

Why the EU now dislikes Turkey

The EU is not happy with the results of the Turkish referendum. Some EU politicians argue the campaign was not properly conducted, with irregularities in voting, undue pressures on some voters and one sided media coverage heavily influenced by the government line. Many in the EU believe the changes will be bad for Turkish democracy, giving the President substantial new powers to govern without proper checks from Parliament and the courts.

This response is likely to harden those attitudes in Turkey which think the EU has been playing them along for too many years without allowing them to join the EU as full members. The first EEC/Turkey Association Agreement was signed in 1963. In 1970 the Customs Union was developed with Turkey, and more progress was made with a fuller document in 1992. The original aim was for Turkey to be a full member of the Customs Union, to be part of many common policies, and to reach freedom of movement with the EU. In 2013 a worried EU signed a Readmission Agreement with Turkey to get Turkey to take back more people, and on March 18 2016 a wider ranging policy was signed to enlist Turkey's help in controlling migration across the Med.

The supporters of President Erdogan claim the referendum was fairly fought and conducted with plenty of outside vigilance and interest. They remind the many critics that the 18 changes to the Turkish constitution passed through Parliament with substantial majorities, typically around 340 votes in favour and 140 votes against on an Article by Article basis in a 550 seat Parliament. The changes include an extra 50 MPs, 5 yearly Parliamentary and Presidential elections, and a requirement for impartiality by judges. Parliament can pass a law to overrule a Presidential decree and can institute a Parliamentary review of the government. Judicial review is also introduced for government actions. The military courts are abolished.

His critics think he will have too much power through appointing and influencing judges, using the powers to rule by decree, and acting as the Leader of his political party. They seem to think he will be able to win a couple of elections easily to stay in government for the next decade. They do not rate the Parliament as an effective check on the new government.

The EU is making a mess of handling its relations with its neighbours to the East. Ukraine is badly split and damaged by civil war. Now Turkey is moving away from the EU's model of Association. What should the EU now do to make the situation better? What type of relationship is now realistic and desirable?