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The Significance of the Opening of EU Accession Negotiations with Turkey and its Implications for Europe and the U.S.A.

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The European Council's decision on December 17, 2004 to enter into accession negotiations with Turkey on October 3, 2005 has been a turning point in the relationship between Turkey and the EU. The forthcoming developments will crucially decide on whether negotiations and a possible Turkish entry in the future will be a contribution to the EU's strategic capabilities.

Whereas the EU has yet to reflect upon the prospective dividend of a Turkish EU membership, Washington has been supporting Turkey's EU aspirations ever since. Hence the opening of accession negotiations has immediately been declared a political victory by U.S. policymakers.

The preceding European debate has displayed a sizeable amount of ignorance about and prejudices against Turkey, which has been boosted by populist remarks, uttered by some politicians. But it has also shown the absence of a concept of what Europe and the EU are meant to be or are yet to become. The limply established "European Security and Defense Policy" (ESDP) exemplifies best how little of a strategic vision and long-term clairvoyance the EU is able or willing to bear. Consequently, expanding the Union's borders from the North Sea to the Caucasus through Turkish admission is for some European technocrats a means of transforming the EU into a global player. In doing so, Europeanization appears to be the "magic word". But the Turkish case is a different one, and considering the traditional link between Ankara and Washington might come as a blow to the wishful thinking of some Europeans.

In fact, the U.S.-Turkish link is a special one: Both countries have been pursuing a strategic partnership, based on similar interests in the region adjacent to Turkey. Despite its year-long western and European commitment, Turkey felt misunderstood and rejected by Europe. The EC's and later the EU's resentment towards a Turkish EU membership and its failure to act as a reliable mediator in conflicts, such as the one on Cyprus or the bilateral issues between Turkey and Greece, have resulted in deep Turkish mistrust. It has therefore been the U.S. that filled in the gap and constantly supported a Turkish EU

membership. This, of course, not without any self-interest. Turkey qualifies as a strategic ally for the U.S. because of the following attributes:

- Turkey is a Mediterranean "flank state" in Europe and NATO's south-eastern corner pillar.
- Its geographical location makes the country an indispensable military base; its use for the deployment of allied air force and particularly U.S. Air Force in operations in the Middle East is an integral part of military planning.
- Turkey's control of the straits and its access to the Black Sea are of great strategic importance to the U.S.

Winning Turkey as a new member of the "European family" would guarantee its further western orientation and make its foreign policy more predictable in view of the fact that Turkey may have been a loyal, but not an acquiescent partner. The so-called Johnson Letter in 1964, for instance, has created uncertainty about Washington's reliability. Turkey, hereupon, displayed a remarkable capability of selective loyalty along with its national interests, knowing how to differentiate between its allies and neighbors. Despite occasional collision with U.S. policy in Turkey's neighborhood after the Cold War, Turkey emerged to be an even more valuable strategic ally, not only in Eurasia and in the Middle East, but along with Britain in Europe.

Hence Europeans urgently need to transform these parameters into a coherent EU policy towards Turkey, following their own strategic interests. Attempts to achieve a greater separation of the EU from the U.S. are bound to fail, as a Turkish EU membership will force the EU to coordinate its security and defense policy even more closely with NATO, hence with Washington.

For the time being, Turkey can safeguard its political interests merely in accordance with Washington, as the examples of Northern Iraq and the Caucasus illustrate. Thus Turkish ambitions towards the EU do not automatically imply the subordination of its regional interests to European preferences, forewarn European pundits. That is why the Turkish EU membership would be of a *sui generis* category, as Ankara would retain its strategic ties

to Washington. Thus Turkey's westernization does not equate to its Europeanization; it rather may mean a gradual Americanization.

Eventually, a Turkey within the EU will have to face the necessity of a Europeanization. Even a Turkish EU membership may be regarded as a strategic gain for the U.S.; a Turkey closer to the EU will alter the relationship between Washington and Ankara. Turkey is already an assertive partner, warily balancing between its own national interests and its duties as an alliance partner. The U.S. needs to take this into account when it comes to formulating its policy towards Turkey. It would be wise for the EU to do the same.