

# Why America Should Build Bridges to Turkey



By [LIZ PEEK](#)

July 3, 2007

The following is an excerpted version of an article published in the New York Sun on July 3, 2007 by Liz Peek.

The Turks are getting cranky, and who can blame them? Since recovering from a fiscal crisis in 2001, the country has racked up one of the best growth rates in the world, and today it is the 17th largest economy. Last year the budget deficit fell to less than 1% of Gross Domestic Product, while inflation has been in single-digit territory for the past three years.

Notwithstanding these hard-won accomplishments, the newly elected but evidently still campaigning French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, recently rejected the idea of Turkish membership in the [E.U.](#) The rationale was weak at best: He argued that, geographically, Turkey is not really part of [Europe](#). To the Turks, the argument was considered unfair, and it was described by various leaders as "repulsive" and, more privately, racist.

Why should we in [America](#) care about this Euro-squabble? First, because Turkey represents a real example of exactly what our government is so inexpertly striving for in the Middle East. Turkey is that secular Muslim democracy that we are so desperate to create in the region. It serves as a shining example of how religious, political, and economic freedom can prosper in an Islamic society, and how such a society can continue to embrace the West.

Secondly, Turkey is and always has been strategically situated between East and West. Its position today looms especially large as [Russia](#) gains a stranglehold on delivering natural gas to Europe. Various competing pipeline projects have been under consideration as Russia builds its export capacity. Turkey has been promoting the construction of a line called the Nabucco. The project is led by Austria, which by linking Caspian gas fields to Europe would have reduced the continent's dependence on Russian exports.

(...) Indeed, it would be impossible to view Turkey's geographic situation as anything but strategic to America. It shares borders with Iraq, Syria, Georgia, and Iran. Of all

these nations, Turkey is certainly the most stable and the most likely to be a reliable ally.

Because of its stability, Turkey is also fast becoming a significant trading partner and investment hub for the EU and America. Foreign investment into Turkey has jumped to more than \$20 billion last year from less than \$3 billion in 2004. The total this year is expected to show another sizeable gain. This rise in foreign investment is offsetting a current account deficit that reflects rising imports, and a growing middle class. Nearly half of Turkey's citizens are under the age of 25; unlike most European countries, Turkey's population of roughly 73 million is growing, at a rate or more than 1% a year. Despite unemployment that is still around 10%, per capita GDP has more than doubled since 2002, scoring one of the highest growth rates in the world.

In other words, Turkey has made significant economic progress since its last fiscal crisis, a time that inspired a number of effective fiscal reforms. The government has also pushed social measures that have, for instance, significantly boosted the country's literacy rate (now 96%) and education. Almost all children in the country now attend primary school. Furthermore, there are 35 private universities in Turkey, as well as 80 run by the state.

It is because Turkey has made such strides that the country is so angered by the shabby treatment recently doled out by the E.U. (...)

On July 22, Turkey will elect a new parliament (...) Overall, the expectation is that the AKP will again win a majority, especially as elections have been called when many middle class Turks are on holiday outside the country. The party's majority, however, could be reduced, resulting in a less effective coalition government.

The upcoming election is unlikely to create any real change in Turkey's commitment to furthering its economic involvement with the West (...) ***This would be an excellent time for America to rebuild a relationship that has been frayed by Turkey's resistance to American involvement in Iraq. Pushing Turkey closer to Russia, or any other of its neighbors, would surely not be in our country's best interests.***