Greece, Prime Minister Karamanlis effectively took non-democratic options off the table, during the post-dictatorship debate over the country's domestic political institutions, by committing Greece to EU membership, because it was understood that democracy was a requirement both for becoming and remaining an EU member state (Verney 1990:206, 207f). Similarly in Spain, "bonds with European institutions [...] were a fundamental element of [the defenses] against any monopolistic or authoritarian proposals which might still linger" (Galán 1993:272). As Pridham points out (2002:188f, 202), any such constraints on anti-democratic ideas and forces depended entirely on anticipated "punishments" for any reversal of democratization and in that sense were purely hypothetical, but had some concrete basis in the "contingency planning" and prophylactic diplomatic intervention by EU leaders in response to the events that threatened reversal in Portugal in 1975/76.

Both during the accession process and afterwards, the EU also allowed the Spanish government to shift the blame for necessary but painful economic reforms, thus sparing the young democracy the political liability of an unfavorable association with economic hardship

¹⁸ Political support for EU membership, however, was not as broad and overwhelming as in Spain.

(Closa and Heywood 2004:172; Jones 2000:48; Pridham 1995:181). The forced restructuring of the olive oil industry and the cut of 16.4 billion pesetas in annual subsidies to this important part of the agricultural sector, for instance, were justified as a requirement of EU entry (Jones 2000:44), as was the introduction of the highly unpopular Value Added Tax just prior to accession in 1986 (Closa and Heywood 2004:20f; Pridham 1995:188). As the 1977-1982 Spanish ambassador to the EU acknowledges: "Accession offered us the path to progress without any political cost in the internal electoral struggle, given that the legislative transformation and modernization was imposed on us from the outside" (Bassols 1995:169f; authors' translation).

In addition, EU membership contributed to improved government performance by providing opportunities for institutionalized learning about other member states' best practices and transgovernmental contacts between mid-level public officials, spurring bureaucratic reform (Pridham 1995:193; 2002:198f), though this effect appears to have been muted in Greece (Ioakimidis 1994:esp.146ff). EU membership also brought economic benefits, which in turn contributed to the process of consolidation (Maravall 1997). These economic benefits ranged from growth opportunities (due to economic liberalization and assured market access) to EU structural funds, which according to Commission estimates brought Spain additional economic growth of 0.8% of GDP per year between 1989 and 1993 and 1.7% of GDP between 1994 and 1999 (the Spanish government estimates a slightly more modest but still substantial contribution, see Closa and Heywood 2004:204). Portugal and Greece experienced comparable benefits (Pridham 2002:201f). Finally, and primarily in the long run, the EU political context fostered civil society domestically and participation in associational life at the transnational level (Sidjanski 1991:esp. 199).

In sum, the prospect and reality of EU membership has contributed to the consolidation of the new democracies of Southern Europe in several important ways, though it is inherently difficult to isolate these effects in each case from numerous other factors that played a major role (e.g., Bermeo 1994; Gunther, Montero, and Botella 2000). The EU, to be sure, did not have the political resources (or will) to impose democracy—nor to bring about a reversal of an autocratic relapse coercively, should such a relapse have occurred. Rather, the EU changed the incentives and in various ways strengthened the liberal-democratic forces within each country. To paraphrase Fishman (2003), the EU did not create but it shaped democracy. In so doing, it substantially helped the consolidation of democracy in Greece, Portugal, and Spain.

There are strong reasons to expect that EU membership will hold the same promise for the consolidation of democracy in Turkey. There are now an estimated 6 million EU residents of Turkish descent living in the current EU member states, including more than 2.5 million in Germany (1.7 million of them with Turkish citizenship, according to the federal statistical office), and large communities in Bulgaria, Austria, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Their experience with, and increasingly participation in, political democracy provides ample opportunities for demonstration and diffusion effects, even without close transnational ties between political parties based on ideological affinity, which were a prominent feature of the Spanish case. While those experiences are largely at the local and national level (from democratic elections in labor unions to the operation of national governments and parliaments), the EU is more than just a coincidental commonality: Several current members of the European Parliament (EP) are of Turkish descent, a fact that is frequently noted in Turkish media reports about the EU/EP. Moreover, studies of Turkish public opinion have long found strong support for EU membership among Turkish citizens—and that EU membership is in most survey

respondents' minds tied to the consolidation of democracy, as a prerequisite or a hoped-for consequence (e.g., McLaren 2000). This awareness of the linkage increases the chance that the desire for EU membership will constrain those who may be tempted by a possible return to an authoritarian regime (Boland 2008) and invigorate those who are committed to liberal democracy, as it did in the case of Spain.

That said, Turkey is at something of a crossroads in its relations with the EU, with serious implications. The insistence of several political leaders of current member states that the negotiations are "open ended," the generally mixed signals about the EU's commitment to Turkish membership even if it were to fulfill all membership criteria, and the perception that those criteria keep changing, have led to a steep decline in popular support for EU membership, which only a few years ago used to be higher than in almost any current or prospective member state.¹⁹ The autumn 2008 *Eurobarometer 70* survey (*National Report: Turkey*) showed as few as 42% of the general public considering membership "a positive thing," down from 62% in autumn 2004 (*Eurobarometer 62*) and even higher levels in other studies. Those who want to see Turkey become an EU member still are a relative majority, and political and economic elites still largely support the drive for membership, but the EU is no longer viewed overwhelmingly positively. There are direct costs to this trend for the EU in that support for EU leadership in international affairs has as a consequence also declined—especially worrisome at a time when Turkish and Middle Eastern support for US leadership has also declined.²⁰ But most importantly, the declining support for EU membership weakens the process of democratic consolidation in Turkey, which to support the EU has always understood to be in its enlightened self-interest. Opposition to EU membership by a significant minority creates incentives for political parties to oppose it as an electoral strategy (Patton 2007). The symbolic association of the EU with democracy also risks backfiring against democracy when the EU becomes unpopular. And a narrower coalition in support of EU membership cannot support much blame-shifting for unpopular reforms. Pushing for further changes in the constitution, laws, and customs of Turkey in order to continue its convergence with the norms of the West—on issues ranging from judicial independence and the penal code to strictly civilian control of the military and religious tolerance—will require much greater political courage and be less likely to succeed without a commitment from the EU (e.g. Matthews and Kohen 2009).

At the same time, the EU should still be able to regain substantial support in Turkey and thus further strengthen the commitment to democracy among both the elite and the general public. Continued economic integration with the EU (with appropriate transition periods) promises to bring further economic benefits (see above). Recent reforms, partly with help from the EU, have included administrative and institutional reforms of the Turkish state. The reforms promise to lead to better bureaucratic performance for Turkish citizens, especially if the EU offers Turkish senior civil servants opportunities for institutionalized learning from their European counterparts, to make the formal changes successful. Strengthening such transgovernmental linkages also promises to advance democratic consolidation by providing opportunities for technocratic elites to see the compatibility of efficiency and democracy. Finally, a revived EU commitment to Turkish membership *conditional on secular democracy*

¹⁹ As Şenyuva (2006) cautions, the systematic study of Turkish public opinion on this issue has only begun in the late 1990s.

²⁰ It is too early to assess the effectiveness of the Obama administration's efforts to reverse this trend.

would reassure the traditional secular elites who view themselves as the guardians of the Turkish Republic.

Conclusion

Since Turkey applied for EU membership in 1987, its economy has grown at a rapid pace, and its society, political culture, and formal-legal institutions have significantly converged on those of the EU. Many of these changes have mirrored the experience of previous accession candidates, though the changes in Turkey may have gone further: The constitutional and administrative reforms, including those related to the independence of the judiciary, are considered by many observers to be as profound as the 19th century *Tanzimat* reforms of the Ottoman Empire or the *Meiji* reform in Japan (e.g., Grigoriadis 2009). To be sure, further significant progress remains to be made by Turkey before accession. In some previous cases, including Greece, the EU's poor understanding of differences in economic structures and state capacity led to unnecessarily painful adjustments after the conclusion of negotiation or even after accession, and once a country is a member, the EU's ability to hold that country to previous promises is greatly reduced.²¹ The EU should and has learned from these prior experiences, and in that sense, accusations of a "double standard" often miss the point.

At the same time, presenting Turkey with a long lists of demands that must be met *before* serious talk of accession can start is reminiscent of the hubris that the Europeans loved to criticize in the second Bush administration's policies toward many parts of the world. It also does not help bring about the sought-after changes, especially since there is now a strong sense in Turkey (and beyond) that the EU, having officially opened accession negotiations with Turkey in October 2005, is not interested in a successful conclusion of those negotiations (see e.g., Bila 2006; Münir 2009; Redmond 2007; Sandik 2008). This undermines the substantial economic and political achievements in Turkey. Many recent reforms became politically feasible because the promise of EU membership strengthened the reformers within Turkish political parties and among the socio-economic elites (Patton 2007) and guaranteed public acceptance—a benefit now endangered by the decline of support among Turkish voters who feel rejected by Europe. Failure of the Turkish accession negotiations also undermines the credibility of the EU at home and abroad and deprives the EU of its leverage. The experience of Greece, Portugal and Spain suggests that it would be far more effective to seek to address the EU's legitimate concerns by working *with* Turkey during the accession negotiations and the subsequent transition period, based on predictable and transparent criteria.

Our analysis has shown that most issues that need to be addressed during Turkey's accession negotiations are similar to concerns raised and addressed by previous accessions. While Turkey was starkly different from current EU members on many dimensions when it first applied for membership in 1987, it has significantly converged on the EU (a process that continues). On many specific measures, Turkey is by now comparable to previous accession countries when they became members of the EU. This suggests that political and economic measures that have in previous accessions have proven successful to ensure continued convergence, during both the remainder of the accession negotiations and the subsequent transition period, can and should also be used to support the continued economic and democratic transition in Turkey. Even issues that may appear to be of a different nature may be addressed

²¹ The Greek Cypriot government's campaign against the UN-brokered plan for reunification illustrates this point.

with the tools developed in previous accessions. Concerns about religious differences, for instance, may be addressed by enshrining both freedom of religion and the separation of religion and state in the (revised) founding treaty of the EU, to which Turkey would have to commit itself in seeking accession. Such legal provisions would allow Turkish citizens (and others) recourse not just to the increasingly independent Turkish judiciary but also to the EU court if their rights were violated (via national courts, which have to refer questions of EU law to the ECJ). And it would re-assure the Turkish armed forces that a genuine commitment by the military to rule of law with civilian control will not endanger the secular nature of the Turkish state.

At the same time, Turkish membership holds great promise for current EU members, well beyond the increase of the common market by some 70 million customers with substantial growth potential (see Lejour and Mooij 2005). The consolidation of a liberal democracy in Turkey has ostensibly been a longstanding EU objective. Supporting it is more important than ever now that several EU member states directly border on Turkey, but democratic consolidation may also have broader benefits: As a liberal democracy that is seen as a political and economic success for most of the 99% Muslims among its population, Turkey can provide the kind of exemplar of the compatibility of Islam and democracy that Spain and Portugal provided for Roman Catholic countries in Latin America in the "third wave" of democratization (see Huntington 1991:72ff; see also Leggewie 2004; Phillips 2004). Turkey has also long been widely respected as a moderate voice in the Middle East and (at least until the winter 2008/09 Israeli military raids in Gaza) as an even-handed facilitator of conflict resolution by both sides in the Arab-Israeli conflict. EU membership would provide Turkey with greater weight in continuing to play this positive role, while giving the EU greater credibility in the region. In addition, as the EU has explicitly recognized, "Turkey has a special relationship with the Turkic-language republics in Central Asia, where it has considerable political and economic influence" (Commission 1998:52). Turkish EU membership would thus increase the importance of the EU as a "global political actor" (Ginsberg and Smith 2007).

As the Commission stated in its initial December 1989 opinion on the Turkish application, "any decision to open negotiations with a particular country must be based on a strong conviction that a positive conclusion is possible, indeed probable, within a reasonable period" (Commission 1989a:4). The comparative analysis presented in this paper suggests that it is time for the EU to move with conviction, based on its prior normative commitment (Schimmelfennig 2001), toward a "positive conclusion" that entails—directly or in stages²²—full membership for Turkey.

²² Karakas (2005, 2007) has proposed the innovative notion of "gradual" (or more precisely: "graduated") integration, in which Turkey increasingly participates in the EU political and decision-making process in stages as it passes a series of benchmarks. Such an arrangement would have many benefits, including that it would assure current member states that reforms and democratic consolidation will continue, as long as it is clear that Turkey has the option of moving, through this process, toward full membership as it fulfills clearly specified criteria.

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