



The EU and Türkiye: Can shared threats overcome mutual suspicion?

EU-Türkiye relations are stuck in a mutually detrimental stalemate. Low mutual trust and high transactionalism mean deeper co-operation has effectively stalled for two decades. This comes despite common threats and challenges posed by Russia, the US, and China, and potential joint security and economic co-operation between the EU and Türkiye to address these threats.

A new policy brief, [‘The EU and Türkiye: Can shared threats overcome mutual suspicion?’](#), authored by Thomas Maddock, sets out some steps that the EU and Türkiye can take to reset ties.

On security, Türkiye and the EU should build up institutional engagement, through an annual dialogue between the Enlargement Commissioner and her Turkish counterparts. This informal dialogue should be flexible to avoid national vetoes, but regularly held to maintain institutional buy-in; initial stages could focus on Levant stability, Black Sea security, and defence industrial co-operation.

On defence industrial co-operation, Türkiye’s considerable manufacturing capacity could fill critical gaps in the EU’s defence industrial supply chains, including uncrewed aerial, surface, and ground vehicles. Even if Türkiye is unable to participate in EU-level defence industrial schemes such as SAFE, more can be done at the national level between EU member-states and Türkiye.

On economic ties, the EU should move to modernise the customs union, with agreements on services and digital trade. The EU should view modernisation more as a technical fix than a bargaining chip. Türkiye currently has no say in EU trade policy, yet EU trade agreements with third countries automatically apply asymmetrically to Türkiye. Giving Türkiye an observer status in talks could be a low-cost fix to allow Türkiye to kick off its own talks with those countries. Both sides should explore expertise-sharing on critical minerals and co-operation on connectivity projects, looking at projects such as the Middle Corridor.

More broadly, both sides need to shift their mindset about the relationship. Türkiye should address the EU’s most pressing concerns about its domestic politics, and in return the EU should signal support for and meaningfully pursue co-operation. Parts of the relationship can already be improved at the national level, without needing EU unanimity.

The author, Thomas Maddock, said, *“Re-engagement between the EU and Türkiye is not a zero-cost strategy. But in the current environment, the costs of maintaining the status quo or a further estrangement clearly outweigh those of step-by-step, sequenced engagement.”*

Notes for editors:

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