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The EU and Turkey: Between Geopolitics and Social Engineering

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In her nationalist rhetoric, Turkey likes to represent herself as a “bridge between the East and the West”, or more recently the “center of the Turkic world”. But Turkey certainly is at the periphery of the Western World and has less room to manoeuvre since the fall of the USSR, because of her financial dependency on the Western countries and the global domination of the US. So, the prediction made by Huntington that Turkey was going to redefine herself as a part of the Turkic world after the fall of the USSR has obviously been wrong¹. In fact, since the 1920s, the discourse of the Turkish elite is based on the europeanization of Turkey, which will give them access to ‘civilization’. EU full membership would be the achievement of this process, and a way to integrate itself with the dominant countries, but at the price of a profound political and social change, that can be described as a new Tanzimat. That is why the relationship with the EU is a central problem for the self-definition of the Turks and maybe the most important issue on the Turkish political agenda today.

On a different ground, the Turkish membership could also be decisive for the EU. Turkey will have between 80 and 90 million citizens in less than a generation, and will be the most populous country in Europe. In case of a Turkish full membership, the EU will acquire a Middle

Eastern dimension with borders with Iraq, Iran and Syria. In addition, the Turkish membership would be a sign for Israel, Morocco and maybe some Caucasian States to apply to the EU. The question here is that of the frontiers of the EU: since Europe is not a geographical but a political concept there is no criterion to define ‘objectively’ what is part of it. Besides, the cost of this new accession for the EU would exceed by far what has been seen before.

But, in spite of the importance of what is at stake on both sides, there is no European strategy; that is to say the tentative to define a European interest in the Realist tradition. The EU is nevertheless becoming a major actor in Turkey, in the sense that it sponsors a coherent project to reform in depth the Turkish society. The EU is addressing in priority the internal dynamics of the countries at its periphery, to the point of a ‘nation-building’, that reflects the very process of the construction of the EU itself. In this process of ‘Euro-globalisation’, Europe’s institutions and style are spreading, ‘integrating’ whole peripheral nations. And, finally, the process of integration itself implies a deep change in the Turkish foreign policy.

We will analyse first the origins and development of the Turkish relationship with the EEC/EU (I). The EU is supporting the reform of the Turkish society with some contradictory results (II) and the enlargement of the EU which brings new light on some questions of foreign policy that are still unresolved (III).

The origins of the Turkish candidacy

Since the post-war area, Turkey is part of different European/Western organizations: the OECD (1948), the Council of Europe (1949), and NATO (1952). Turkey’s associate membership with the EEC began in 1963 and added a new dimension to its relationship with Europe. At that time, Walter Hallstein, President of the European Commission, declared that “Turkey is part of Europe”², recognizing that Turkey had vocation to become a full member. The Ankara agreement

¹ Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilization”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72 (1993), p. 42. Turkey nonetheless has played an important role in different regional organizations and is part of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Council and the D8, a group of 8 Muslims countries, including Egypt, Nigeria, Malaysia and Central Asian states.

² Redmond J., *The Next Mediterranean Enlargement of the European Community: Turkey, Cyprus and Malta?*, (Aldershot: Dartmouth), p. 23.

signed in 1963 included three phases to achieve full economic integration. After a modification in 1970, the Customs union came into effect the 31 December 1995. But despite those developments, the Commission and the European Council were quite negative about a Turkish membership at that time. At the December 1997 Luxembourg European Council summit, accession negotiations were opened to all applicant countries except Turkey. As a result of what was widely perceived as a national humiliation, the Turkish government refused to participate to the March 1998 European Conference in London. A compromise was finally worked out in the June 1998 summit in Cardiff: Turkey was not considered for an early full membership like the Eastern European countries, but the Commission offered proposals to assist Turkey. Finally, the 10-11 December 1999 Helsinki meeting of the European Council accepted Turkey as a candidate for full membership with the same requirements as the others countries. The objective of the Turkish government is now to set a negotiation schedule in the next Copenhagen meeting for accession negotiations (December 2002).

On the EU side, the acceptance of the Turkish candidacy is the result of a series of diplomatic compromises to avoid a crisis with a close ally. Besides, the Clinton administration put a lot of pressure on the EU to accept the candidacy of Turkey for full membership, as a way both to stabilize Turkey and to weaken the EU cohesion. On the other hand, the question of the EU interest in a Turkish full membership has never been addressed with consistency and, for example, a special status for Turkey has never officially been proposed or even studied in detail. In fact, one could support the idea that there is no economic interest to a Turkish full membership because to that point the EU has been winning in its relationship with Turkey, due probably to a bad negotiation (on the Turkish side) of the Customs agreement. Since December 1995, the economic integration is deepening and the EU is the first economic partner of Turkey with 52% of the Turkish exportations and 49% of its imports in 2000. The Turkish full membership could only be an economic burden for the EU since the Turkish revenue per capita is about 29% of the EU and the gap between the EU and Turkey has not narrowed and maybe even depended since 1995. The level of economic activity is less than 50%

and the unemployment, officially around 9% is probably much more important (about 25% for the urban young educated). The inflation, largely a result of the fragility of the banking system and political clientelism, will be around 45% this year, but this progress is largely due to the severe recession (-10%) in the economic activity since the crisis of November 2000 and March 2001.

The financial cost to prepare the Turkish membership will probably be heavy on both sides³. The Turkish agriculture is not competitive on the international markets, the small firms would not easily adapt to the European legislation and the regional disparities are extremely important. To that point, the EU has not given much help to accelerate the transformation of the Turkish economy, and the full membership of the Eastern European countries will put a strong constraint on the EU financial capabilities in the next decade. Today, Turkey has access to 5 different types of loans from the BEI but only for 6.425 billion euros from 2000 to 2007⁴, that is to say far less than is needed to fill the gap between the economic and social systems.

On a political ground, the Turkish candidacy is different from that of others countries. The Turkish adhesion to the UE will be a hard sell to the European public opinion(s). The perspective of a free circulation of workers between Turkey and Europe is feared by some European governments and there is an increase in the illegal migrants going to the UE through Turkey. The Turkish authorities have admitted the presence of almost 100,000 illegal migrants on their territory in 2000 (only 11,362 in 1995) and the trend is going on with a strong increase in 2001. Even if the EU economies objectively need foreign workers, it is a political challenge to have this idea accepted by the public opinion. Besides,

³ One has to notice that the statistics in Turkey are not precise, it is a recurrent complaint from the EU, it is therefore difficult to evaluate precisely the state of the Turkish economy.

⁴ In 2000, the BEI has only lent €575 million for different projects in Turkey, while Turkey is eligible to the €8.5 billion special program for the 13 applicant countries. There are also some special programs, for example, after the earthquake in August 1999 (TERRA, €600 million). In 2000, €209 million have been spent for assisting Turkey. The same year, ECHO gave €30 million more for an emergency (the earthquake in august 1999). The BEI has lent as a part of its new Mediterranean policy €545 million between 1992 and 1999.

the argument of the cultural difference is increasingly used as an argument against Turkey's integration into the EU⁵. There is of course no clear definition of what is 'European', but Turkey is generally not considered part of it by a lot of EU citizens. There is also a growing anti-Muslim/anti-migrants prejudice in Europe since the last decade and some conservative politicians have had some clear positions against the admission of Turkey, notably Helmut Kohl and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (*Le Figaro*, 10 April 2000) and more recently G. Schroiber during the German elections. But the social-democrats, who have lost ground in recent elections, are not necessarily in favour of the Turkish full membership and Helmut Schmitt has publicly stated that the religious issue is an argument against Turkey joining the EU.

The strategic advantages are limited for Europe since the US is the major player in the Middle East with a strong relationship with Turkey and there is no credible alternative for Ankara outside NATO and her Western allies. Turkey has a strong pro-US, pro-Israeli policy in the Middle East that is to a certain point in contradiction with the EU policy that is more pro-Arab (especially for France, Italy, and Spain). The historically bad relationship between Turkey and its Arab neighbours will be difficult to deal with inside the EU. There is a serious risk that the Turkish accession will paralyse the EU as a strategic actor in the Middle East, because the EU will be part of the problem and will no more appear as a potential broker. Besides, the conflicting relationship between Greece and Turkey will pose serious problems to define a common foreign policy (see below).

So, the process of the admission of Turkey is not part of a coherent strategy of the EU, but the result of a diplomatic/bureaucratic process and economic interest. France, for example, became the first investor in Turkey after 1988, at the end of a period of political tensions, and supported Turkey's candidacy - in a large part to keep her as a client. In some cases, it is likely that the implicit idea was that Turkey will never be able to fulfil the requirements for the full membership. The severe economic crisis since 1999 and the slow move on human rights is a clear indication

that, contrary to what is said by the Turkish politicians, the full membership is probably not on the European agenda before at the best 10 or 15 years. The candidacy has never been accepted with enthusiasm and it was accepted largely to avoid a political crisis. Even the decision of the Helsinki summit in December 1999 could be seen as a very ambiguous move. At the Nice summit of December 2000, it was stated that the case of Turkey was not to be taken into consideration for the redistribution of the seats and posts in the European Commission for the next 12 years.

On the Turkish side, the policy towards the EU is initially the result of geopolitical and economic interests and not a will to merge into a European federation. The concurrence with Greece, the archenemy of Turkey is determinant. Significantly, the Turkish government made a demand to be associate member of the EEC the 31 July 1959 and it seems to be largely a consequence of the Greek government's own demand a few weeks before. After 1974, the improvement of the EEC relationship with Greece led to the full membership the 1 January 1981 and this process has been a key factor in the Turkish policy at the same period, but the Turkish application for full membership was only accepted in 1987. A second explanation is the will at certain period to distance itself from the US. The Turkish candidacy is also the product of a strained relationship with the US in the 1960s, at a time when the US economic support decreased significantly. At that time the Turkish government was looking for a more diversified international politics, hence the rapprochement with the EEC. The Ankara Agreement led to a developing trade between Turkey and the EEC to a certain point to the detriment of the US. The last explanation is an economic one and is today the most important cause of the popularity of the EU in a country facing a deep economic crisis. For a majority of Turks, the admission to the EU is essentially an economical question. About half of the population is considering moving outside the country, one and half million people have tried to get a green card this year. But at the same time, what was at the beginning a geopolitical interest is becoming more and more a way to 'modernize' the Turkish society.

⁵ GÜNTER Endruweit, "Turkey and the European Union: a Question of Cultural Differences?", *Perceptions*, June-August, 1998, pp. 54-72.

The new Tanzimat?

In the last few years, the Turkish full membership has been a major subject in the political agenda and the EU has been increasingly an actor in the Turkish politics. The EU has set a series of condition that could open the beginning of the Turkish negotiation to the adhesion. In Copenhagen in June 1993, The European Council defined the standards that the countries must meet to adhere to the UE, notably the stability of the democracy, the State of Law, and the respect for the minorities⁶. The adaptation of the Turkish legislation is quite significant, even if the practice is still far from what is required by the EU. Besides, what is seen as a growing interference of the EU in local politics has triggered a nationalist reaction.

‘Civil society’ and ‘Democratisation’

Even if the liberalization of the Turkish society is evident since the beginning of the 1980s, its political system is still essentially different from the Western democracies, and an exception in NATO. The military is still a major political actor in Turkish politics. The MGK (National Security Council), where the generals are dominant, defines the broad lines of the policy of the government and put an end to the government of the Refah (an islamist party) in 1997 in the name of secularism. Since 1983, 21 political parties have been closed by the Constitutional Court. The official figures of the Turkish government indicate that around 9000 persons are in jail for crimes linked to the freedom of conscience and expression. In a 14 December 2000 decision, the Istanbul State Court Security No. 4 forbade all publications showing Turkey “in a state of weakness”. With regard to the EU, the evolution of the Turkish political system is linked to three aspects: the change of the Turkish legislation, the role of the ‘civil society’ and the appeals to the European Court of Justice.

One could say that the major part of the Turkish legislation is now debated in its conformity with

the EU regulations, the ‘*acquis communautaire*’. For example, the new Law about media and the watch dog RTÜK was vetoed by president Sezer in June 2001 because it was in contradiction with the European standards. The Turkish government has launched the Ulusal Program (National program) a 523 page document that tells in detail how Turkey must transform itself to meet the standards required by the EU. This program was published on the 19th of March 2001 and supposes the transformation of a large part of the laws and administration. The Turkish government has also created a General Secretary to the European Union under the responsibility of Mesut Yılmaz, leader of the ANAP center-right party.

The weight of the EU recommendations is felt on different subjects: the rights of women, the abolition of the death penalty, and the rights of minorities. The 1982 Constitution has been changed on 34 articles the 3 October 2001, notably on the prevention of torture, the freedom of speech, the freedom of association, the equality between men and women etc. The role and the composition of the MGK (National Security Council) have been redefined and the civil members of the Council are 9 instead of 5. The government is invited to ‘evaluate’ its recommendations instead of giving it a ‘priority’. In August 2002, the Parliament accepted with a surprisingly large consensus some major changes, notably the education in Kurdish and the abolition of the death penalty. It is very likely that the progressive liberalization of Turkey is in part an effect of the EU influence, but beyond the law, the practice is still authoritarian in numerous domains.

In this aspect, the European institutions are offering a way to get around the Turkish jurisdiction. Over 4,000 individuals have filed cases in Strasbourg since Turkey recognized the Court’s jurisdiction in 1990. Of 141 rulings so far, 131 went against Turkey. For example, imposing a heavy fine on the Turkish government, the European Court of Human Rights said that the Çiller 1993 government’s decision to dissolve the pro-Kurdish Democracy Party (Demokrasi Parti or DEP) and disqualify 13 DEP Members of Parliament (MPs) had undermined the right to a fair election. Turkey had violated “the very essence of the right to stand for election and to hold parliamentary office,” the Strasbourg-based court ruled, adding

⁶ Those principles have been reaffirmed during the December 2000 Nice summit.

that it had also “infringed the unfettered discretion of the electorate which had elected the applicants”.

Another aspect of the European strategy to democratise Turkey is to help the strengthening of the Turkish ‘civil society’. During the 1990s, the emergence of a ‘civil society’ of growing importance against the State was supposed to carry a democratisation of the Turkish society⁷. For example, a festival (music and a round table about multiculturalism) was organized in Diyarbakır the 25-27 May 2002 with a financing of the Meda EU program. The Civil Society Platform, which was established by 175 civil society associations, issued a notice, supporting the Turkish candidacy (Turkish Daily News 6 June 2002). Turkey’s most active employment institutes, worker organizations, disabled people’s association, environmentalists, leftists, rightists, press organs and universities were among these 175 NGOs.

The debate in Turkey: a nationalist reaction?

The adhesion to the EU is supported by a wide range of political and social actors in Turkey. Beginning with, the big business that has an interest in the integration of Turkey in the EU for two reasons. First, the opening of markets and second, the political and economical stabilization of Turkey. Besides, a lot of groups are seeing the EU as a way to advance their cause. Europe has been more open to the Kurdish and Alevi demands. The Kurdish nationalists⁸ - even if the PKK has been forbidden in Germany and France since a few years - are strongly organized there. Different Kurdish associations are active in Europe and had played an important role in what is described as a renaissance of Kurdish culture. The limitation of the civil liberties is conducting a lot of social actor to play the supra-national

⁷ This discourse and its political implications have been criticized at length and Lacroix has shown the artificiality of the opposition between the State and the society “Ordre politique et ordre social”, in *Traité de science politique*, Grawitz et Leca, 1985, 469-565). Yael-Navaro Yashin in *New Perspectives on Turkey*.

⁸ The PKK no longer exists, it has been replaced by the KADEP.

structures like the EU against the Turkish State. The center-right and center-left parties are the most Europe oriented parties. The islamist movement was clearly against the EU in the 1980s, but has developed a different attitude and is now fragmented.

For a part of the Turkish society, the EU is seen as a menace for the cultural identity and political independence of the country. Historically, at least, the Turkish left is not very European. The MHP, which has a very nationalist stand, is opposed to what is seen as a risk of loosing the Turkish identity. The 1999 elections that were the origin of the coalition government is the success of the nationalist movements, and the nationalist right is developing a strategy to gain the support of the Turks who are somewhat worried about the loss of national sovereignty. The MHP leader, Bahçeli, declared that abolishing the death sentence, broadcasting and education in mother-tongue and the Cyprus issues are not an acceptable price to enter the EU. Indeed, while 70 percent of Turkish citizens are supporting Turkey’s membership to the European Union, there is 30 percent who are against the EU because they are afraid Turkey will lose its national sovereignty (*Turkish Daily News*, 15 June 2002). The publication of the e-mail of the EU representative in Ankara, Karen Fogg, was part of a campaign against the EU. Besides, in 1987 the European Parliament took a resolution in which one of the conditions for Turkey’s full membership was the acknowledgment of the Armenian genocide. Even if this is not part of the Copenhagen standards, this question is likely to constitute a major source of tension.

The strategic relationship

The essential strategic partner of Turkey is and will probably stay the US⁹. Since the Bush presidency in the 1990s, the American administrations have been careful to keep good relations with Turkey. For example, Ankara has had full American support in its confrontation with Syria in 1999, conducting Hafez el Assad to expel Abdullah Öcalan from Syria. The US is the

⁹ The Turkish elite are also more and more influenced by the US culture and way of life.

first strategic partner for Turkey, even if the interests of the two countries are to a certain point different in northern Iraq. So, the current US plan to topple Saddam Hussein is not well received in Ankara because the Turkish government is afraid of a possible independent Kurdish State in Northern Iraq, but nonetheless, the US has enough influence on Turkey to obtain political and maybe military support on this issue. Turkey's strategic alliance with Israel - underlined by a recent US\$800 million tank deal signed with Israel during the Israeli invasion of Palestinian territory - won Ankara important support in the US Congress and silenced complaints over its human rights record. The Israel lobby has been making things easy for Turkey in Washington and preventing the Greek and Armenian lobbies from imposing restrictions on US-Turkish relations.

On the other hand, the role of the EU in Turkish foreign policy is more a result of the membership process and the development of a common foreign and military policy. The key question in those issues is the relationship between Turkey and Greece. The two countries still have irreconcilable demands on the national air space and continental shelves. Greece claims her national air space to be 10 miles, Turkey does not recognize this claim as legitimate. On the other hand, the status of 3400 islets is not legally determined and there was a serious conflict in 1995 about the Kardak/Imea islets. The EU Helsinki decisions of December 1999 require that the two countries should reach a compromise before 2004, or, if they fail, the issue will be referred to the international Court of Justice. Besides, Greece is extending its territorial waters from 6 to 12 miles. There is still no indication that a compromise can be reached before 2004. Directly linked to the Turkish-Greek relationship are two other major questions on the EU agenda: Cyprus and the ESDP. In the two cases, Turkey will be obliged to comply with the EU demands or to renounce full membership.

The ESDP

Most of the time, Turkey has aligned its positions on the EU communiqués and has been associated with the common actions, especially for the

Balkans. For the ESDP, Turkey has cooperated in the 15+1 (NATO countries plus Turkey) and EU+6 (European countries belonging to NATO, but not to the EU). The cooperation with the EU has sometimes helped to ease tensions with Greece. The two governments are keeping informed of the military exercises in the Aegean Sea and the border will be cleared of mines. A direct phone line is functioning between the two foreign ministries, but the mistrust between the two countries has still a paralysing effect. In the June 2002 Seville meeting, Turkey blocked a new EU deal on rapid reaction force. In 2001, Turkey, as a NATO member, has obtained the guarantee - in return for agreeing that the 60,000-strong EU force could use NATO assets and equipment - that the EU forces would never be used in the Aegean or Cyprus. The agreement with Ankara was dealt without the consent of Greece, but after a lot of pressure from the others European governments, Greece accepted a new formulation of the agreement. But, Turkey refused to move from the previous deal and Turkish objections ruled out a first EU mission in Macedonia where the EU was supposed to take over the NATO-led peacekeeping mission in the autumn. And since Greece will be running EU defence and security matters from July 1, because Denmark, which assumes the union's rotating presidency on that date, has opted out of that area of policy making, there is no foreseeable compromise on the matter in the near future.

Cyprus

Turkey has generally felt that the EU was too much influenced by Greece in its policy, notably in the Cyprus question. Despite all of the encouraging signs on the EU side for Turkish membership, the resolution of the Cyprus question is a *sine qua non* condition for full membership. The Helsinki meeting of the European Council, with the insistence of the Greek government, put as a condition that the Cyprus question should be resolved before full membership. As a member of the EU, Greece will veto Turkey's membership unless Cyprus, divided between the internationally recognized Greek south and the Turkish occupied north, is fully accepted in the EU. So, if the presence of the Turkish troops continues, Turkey would be in

a very contradictory situation: occupying militarily a part of the EU territory and being an applicant for full membership.

Since 1974, the Turkish strategy towards Cyprus has been to protect and legitimise the presence of its 30,000 troops in the island and to consolidate the independence of the North. The declaration of independence of a Turk Cyprus Republic in 1987 was the outcome of this strategy, with the possibility of an annexation by Turkey. Besides, the integration of the Turkish part of the island has been accelerated. As a *de facto* sovereign power, Turkey has tried to change the demographic equilibrium in northern Cyprus with the settlement of thousands of Turks. They are a majority today and this will deeply affect the political process. On the diplomatic front, the situation is more or less at a standstill because the Turkish part wanted only negotiations that would recognise it as a state. But the legitimisation of the intervention has been so far a failure since the Cyprus Republic has never been internationally recognize except by Turkey, and the UE has been very clear about the fact that the Turkish part of Cyprus is not a state.

The situation has changed quickly in the last years because of the enlargement of the EU, and since Cyprus is probably going to be a member of the EU in 2004 in the name of the entire island. To that point, even if a serious concession seems likely on the Turkish side, there are some difficulties to move to a new position in the negotiations. In particular, Turkey backed Denktaş in his decision to withdraw from the negotiations under the auspices of the UN and not to participate to the negotiations in New York in September 2001. At that time the National Security council communiqué was adamant about the point that the recognition of Turkish Cyprus as a sovereign State was a *sine qua non* condition for the negotiations.

Conclusion

The EU is a coherent actor only in a few issues that are directly linked to the adhesion of Cyprus and the relationship between Greece and Turkey (the two issues being closely linked). The case of the Turk-EU relationship shows the style of EU in dealing with its environment. The EU tends to transform the society at its periphery more than projecting a policy of power in the Realist tradition. The long-term effects are in a way more profound because the changes are deeper than a state alliance in the name of national interest, but it reposes on the assumption that all the periphery is willing to join the European model and able to do so.

At that point, one would like to underline two points. First, the deep transformation of Turkey in the process of adhesion will provoke tensions as the EU will be more and more a part of Turkish politics. Second, the failure of Turkey to meet the European demands would give way to a deep political crisis. It is not at this time sure that the EU is ready to give enough support to Turkey to make it able to join in a not-too-far period (10 to 15 years). And the fact that Turkey will probably be the last or one of the last countries to merge in the EU is *per se* a problem. In 10 years, it is likely that the EU will be more integrated, that is to say that Turkey will have to abandon most of her sovereignty with no possibility to be part of the creation of the institutions.

Maybe the most important question for the Turkish politicians is the very dynamic nature of the EU. The European institutions could be significantly different when the Turkish full membership will be a reality. The EU is *de facto* going towards a sort of federation, the economic integration is largely behind us and there is a move towards a more integrated foreign policy. More important, the internal process of decision-making gives less possibility of veto for a government. And the newcomers to the UE will lose a large part of their national sovereignty without been able to influence the making of the European Union.

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