

## Why Europe should said 'Yes' to Turkey

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The decision of the European Commission to recommend the initiation of negotiations for Turkish accession, which will almost certainly be approved by EU governments in December, is of the utmost significance. Nothing less than the identity of the Union – and with it, its borders – are at stake with the so-called «Turkish question».

The importance of Turkish membership for the future of the Union more than justifies the intensity of the debate on the matter. Although indirectly, it was a crucial in shaping the formulation of the European Constitution, which eschewed the minority view that Europe should adopt a clear religious identity and thus exclude, without appeal, a mostly Muslim Turkey.

Europe's identity is not just a product of its founding values – democracy and human rights – but also of principles like unity with diversity and association. Turkey raises another question, which was fortunately always left pending but is no less essential, and that is the finality of the Union, the limits of the European integration project. Saying 'yes' to Turkey after the last enlargement probably means giving up on the nostalgic and dangerous chimera of a European super-state, a mirror image of the federation of the United States. And yet, as the Ankara government elite never tires of reminding Europe, Turkey's accession will give the Union a far greater capacity to project itself in the world outside its own borders.

By abandoning the idea of state sovereignty on a continental scale, which implies the existence of clearly defined borders, the Union will adopt fully a model that has a universal impact and vocation, and which is different from the only remaining superpower and even more divergent from emerging powers like China. Europe will be seen beyond its frontiers as a regional integration project that prefigures a form of global governance based on multilateralism and inclusion. The Union will cease to be a project that belongs simply in the European peninsula of Eurasia: it will acquire an Asian dimension. Even if it is difficult to imagine that the Asian territory of Turkey is European, Homer's possible birthplace and the place where Hellenism found its roots will be seen by the citizens of neighbouring countries and of the poor south as such. Turkey, Europe extends into Asia across to the Caucasus, meeting the borders of Syria, Iran, and Iraq, and exerting a great power of attraction and thus transformation over countries that are so central to international security. The possibility will certainly increase of the Union having to deal with the serious security issues at stake in such places – indeed, they are already at stake in Europe's current neighbourhood.

The identification with and attraction of the Union for its periphery will be powerful indeed if the inclusion of Turkey is based on full respect for the values that lie at the heart of European integration. Turkish government insists that democratisation is a domestic demand and not imposed from the outside, but it is clear that the prospect of accession constituted a strong stimulus for change, which has had a great democratising effect, as it did in the case of Portugal or of Poland. Most Turkish reformers thank the Commission for the high demands it made of Turkey in terms of fundamental rights. However, the imposition of discriminatory conditions on Turkey as a future member is not acceptable. This is always attributable to dubious cultural and religious criteria and is particularly detestable if it leads to the restriction of free circulation of citizens.

It must be underlined that it was a democratic party of Islamic inspiration, freed from traditional nationalist ideology, that not only took on board Turkey's historic European project but also linked it wholly with democratisation, and accelerated the transformation of relations with 'neighbouring enemy' Greece, something that decades of cohabitation in NATO never made possible.

If confirmed, Turkey's accession will be a re-founding event for the Union, after years of an 'economicist' fog that renders it difficult to grasp fully the political aims and finality of the European adventure. And more clearly the Union will become a global project that is not just for the citizens of the states of Europe. In doing so it will be faithful to the intentions of its founders, as the project was born exactly to attain that which the balance of powers was unable to achieve: peace among states through democracy and association.

There is no contradiction, not even apparently, in statement that the accession of Turkey presents an enormous challenge to the internal balance and institutions of the Union – which are already very deficient in a Union of 25. Solidity of principles cannot mean ignoring practical questions of working procedures and institutions, without which principles cannot be put into practise. The ratification of the Constitution is a first step, as are the internal reforms that are now under consideration – and the necessity of which becomes all the more pressing with the prospect of Turkish membership – cannot and should not be delayed.