

Turkey and the EU: renewed efforts in a complex web of disputes

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On 6 February 2026, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Marta Kos, arrived in Ankara, where she met the Minister of Treasury and Finance, Mehmet Şimşek, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hakan Fidan, among other officials. During the visit, the parties confirmed the resumption of the European Investment Bank's activities in Turkey and signed a letter of intent to provide state-owned enterprises with loans totalling €200 million. The funds will support the green transition, including measures to enhance energy efficiency. In a joint statement, Kos and Fidan underlined the strategic importance of Turkey–EU relations in promoting regional stability. They also declared their intention to continue work on modernising the Customs Union with a view to strengthening the competitiveness and economic security of Turkey and the EU. Kos's visit received a positive response in Ankara, where officials particularly emphasised their willingness to continue dialogue on visa liberalisation and cooperation under the Connectivity Agenda in the Black Sea region, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

The Commissioner's visit may be regarded as a continuation of the gradual process of rebuilding political relations with Turkey. However, it will not alter the position of EU member states on issues of key importance to Ankara, namely visa liberalisation and the modernisation of the Customs Union. The latter remains a priority for Turkey, especially in light of the EU's signing of free trade agreements with India and Mercosur in January this year. Ankara views these agreements as evidence of double standards on the part of the EU, which, on the one hand, stresses Turkey's importance in the field of security, while on the other, shows limited determination to deepen economic ties with it.

Commentary

- **Over the past two years, Turkey and the EU have been gradually rebuilding political and economic cooperation.** The European Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, provided momentum for this process in November 2023, expressing their intention to reinvigorate political and economic relations between Brussels and Ankara (see '[Turkey and the European Union: in a maze of disputes](#)'). Although dialogue has intensified, as reflected, for example, in Kaja Kallas's visit to the Turkish capital in January 2025, it has so far produced no tangible results. The policy of the Trump administration has become a significant driver of improved relations, particularly in light of its impact on international economic relations and its announcements of a reduced US commitment to European security. In this context,

Ankara recognises the urgent need to deepen ties with the EU, which it views as a key economic and strategic partner in an increasingly unpredictable international order.

- **The most significant outcome of Marta Kos's visit to Turkey is the confirmation of the EIB's return to the country after seven years**, following a period during which its activities had been curtailed due to Ankara's provocative policy in the Mediterranean basin. In the future, the Bank may become an instrument to support infrastructure investment in Turkey under the EU's Connectivity Agenda and the Global Gateway programme. Although this could mark an important step towards deeper EU–Turkey cooperation, Ankara remains concerned about the lack of progress on visa liberalisation and on Turkey's inclusion in EU financial instruments for defence procurement (SAFE). Only tangible progress in these areas would signal a fundamental shift in the relationship.
- **The lack of modernisation of the customs union is becoming an increasingly serious problem for Turkey.** In recent months, EU trade agreements with India and Mercosur have emerged as a source of concern. Under the current Customs Union, Turkey must align its external tariffs with the EU's common customs policy, thereby granting preferential access to the Turkish market to goods originating in countries that have concluded trade agreements with the EU. These countries, however, do not offer similar conditions to Turkish products unless Ankara negotiates separate agreements with them. As a result, Turkey fears that an influx of low-cost goods, for example textiles from India, could undermine the competitiveness of certain sectors of its economy. It is therefore likely to press more strongly for the modernisation of the Customs Union in the near future. At the same time, updating the agreement could provide an opportunity to enhance cooperation on sensitive issues. These include efforts to prevent Turkish and European companies from circumventing sanctions imposed on Russia via Turkey, as well as attempts by Chinese manufacturers to bypass EU tariffs, for example by relocating electric vehicle production to Turkey and exporting onwards to the EU (see '[Electromobility 'Made in Türkiye': Turkey's automotive sector in the era of change](#)'). For now, the joint declaration by Marta Kos and Hakan Fidan on "paving the way" for the modernization of the Customs Union is largely symbolic in nature. A substantive decision on this matter would require unanimous approval from all EU member states, which in turn necessitates overcoming the entrenched opposition of countries such as Greece and Cyprus – both of which continue to maintain strained relations with Ankara.