

## **A MOMENT OF OPPORTUNITY IN THE EU-TURKEY RELATIONSHIP**

**MARC PIERINI AND SINAN ÜLGEN**

Relations between Ankara and Brussels are about more than Turkey's potential accession to the European Union (EU). The relationship is diversified, but it needs to be deepened and modernized. While Turkey's EU membership vocation should be maintained, Ankara and Brussels should take steps to update their partnership and vastly improve cooperation on current challenges that are of vital importance for both.

### **The State of the EU-Turkey Relationship**

- The new Turkish government considers the EU accession process central to its domestic agenda. And Ankara and Brussels have developed new forms of cooperation, including on visa liberalization, irregular migration, and counterterrorism.
- A sharp regression in Turkey's rule-of-law architecture hampers the accession process. Negotiations are stalled as of late 2014 and will stagnate until the Turkish government returns to a higher degree of compliance with the EU's political criteria for membership.
- The EU-Turkey Customs Union is a major success but should be revised to reach its full potential. Turkey also requests to be included in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).
- Turmoil along Turkey's southeastern border, in Iraq and Syria, threatens both the EU's and Turkey's homeland security, pointing to the need for a reinforced foreign policy dialogue between the two.

### **Recommendations for the EU and Turkey**

**Deepen trade and economic integration.** Brussels and Ankara should significantly upgrade their customs union. Turkey's eventual participation in TTIP should also be addressed. Both modernizing the customs union and joining TTIP would nonetheless require Turkey to undertake major reforms.

**Consider pursuing an in-depth discussion of judiciary and rule-of-law issues in Turkey.** This would entail exempting chapters 23 and 24 of the accession negotiations from the current blockage.

**Upgrade the level of dialogue on mobility and migration.** The visa liberalization road map launched in 2013 and the readmission agreement for irregular migrants signed in 2013 should be quickly advanced.

**Strive for joint action on the Syrian and Iraqi crises and in the fight against the militant Islamic**

**State.** Issues Brussels and Ankara should consider include humanitarian assistance, safe areas for displaced persons, and relations with the Syrian opposition. Turkey should develop a comprehensive plan that addresses the long-term needs of the refugees and share this plan with the EU and other stakeholders to obtain more significant international support. The EU should push its member states to increase the resettlement numbers for Syrian refugees to help manage this humanitarian burden.

**Improve counterterrorism cooperation.** Brussels, key EU capitals, and Ankara need more effective channels of communication for the timely sharing of sensitive information.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

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