



# Main Obstacles to Turkey's Accession to the European Union

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## Project Description:

This paper will address the main obstacles to Turkish accession to the EU and show if Ankara has fulfilled the Copenhagen criteria.

## Abstract:

Since 1959, Turkish attempts to join the EU have failed. Several sets of talks have been held and many obstacles have risen, such as cultural, security, economic, and geopolitical barriers. Additionally, joining the EU is a significant challenge because it demands major changes in the Turkish socio-cultural identity to fulfill the EU standards; specifically, Turkey is primarily a Muslim country which is trying to be a part of a Christian union that has different norms, values, and cultures.

## Major Obstacles to Turkish membership in the EU: *Cultural and Religious Identity.*

### Copenhagen Criteria: Before starting the accession negotiation a country needs to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria:

1. Stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities.
2. A functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU.
3. Ability to take on the obligations of membership, including the capacity to effectively implement the rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law (the 'acquis'), and adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

### Attitudes Toward Turkish Membership:

#### EU Member states' attitudes:

1. UK and Germany: supporting very strongly.
2. France, Cyprus, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Luxembourg, and Austria: opposing on both public and governmental levels.
3. Greece: government supporting but people are opposing.
4. Czech republic, Slovakia, Hungary, the Baltic states, and many smaller members of the EU: supporting but Christian Democrats and the radicals in these countries oppose.
5. Portugal, Spain and Italy: supporting Turkey as a future member that would balance the Mediterranean members' power

#### EU Citizens' Attitudes

1. One third of the interviewees accept Turkish membership
2. In Sweden, Romania, Portugal, and Bulgaria: more than a 50% majority welcomed the idea
3. Interviewees' rejection was related to Turkish cultural differences, political ideology, EU economic benefits, and the attitudes toward EU immigration
4. Turkey's accession to the EU has the least acceptance from EU citizens among all countries' applications because Turkey has few resources and will not bring revenues to the Union. Further, Turkey will flood the EU with immigrants and the EU will lose structural funds.

### Turkey's Political Situation:

1. *Muslim Brotherhood:* The disagreement between Turkey and the EU made Ankara strengthen relationships with Muslim Brotherhood.
2. *Middle East:* The geography of Turkey between the EU and the Middle East, and Turkey being a Muslim country, would help in applying EU policies in the area, especially before Ankara becomes a member in the Union.
3. *United States:* Both Bush and Obama administrations supported Turkish accession in the EU, which would help US interests in more regional stability and increase economic opportunities.
4. *Israel:* Turkey has to restore its relationships with Israel as a political and economic energy stock that will be needed for Ankara in its role as a way between Middle East oil and gas and Europe.
5. *Cyprus and The Kurds:* Turkey was asked in December 1999 to solve the Cyprus and Greek conflicts in order to fulfill the Copenhagen Criteria: Turkey might solve the Kurdish issue by discharging the PKK fighters and granting the group regional autonomy.
6. *Syrian Civil War:* Turkey has to offer a safe and legal road for the refugees, return any casual immigrants passing from Turkey to Greece, and for every returned refugee the EU has to receive a refugee from Turkey.

### Hypothesis:

Turkey's cultural and religious identity is the main obstacle to Ankara's accession to the union.

### Research Questions:

What is the main obstacle/barrier to Turkish membership in the EU?

### Conclusion:

Turkey's high Muslim population, its cultural identity, values, and norms are different from European religious and cultural identity, which is based on a Christian legacy and values. These differences in culture, religion, and identity are considered challenges to the EU since Turkey is also not connected geographically to the Union and has a completely different history. Putting pressure on the EU, Turkish president Erdogan recently announced that Ankara might not need to be a part of the Union. Instead, his country could be a member of a security union led by Russia, China, and other Asian countries. From its side, the EU voted in late November 2016 to suspend the accession talks with Turkey because the union is still worried about some democratic violations in Turkey that followed the failed military coup, as well as some human rights violations, which it accuses Ankara of making.

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