

**Türkiye From The Eyes Of The West**

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Abstract

This article examines the Western world's perception of Turkey, offering a broad perspective that spans from the historical context to the political, economic, and cultural dynamics of the present day. Turkey's relations with the West have continuously evolved since the late period of the Ottoman Empire. This article will focus on the factors shaping the West’s perception of Turkey, current international developments, and the role of the media. Additionally, the bilateral effects of this perception and possible future scenarios will also be analyzed.

Historical Background

It lays back to the very roots of the modern-day perception of the West about Turkey: the Ottoman Empire, in which the 19th century has witnessed the declaration of the Ottoman Empire as the "Sick Man" and thereby opened it to the political intervention of Western powers. This particular period tends to have the consequence on how the West viewed Turkey as being weak, in need of reforms or seeking reforms. However, the diplomatic relations of the Ottomans with the West had not only been about power balances but also included cultural and commercial interactions which became significant in this period. The reform movements like the Tanzimat and Islahat Firman, for instance, reflected their images in the European part as signs of the Turkish efforts of modernization.

The establishment of the Republic opened new vistas for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's efforts towards modernization and westernization to become objects of admiration in the West and will, however, not fail to be the cause of these complicated debates within Turkey itself about its identity. In the view of the West, forms of secularism embodied in Atatürk's understanding of it as well as reforms in the judiciary ranked Turkey as a modern, developing nation-state. That period of the Cold War inevitably consolidated the image of Turkey, as a member of the Western alliance, toward being regarded as both a military and strategic ally. Indeed, in all this development, Turkey has also been placed in a critical role in Western defense policies alongside NATO membership while at the same time has experienced some strong push for democratic pressure from the West.

The Kurdish question in Turkey was one of the hottest topics in Western media during the political instabilities and human rights discourses of the 1990s. In such an era, Turkey remained a strategic partner of the West while confronted with human rights violations and allegations of democratic backsliding. Towards the beginning of the 2000s, the negotiation process that Turkey initiated with the European Union stirred a hope and enthusiasm in the West but brought forth renewed criticisms with the stall of the process. The history of Turkey's relations with the west bespeaks a long and winding road with each historical period having its accouterments of distinct dynamics with which to shape a given perception of the West. Besides, a debate that usually finds itself being explored from the above angle among academics in the West is the balancing act Turkey has attempted with respect to mending a modern nation's state forms with the Ottoman heritage of the now bygone empire.

Political Perspective

As of now, Western political perception concerning Turkey is shaped by various transformations in external policy that may have a direct relationship with Turkey. This transformation particularly went hand-in-hand with the multilateral foreign policy strategy that Turkey had since the early 2000s, inaugurating a new phase in relations with the West. Likewise, the Turkish government's policy of "zero problems with neighbors" has been touted as a diplomatic opening by the West, although this has been severely stretched by the Arab Spring. Membership negotiations with the European Union have dominated a certain period of time, and the recent stagnation of the event has led to the rise of a rather critical language in Western media and political circles.

Turkey's increased influence in the Middle East, the Syrian crisis, and its immigration policies have made Western security and stability concerns mount. The migration crisis has accelerated the dependency on Turkey in Europe, particularly after 2015, making its location on the strategic map even more evident. Criticism of democratic backsliding, as well as international reports regarding freedom of the press and matters of human rights, influence the negative side of the perception by the West of Turkey. These criticisms would further add to the Western concern about Turkey's tendencies toward authoritarianism and the rule of law.

Recently, the attitude adopted by Turkey regarding the NATO membership processes of Sweden and Finland has reverberated in the Western media. This increasingly independent line that Turkey is taking in foreign policy is being quite problematic for the understanding of perceiving Turkey as a traditional ally of the West. However, during the current Ukraine-Russia War, Turkey's mediation efforts, the event of the grain corridor agreement, and diplomacy efforts are also reviving interest in Turkey as a strategic nation within the realm of the West. Turkey has also developed such relations with African countries in terms of diplomacy and economy that the West would see as a bizarre pop.

Economic Dynamics

Turkey's economic development has been monitored both in the West with admiration and with anxiety. In earlier 2000s with rapid growth and economic reforms, Turkey stood out in the West as an emerging market and investment opportunity. But in the last few years economic shocks, high inflation and currency crises as well as financial instability are frequent subjects in the Western media. Relations with alternative economic partners such as China and Russia are sometimes conflicting with Western economic policies-the result of which generates uncertainty in the Western gaze towards Turkey.

Changes made in the economy management after the 2023 elections may have the potential to reshape the economic relations of Turkey with the West. The struggle against inflation, interest rate policy, and efforts to attract foreign investors are being keenly followed by the West media. Besides that, green energy investments from Turkey, advances in the digital economy, and technological entrepreneurship have sparked interest in the West and positioned Turkey as a regional economic power. Steps toward Turkey's energy independence by 2024, as well as its role in international trade agreements, will comprise elements that shape the economic strategies the West takes against Turkey.

Cultural Perceptions

The perception of the West towards Turkey is molded by media, art, and pop culture. Its rich history, glamorous atmosphere of Istanbul, and the fame of Turkish cuisine created a great audience in the West. Dramas, movies, and literary works can be mentioned among the important means of introducing Turkey as an exotic, mysterious, and at the same time modern country. Most particularly, the huge popularity of Turkish dramas in Latin America, the Middle East, and Europe has further increased Turkey's soft power.

However, at times Islamophobia and cultural prejudices may lead to negative stereotypes against Turkey. But this becomes more pronounced during terrorism and political crisis. Increasing anti-Islam protests in Europe in 2023 have also affected perceptions concerning Turkey.

Cultural interaction between Turkey and the West can be potential two-way channels for breaking prejudices and developing new understandings. Successes achieved by

Turkish athletes in the 2024 Paris Olympics have contributed towards a more positive reflection of Turkey's cultural-sporting identity in the Western media.

The role of media

The western media are very instrumental to molding the global image of Turkey. All major news agencies and influential papers usually rope in their news about Turkey to the public and governments. Thus, Turkey's political events, protests, or crisis moments are featured mostly by the western media; however, developments that are positive are less mentioned. That way, it may lead to the development of a one-sided perspective in the West.

Nonetheless, the onset of digital media and social networks allows much more varied access to information about Turkey by individuals. For instance, in 2023, the discussion in Western media was that the flow of information across social media, specifically channels like Twitter and TikTok, made it easier during the elections and natural disasters events concerning Turkey. This stand to foster a more balanced and multidimensional understanding of Turkey within the West would also contribute. Relevant examples in this regard include how the European Parliament's elections in 2024 were shouted out in social media concerning Turkey.

The Current Affairs and Turkey Perception: The present political and economic happenings have a very major effect on the present perception that the west holds of Turkey. Much ink has been spilled in the west discussing the post-July 15 coup attempt domestic policy changes in Turkey. The military operations in Syria, energy policies in the Eastern Mediterranean, and Turkey's position over the immigration issue have opened up new issues in the West, triggering discussions around foreign affairs pertaining to Turkey.

How Turkey has changed its internal and foreign policy post-elections through 2023 has been widely covered in the West. Also reflected in the western press is the capacity of Turkey to manage disasters, apart from "international demonstrations of solidarity" displayed by most countries after the earth-quake calamities. The countries of West also eye the climate change policies of Turkey, its stand in the COP28 Summit, and the advancements made in energy transformation. In 2024, the steps Turkey takes in the advances made in defense industry and the space program will also make a significant place in the western media.

Diplomatic Relations and Security Policies

As such, Turkey has formulated its diplomatic ties with the West especially in the light of NATO membership and negotiations with the EU. Being a member and one of the most significant contributors to NATO, Turkey plays a crucial role in security policies defined by the Western world. Recently, Turkey's advancing strategic partnership with Russia andthe state of independence in defense industry created an impact on perceptions of security policies with respect to the West. Acquisitions of the S-400 missile defense system and energy politics in the Mediterranean have increased barriers that contribute to Turkey's declaration as an independent actor while raising diplomatic tensions with the West. The multilateral diplomatic paradigm changed the perspectives of security policies concerning Turkey by the West.

Social Perceptions and Migration Dynamics

Western societal perceptions regarding Turkey are also formed through migration movements and diaspora communities. The Turkish diaspora in Germany has created the ground for both positive and negative perceptions towards Turkey in western societies. One of the decisive factors for the Western gaze towards Turkey is the migrant crisis and the role of Turkey as a buffer zone in the transit to Europe. While anti-immigrant rhetoric, which came up in the aftermath of 2015, is further damaging the perception of Turkey in Europe, it also added to the strategic importance of the responsibilities taken by Turkey during this period. Moreover, Türkiye's humanitarian assistance policies and integration efforts for refugees also count as factors which elicit appreciation from the West.

Conclusion

In this article, the perception of the West towards Turkey is examined within a broad spectrum, starting from its historical roots to current political, economic, cultural, diplomatic, security, and media-based perceptions. The West’s perception of Turkey has a dynamic and multi-layered structure. Turkey’s geopolitical position, historical heritage, modernization efforts, and multidimensional foreign policy create both opportunities and challenges in its relations with the West. Strategic partnerships in diplomatic relations, independent stances in security policies, and societal perceptions shaped by migration dynamics make the West’s view of Turkey more complex. In the future, the development of policies based on mutual understanding and cooperation may shape Turkey’s image in the West more positively. Additionally, Turkey’s role in the multipolar world order will be one of the most significant factors determining the West’s perception of Turkey.

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