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# European Talks on Turkey Stall as Austria Insists on Lesser Role

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[LUXEMBOURG](#), Oct. 2 - European foreign ministers broke off last-minute emergency discussions on Sunday over admitting [Turkey](#) to the European Union, but agreed to continue Monday in the hope of being able to open direct talks with Turkey later that day.

The ministers failed to resolve a standoff over [Austria's](#) insistence that Turkey be offered less than full membership in the European Union.

"It is a frustrating situation, but I hope and pray we may be able to reach an agreement," said Jack Straw, the British foreign secretary, who was leading the meeting. He said the negotiations with Turkey were still scheduled for Monday, but he admitted that the start could be delayed. [Britain](#) currently holds the rotating presidency of the union.

If the membership negotiations go ahead on Monday, they will mark an important moment for the European Union, and a momentous step in Turkey's 42-year quest to join Europe's economic alliance.

Over the past week, Austria has stood alone in insisting that Turkey should be offered a secondary status in the union.

This position is flatly rejected by the other 24 European Union member governments.

Turkey has warned that it will not agree to start talks, which are expected to last at least 10 years, unless the final goal is full membership.

On Sunday, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey said the meeting was a moment of decision for Europe. "Either it will show political maturity and become a global power, or it will end up a Christian club," he said, speaking to lawmakers in Turkey, which is predominantly Muslim.

A rebuff would not deflect Turkey from its course toward further democracy and reforms, he said. "We will, however, be saddened that a project for the alliance of civilizations will be harmed," he added.

A resolution of the impasse could center on [Croatia](#), whose European Union membership Austria supports. Negotiations for Croatia have been on hold since March after Europe accused it of failing to cooperate with the United Nations war crimes tribunal in catching Anta Gotovina, a former Croatian general indicted for war crimes. Austria contends that it is unfair to begin talks with Turkey before those with Croatia.

The decision on whether to start talks is a test for European cooperation after referendums failed last summer on the European constitution and contributions to the European budget. Failure could once again throw the union into disarray, and add to its sense of drift.

Britain has made the start of membership talks with Turkey a priority, and many officials in Brussels believe that opening negotiations with Turkey would provide important new momentum for the union.

Despite increasing pressure from the other member nations to yield on the issue, the Austrian government raised doubts about Europe's readiness to absorb a new nation, especially one the size of Turkey. Austria's position reflected widespread hostility among its citizens toward Turkish entry into the union.

The center-right government of Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel of Austria faced regional elections in Styria Province on Sunday, in which his party suffered a dramatic setback against Social Democrats. Some European

diplomats said Austria's resistance to Turkey could crumble once the elections were over, but the Austrian government has denied that the two issues are linked.

Austria has close historical ties with Croatia and may insist on approval for membership talks with Croatia in return for its agreement on Turkey.

However, Britain was seeking to refuse to accept any link between Turkey and Croatia. It insists that the European Union must make a decision on Turkey before Croatia is discussed.

At the meeting of the foreign ministers on Monday, Carla Del Ponte, chief prosecutor for the United Nations criminal tribunal for the war in the former Yugoslavia, is to give an assessment of whether the Croatian government is cooperating with the tribunal. Her judgment will be critical in deciding whether talks with Croatia will begin.

In similar last-minute diplomacy last December, all 25 governments agreed to open negotiations with Turkey on Oct. 3.

At that time, countries overcame lingering objections about Turkey's human rights record. Since then, Turkey has made substantial changes to address European concerns, but provoked European countries over the summer by declaring that it refused to recognize [Cyprus](#), which has been a member of the European Union since last year.