

## **E.U. Bid Keeps Turkey on Path of Reform** *Goal Is Distant, But Pressure Isn't*

**By Karl Vick**  
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ISTANBUL, Oct. 4 -- Turks say they know the negotiations that formally opened in Luxembourg a few moments after midnight Tuesday morning may not end with Turkey actually joining the European Union.

"The biggest problem, to start with, is that we're Muslims," said Rabia Yasar, 18, to the nods of fellow students on an Istanbul street.

But even as they downgrade their expectations, Turks still very much want to join Europe, polls show. And keeping that possibility alive nourishes a new climate of change that already has brought a flurry of reforms to a country that had long been almost impervious to foreign pressure.

"It's historic," said Cuneyt Ulsever, a columnist for Hurriyet, a mainstream daily newspaper. "We all grew up with our father holding a stick in his hand to make us do our homework. Without any imposition from outside, Turkey would quickly lose contact with reform."

Even with the start of membership negotiations early Tuesday, the process of Turkey joining Europe is expected to take at least 10 years. In the past three years, Turkish lawmakers have voted to ban torture, outlaw the death penalty, dissolve special security courts, revise the criminal code and dilute the power of a military that three times since 1960 has taken power from civilian governments.

All the changes came at the behest of the European Union, which requires member states to conform to so-called European norms.

"E.U. membership is the means of realizing Turkey's claim of being a democratic, liberal, just and prosperous society," Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday told his ruling Justice and Development Party, which calls itself reformist.

In the past month, as the start date for talks loomed, critics scheduled news conferences to show what work still needed to be done, and Turkish officials scrambled to demonstrate that their country really could change.

With the public encouragement of Erdogan, scholars gathered in Istanbul for the first independent public examination here of the deaths of 1 million Armenians in eastern Turkey during the last days of the Ottoman Empire. Police lines kept back ultranationalists who gathered to protest that shattering of what was termed "Turkey's last taboo."

Less noticed was the launch of a government program that pays households for sending their daughters to school. The move was aimed at undoing traditions that impede women's rights in the Anatolian heartland.

"If there were only the European side of Turkey, it would be easy," said Ifgenia Minaoglu, in the Katia shop that for half a century has made custom hats for the elite of Istanbul society, who have long considered themselves continental.

Others worry that Europe will bring not only rights and prosperity but also homogenization. "We've been living without the E.U. up to now," said Nadira Canan, her hair tucked under the head scarf that many Turkish women believe Islam requires them to wear in public. "If we're going to lose the values of our culture, then we're better off not part of it."

But the headlines of Monday's front pages, just under news of the E.U. cliffhanger in which Austria nearly blocked the start of membership talks, told of changes already underway: life in prison for a man who killed his 16-year-old daughter because she had been raped, an "honor crime" that a year ago would have brought a lighter sentence; the opening by a state official of a home in central Istanbul for battered and homeless women.

"The speed of reform has increased tremendously," said Meltem Muftuler Bac, who studies Turkey and the E.U. at Istanbul's Sabanci University.

On an inside page, Hurriyet on Tuesday discreetly displayed the front page it had prepared in the event that Austria had prevailed in its attempt to deny Turkey full E.U. membership. The mock-up featured a giant photo of Adolf Hitler throwing a straight-arm salute. "The Same Spirit," the headline read.

At the same time, Turkish nationalists have also been energized by the E.U. bid, turning out tens of thousands of protesters for a weekend rally where Erdogan's government was accused of selling out the country's sovereignty. Turks are raised to be deeply invested in their state, and some analysts predict that mind-set is more likely to derail union with Europe than the country's size, poverty, Middle Eastern borders or even religion.

"Whatever the state thinks, that's what I think," said Arsez Degirmencioglu, 70, outside his clock shop in downtown Istanbul. "I don't have any individual thoughts."