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## Talking Turkey

By Wolfgang Schauble and David L. Phillips

From *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2004

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### A Still-European Union

Wolfgang Schauble

David Phillips is right to argue that "Turkey is a crucial ally for the West" ("Turkey's Dreams of Accession," September/October 2004) but wrong to claim that only full membership in the EU will preserve that relationship.

The EU, as a community of nations and values, is too important to be subjected to this kind of merely strategic, functional reasoning. The case for Turkish entry into the EU must be judged on its own merits, which Phillips largely ignores. Although he warns of adverse consequences if Turkey is rejected from the union, he fails to consider the consequences of acceptance. Would an EU with Turkey as a member be able to continue building an ever closer political union or speak with one voice?

Today's European Union has an enormously complex structure, to which independent states have handed over impressive parts of their sovereignty-defying doubts, for example, about the introduction and success of a single currency. The process of integration is ongoing: big steps forward are currently being made in the fields of justice and home affairs and in developing a common defense system, which might lead one day to a common army. Such a high degree of integration cannot continue, however, if the union keeps expanding. It is time, in other words, to start thinking about limiting the EU's size.

Rather than simply shutting the door, however, Europe should start thinking seriously about new frameworks for cooperation with outside states: arrangements that would bring maximum benefits to all sides without endangering the EU itself. This is what is meant by a "privileged partnership," and this is what should be considered for Turkey.

Advocating partnership over membership does not imply any prejudice against Turkey or Turkish society. Phillips is right that Turkey's development since World War I has been enormous, and unique. The country has come a long way since emancipating itself from its Ottoman legacy. As Phillips rightly points out, Turkey deserves enormous credit for its success in protecting its constitution and secular society as well as its Muslim heritage. Turkey has made immense progress recently in improving its democratic structures and human rights record. The country's courageous prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has taken bold steps toward the West at a time when the situations in Iraq and Cyprus have not made doing so easy.

Phillips seems to feel that, given these efforts and Turkey's ardent desire to join the EU, the only possible reason to reject it must have to do with religion. He is certainly not the first to argue that Europe's reluctance to admit Turkey stems from the latter's Muslim nature. Indeed, the EU has been called a "club of Christians" more than once. Repetition does not make the charge more accurate, however. Phillips himself cannot prove this allegation, and a look at European societies undermines that claim—as does the recently approved text of the European constitution, which avoids emphasizing Christianity alone.

Phillips' allegation that Europe's Christian Democratic parties are particularly responsible for the EU's reluctance to embrace Turkey is likewise unsubstantiated. Indeed, Erdogan's own Justice and Development Party has sought to establish close ties to Germany's Christian Democrats and membership in the European People's Party, an umbrella group for all European Christian Democrats. A far more likely explanation for Europe's hesitation to admit Turkey is an awareness of the potential problems that could arise from the integration of a country that shares hundreds of miles of borders with Syria and Iran into a union that, among many other things, all but guarantees freedom of movement for all individuals. Are Turkey's citizens even aware of the scope of sovereignty that they would have to hand over to EU institutions if they joined the union? Today Turkey is an extraordinarily important bridge between Europe and the Middle East. But full integration into the EU would put Turkey, a NATO partner, in a difficult and

not entirely foreseeable position.

#### INTEGRATING ISN'T EASY

The European Union today finds itself at one of the most crucial points of its history. The integration of the ten new member states will be a monumental task, although the benefits should also be enormous: bringing peace and stability to parts of the European continent from which they have long been conspicuously absent.

No one should underestimate, however, the political risks and economic costs inherent in this process. Europe risks overstretching itself. It has given itself an ambitious task and should concentrate first and foremost on accomplishing that task. This will not be possible if the European project loses support from Europe's citizens, who are already feeling fatigued. Now is therefore not the time to decide on more new members-especially Turkey, a country that could soon have a bigger population than any EU member state's and that would require substantial assistance before its economic structure could be brought into Europe's. Instead, what the EU needs to do right now is consolidate.

A "privileged partnership" between Turkey and the EU is therefore the only realistic option for the near future. Phillips, who must know that actual accession is, at best, still a long way off, nonetheless argues that talks should be started now, so as to give reform-minded people in Ankara the momentum necessary to continue on their path to reform. He explains,

If [Europe] agrees to start negotiations with Turkey, Turks will rally behind Erdogan and [the reformist General Hilmi] Ozkok, allowing them to consolidate democratic reforms. ...Turkey's accession to the EU is an unprecedented chance both for the country to fulfill its potential as a successful modern democracy in the Muslim world and for the West to strengthen a precious ally in the fight against terrorism, deepen its commitment to diversity, and foster liberalization in the Islamic world.

But pushing for accession now while putting off the question of whether Turkey will ever become a full EU member would be a mistake. And starting the process, only to have Turkey ultimately fail to qualify, would be disastrous for both Turkey and the EU. Europe's respect for and long-standing friendship with Turkey therefore require that the question be addressed now.

If the Europeans are guilty of anything it is that they have postponed for too long a discussion about the ultimate limits of EU extension and about the meaning of European identity. Many have feared that such a discussion would create the impression that Europe is shutting its door to countries on its borders. The debate, however, is inevitable.

The EU is, after all, European. Although Australia or Japan could fulfill its accession criteria, no one has proposed them as potential EU members. Similarly, countries such as Turkey and Russia only partly share Europe's heritage and geography; in other parts, they definitely do not. And the "strategic" reasons that Phillips proposes for admitting Turkey might one day be applied to other countries in the Middle East or in North Africa that are unquestionably outside Europe.

Still, to avoid seeming exclusivist, the EU must urgently develop a method for establishing partnerships with those of its neighbors that want to intensify their cooperation with it. Turkey in this regard can be a special test case and offers special opportunities. It has been associated with the European Economic Community since 1963. Offering it a "privileged partnership" with the EU would be a good first step toward developing a new framework that may in due time considerably enhance the prospects of cooperation with other neighboring countries. Such a partnership would also underscore the importance of Turkey's relationship with Europe and improve regional security, even while allowing the EU to strengthen its political integration at home.

This will not be what many in Turkey want to hear, and there are good strategic reasons to get Ankara as close to Brussels as possible. But Europe's top priority should be the success of its own integration. Establishing an open and honest debate with Turkey would be the best way for Europe to demonstrate its commitment to Turkey. Indeed, such an arrangement will be the best way to retain and improve the strategic alliance between Turkey and the West-an alliance that is crucially relevant for all sides.

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### Phillips Replies

Wolfgang Schäuble suggests that Turkey's accession to the European Union would limit the ability of EU countries to speak with one voice. Instead, he proposes a "privileged partnership" for Turkey. This alternative, however, is not in Europe's interest.

There are important strategic reasons for starting accession talks with Ankara. Closer ties with Turkey would advance the EU's economic, security, and political interests.

On the economic front, Turkey offers a well-trained and disciplined work force to supplement Europe's dwindling and aging population. As Turkey's economy continues to expand-its average per capita income of \$3,360 is already higher than that of Bulgaria or Romania, two new EU members-Turkey will become an even more attractive export market for European goods. The U.S. Commerce Department recently identified Turkey as one of the top ten emerging markets worldwide. If Europe does not secure its access to Turkish markets, other countries will.

As for security, Turkey has long acted as an effective buffer. During the Cold War, it helped protect NATO's eastern flank. Now Turkey's large and adept armed forces stand between Europe and terror groups in the Middle East and Central Asia. Turkish authorities proved their mettle by forestalling a potentially disastrous attack on world leaders attending June's NATO summit in Istanbul. Extending Europe's borders eastward would project European values and neutralize freedom's foes. In addition, strengthening Turkey as a model secular democracy in the Muslim world would enhance Europe's security.

Including Turkey in the EU would also have political benefits. Europeans are anxious about Turkish immigration to their countries, having grown uneasy about the large Muslim minority in their midst. The March 11 train bombings in Madrid further heightened European concerns about Islam and terror. Starting accession talks with Turkey would be a source of enormous pride to Muslims throughout Europe. If Brussels signaled its willingness to absorb minority religious groups, it would have a moderating effect on these groups, resulting in more reasonable debate about issues such as Muslim women wearing headscarves.

Schäuble, by expressing his doubt that Turkey could ever become truly "European," voices the view of Europe's older generation. They may still think that Europe is homogeneous. But times have changed. Today's Europe is a rich mosaic of cultures, ethnicities, and religions. It is a community of values, in which democracy is strengthened by diversity. More than a political and economic bloc, the union is a dynamic democracy-building project. In order to join it, countries must embrace far-reaching political and economic reforms.

Rejecting Turkey would foment militancy, not only in Turkey, but among Europe's large Muslim population. It would also diminish Europe in the eyes of people from the Balkans and the Caucasus who aspire to join the EU themselves. Europe should make itself a magnet for those seeking a better life, not a target for groups that resent its elitism.

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