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# Turkey Belongs to Europe: Spain

IslamOnline.net & News Agencies

BERLIN – European Union president Spain said Sunday, January 24, that Turkey belongs to Europe, as young Europeans back the Muslim country's bid to join the 27-nation bloc.

Asia & Australia

"Turkey is a part of the European family of peoples," Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos told Germany's Welt am Sonntag newspaper, reported Reuters.

"It is better to have Turkey inside the EU than to leave it standing outside."

Turkey, a predominantly-Muslim but a secular country which straddles Europe and Asia, applied for EU's membership in 1959 and became an EU candidate in 1999.

But Ankara's half-century quest to join Europe's 27-country club has been dogged by problems since it was made an official candidate in October 2005.

France and Germany lead opposition to Turkey's membership in the European Union.

"There may be difference of opinions between EU member states (over Turkish membership), but all have agreed to wait and watch the negotiations," said Moratinos, whose country holds the EU presidency until the end of June.

He voiced hope to open accession talks with Ankara soon in four new policy areas and see progress in a dispute between Turkey and Cyprus which is blocking Ankara's bid.

Moratinos said the EU considers Turkey a partner of high strategic importance, specifically mentioning its diplomatic network in the Middle East and central Asia, saying its accession to Europe would benefit the continent.

"It would bring Europe more advantages than drawbacks."

## **Growing Support**

Spain's backing for Turkey comes as young Europeans are increasingly supporting Ankara's membership bid, reported Today's Zaman.

"Support grows as age goes down, and it becomes less as age rises," Professor Hakan Y?Imaz said.

A poll conducted in five European countries found that young Europeans are increasingly backing Turkey's EU membership.

"When we look at the countries, support is over 50 percent in Spain and Poland, and around 46 percent in Britain," he said.

"However, it is quite less in Germany and France."

The poll, by the Istanbul Bogaziçi University's Center for European Studies, the Autonomous University of Madrid and the University of Granada, found that culture is a main factor defining European perception of Turkey.

"Culture is one of the most important factors that defines perception of Turkey," Y?lmaz said.

"The most important argument for those who culturally do not want Turkey in EU is that religion and religion-based differences keep Turkey out of Europe's cultural circle."

If Turkey were to join the EU today, its population of 71 million would make it the second-largest country in the bloc.

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