



**European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)**  
**Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)**

## **ETUC: Turkey's accession to the European Union**

### **1) Foreword**

The Council [1] of Europe admitted Turkey as a full member in August 1949, just a few months after the signature of the Treaty of London. In 1951, Turkey joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and became one of the cornerstones of the Euro-Atlantic defence system. Turkey also joined the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (the OEEC, later to become the OECD), the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (later to become the OSCE) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Today, Turkey is a fully-fledged member of all leading European institutions except the European Union. In 1959, Turkey applied for associate member status of the European Economic Community (EEC), but a military coup in 1960 meant that the Ankara Association Agreement ended up only being signed in 1963. Article 28 of this agreement contains a carefully worded reference to future membership: "As soon as the operation of this Agreement has advanced far enough to justify envisaging full acceptance by Turkey of the obligations arising out of the Treaty establishing the Community, the Contracting Parties shall examine the possibility of the accession of Turkey to the Community." The main emphasis of the agreement lay in the gradual implementation of a customs union which, in accordance with the points contained in the additional protocol of 1970, would be finalised at the end of a 22-year period. An Association Council [2] would be responsible for regularly analysing the progress made in implementing the Ankara agreement. After several postponements, the Customs Union finally entered into force in 1996. Meanwhile, on 14 April 1987, Turkey applied for membership of the European Community (EC). The European Commission only issued its opinion on this in December 1989. That opinion, approved by the European Council two months later, set out the reasons why the Commission did not consider it appropriate to launch immediate negotiations with Turkey. The two main reasons given were: • The Community was undergoing major changes following the adoption of the Single European Act, and it would have been inappropriate at that stage to launch a new round of membership talks; • Turkey's economic and political situation, in particular "the negative consequences of the dispute between Turkey and one Member State of the Community, and also the situation in Cyprus", meant that the time was not right for such a development.

On that occasion, the Commission recommended a series of measures to assist Turkey, "without casting doubt on its eligibility for membership of the Community". Over the ensuing decade, Turkey's eligibility was confirmed on numerous occasions by the European Council, the General Affairs Council and the Association Council. At the same time, it was repeatedly stressed that Turkey's economic and political problems, especially regarding human rights, constituted hurdles to the opening of negotiations. In particular this was stated at the European Council summit in Luxembourg, which saw the launch of the accession process for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Cyprus, but from which Turkey was excluded. Nonetheless, the European Council held in Helsinki on 10 and 11 December 1999 was to conclude: "Turkey is a candidate State destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate States." The upshot of this was the establishment of an Accession Partnership, the drafting of regular annual reports by the Commission on the progress made by Turkey, and a preliminary procedure for examining the *acquis communautaire* in a bid to encourage and support Turkey's reform efforts. In December 2002, the Copenhagen European Council acknowledged the considerable progress made by Turkey towards meeting the accession criteria, but noted that a great deal remained to be done, especially with regard to the

implementation of reforms. The European Council resolved to examine in December 2004 whether Turkey met the political criteria set in Copenhagen and, if so, to launch accession negotiations. To help Turkey down the path to membership, the Partnership received financial assistance in the form of 'pre-accession aid'. On that occasion, the customs union between the European Union and Turkey was expanded and consolidated. Since the start of 2003, the Turkish government has considerably accelerated and intensified its efforts at reform, thereby demonstrating its determination to meet the conditions laid down by the European Council. The Commission submitted its report in favour of Turkey's accession to the European Union on 6 October 2004. In December 2004, the Council should confirm the Commission's proposals and set out a timetable for negotiations with Turkey.

## 2) Resolution

1. ETUC's Executive Committee confirms the terms of its Resolution dated 16 December 1997, underlining Turkey's place in the European economic and political space and its European vocation. Since 1985, ETUC has numbered Turkish trade unions among its members and has always supported its affiliates in the fight for democracy and trade union rights. It will step up its efforts and cooperation with the aim of guaranteeing trade union rights and the rights of Turkish workers in the private and public sectors. 2. ETUC's Executive Committee reiterates its approval of Article I-1 of the draft Constitutional Treaty: "The Union shall be open to all European States which respect its values and are committed to promoting them together". These values are set out in Article I-2: "respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights". 3. ETUC's Executive Committee emphasises that the inclusion of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in Part II of the draft Constitutional Treaty serves as a reference and a basis for respecting social rights in the EU Member States and the candidate countries.

4. ETUC's Executive Committee recognises that Turkey and its governments have made great efforts. It regards Turkey as a developing democracy that has made considerable progress since December 2002 towards meeting the political criteria laid down in Copenhagen. The Executive Committee recognises that tangible progress has been made with respect to the role of the army in political life and the treatment of minorities, amongst other things.

5. ETUC's Executive Committee points out that the opening of negotiations after the Council of December 2004 should consolidate the efforts already being made to make further headway by guaranteeing full respect for human rights, and particularly the rights of minorities. The Committee also stresses that regional development aid supported by the European Union would enable the peoples in question to take part in the social development of their region.

6. In accordance with Part II of the draft Constitutional Treaty, the Turkish government should use the period of accession negotiations to ensure full compliance with the *acquis communautaire* and more particularly to bring its social legislation into line with ILO Conventions 87 and 98 by recognising the role of the social partners, their ability to negotiate, their independence, the main rights of trade unions and associated fundamental freedoms and to accept the Articles 5 and 6 of the European Social Charter.

7. The duration of the negotiations and their outcome will depend on the progress made, which should not be limited to the economic domain alone. The successful end of these negotiations must go hand in hand with a furthering of the values and objectives mentioned in Parts I and II of the draft Constitutional Treaty.

8. While the efforts made by the Turkish government to meet the political criteria laid down at Copenhagen both reflect its genuine determination and have also proved effective, it is now vital that they be stepped up with regard to social rights, trade union rights and the laws governing associations. The headway made on social policy issues remains insufficient, bearing in mind the Commission's Accession Partnership document, which highlights the following major areas for improvement:

- ▶ Labour law, public and private sector;
- ▶ gender equality;
- ▶ health and safety at work;
- ▶ the fight against discrimination;
- ▶ public health;

- ▶ developing the role of the social partners in social, cross-sectoral, sectoral and corporate dialogue;
- ▶ promoting employment.

9. Turkey's accession is one of the greatest challenges facing Europe in the years to come. It will confirm the ability of the European Union, based on its common values of peace, freedom, democracy, the primacy of law and respect for human rights, to extend its influence and draw strength from the diversity of its members and respect for the philosophical views and religious beliefs of all its citizens.

10. The strength of the European social model can only lie in its capacity to prove that there are alternative responses to the immense challenges facing our generation. ETUC reaffirms that nurturing a multi-ethnic, multicultural Europe is one way of responding to international terrorism, since the very nature of such a Union challenges the notion of a 'clash of civilisations'.

[1] The Council of Europe is the oldest intergovernmental organisation in Europe. Its aims are to protect human rights, shore up pluralist democracy, underpin the rule of law, promote Europe's diverse cultural identity and find solutions to major social problems (re minorities, xenophobia, intolerance, protection of the environment, drugs, organised crime etc.)

[2] As set down in the Ankara Agreement of 1963, the Association Council comprises representatives from Turkey, the EU Member States, the Council of Ministers and the European Commission.

*Last Modification : **February 21 2005.***