The process of European integration, which is the underlying theme of this issue, is currently faced with fundamental challenges. Not only has the EU embarked on an interesting process of formal constitutionalisation, it is also – after the historic and vast enlargement that took place on the first of May 2004 – looking forward to welcoming new members yet again. It is the Union’s objective to have Romania and Bulgaria join in January 2007 and Croatia was officially granted the status of candidate country on 18 June 2004. The most controversial of the prospective new EU members, however, is Turkey.

1 Turkish - EU relations

Of all the newcomers and prospective members, Turkey is in fact the oldest associate of the Union. Its relations with the European integration project date back already to 1959, when it applied for associate membership to the EEC. On 12 September 1963 the “Agreement establishing an Association between the European Economic Community and Turkey” was signed in Ankara, with the goal of eventually establishing a customs union between the EEC and Turkey.

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1 See, especially, the contributions by Tim Corthaut and Henri de Waele in this issue.
2 On which date no less than ten new Member States were admitted, i.e. Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.
4 Ibid.
5 OJ (1973) C 113/2.
Turkey then applied for full membership to the Community on 14 April 1987. It soon became clear, however, that the Community itself was not that enthusiastic and the European Commission put Turkey's accession request into cold storage, calling instead for a completion of the customs union and an intensification of relations between the two parties. Some years later, on the 31st of December 1995, the customs union was indeed accomplished, marking an important step in bringing the EU and Turkey closer together.

Turkish - EU relations deteriorated again, however, when at the Luxembourg European Council of December 1997 concrete promises were made to all of the Union’s candidate states except for Turkey, which was denied the status of candidate State and was merely told that the EU would draw up a strategy “to prepare Turkey for accession by bringing it closer to the European Union in every field.” Only two years later though, at the 1999 Helsinki summit, the European Council reversed this decision and granted Turkey candidate status, declaring that “Turkey is a candidate State destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate States”.

2 Turkey and the concept of European identity

To put it mildly, Turkey has never really had the unequivocal support of the EU Member States. The EU adopted a “two-faced” approach to Turkey, expressing support for Turkey’s membership in public, whilst saying behind closed doors that it should never be allowed in. Apart from the obvious political reason for this – namely the apparent problems associated with the admission into the EU of a country as big as Turkey – another important reason is that the Turkish application has always been haunted by persistent doubts concerning the country’s eligibility for EU membership:

[Perceived differences or weaknesses in the Turkish application have frequently led to doubts whether Turkey qualifies as a]

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6 Commission Opinion on Turkey’s request for accession to the Community, SEC(89) 2290 final/2, 20 December 1989.
7 Decision No 1/95 of the EC-Turkey Association Council on implementing the final phase of the Customs Union, OJ (1996) L 35/1.
10 Stop two-faced approach to Turkey, pleads Verheugen, EUobserver, 9 July 2003.
11 Although Avci rightly points out that “in a Union of 28 members, Turkey’s presence will not be felt as much (as it would let us say in a Union of 16)”: G. Avci, Putting the Turkish EU Candidacy into Context, (2002) 7 EUROPEAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS REVIEW 91, at 104.