

THE EU AND TURKEY: BORDER QUESTIONS©*

French President Jacques Chirac agrees that Turkey should join the European Union. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Chair of the committee that wrote the draft EU Constitution, is staunchly against the move. On the one hand, a prominent German politician, concerned with domestic reforms and budget deficits in his own country, argues that terrorist activity now taking place in Turkey would only be imported into the EU if its enlargement to include that nation went according to schedule. Another prominent EU politician, on the other hand, feels strongly that current terrorism in Turkey has only heightened the case for that country's EU membership. Turkey is part of a civilized world that has now been beset by attacks, many of which stem from those who inhabit an area beyond its own borders.

A large number of Europeans wish their Constitution to highlight a value system historically characterized by Judeo-Christian roots. Though geographers place Turkey firmly within Europe, its overwhelmingly Muslim ideation and history renders it a separate and distinct cultural unit to many citizens of the EU's original 15 member states, and especially to eastern Europeans, such as the Poles, who share a strong and lengthy attachment to Catholicism. This sense of cultural distinction remains true despite a lengthy tradition of secularism in Turkey, and its decades-long political tilt towards the West and democratic institutions. A sense of cultural distinction from Turkey also occupies Europeans even though the social and geographic space between Islamic and Judeo-Christian behaviors has undergone a contraction due to the increased presence of immigrants of the Muslim faith in many of Europe's leading economies. Most immigrants occupy unskilled positions, nevertheless, and live in relatively segregated residential areas, where school children are largely exposed to the children of other immigrant families, and there is little documented contact between immigrant children and their parents, and the larger society. Socially and culturally, therefore, whether citizens of a distant state, or residents of familiar European urban areas, Muslims seem to be what one Middle Eastern scholar described as "present in Europe and yet absent from it." **

In spite of this description, Turkish inclusion into the European Union is proceeding according to established guidelines. Turkey is now in the midst of fundamental reforms of its judicial, legislative, and human rights systems according to the EU's Copenhagen criteria. Beginning in 1999, an economic stabilization program was initiated, which provided for the production of goods and products that conformed to international safety criteria and norms. EU customs criteria and standards of measurement are also being introduced. With EU advice the Turkish system of social security has been revised so as to diminish a prior distance between receipts and assets, and liabilities. The privatization of large-scale state-owned enterprises has been undertaken, and this facet of Turkish integration into the EU is regarded as a key adaptive ingredient necessary for the future stability of that country's economy and its multilateral ties with EU member states. The division of Cyprus into a northern Turkish part and a southern Greek settlement continues, but a "partnership" in resolving difficulties has been sought by the EU under United Nations auspices.

Progress towards Turkish EU membership has not been limited to contractual conditions. Between 1990 and 2000 the Turkish economy exhibited a definite volatility, with upward and downward swings particularly evident in the relation between imports and exports. A

stabilization has occurred that has rendered Turkey the EU's 6th greatest market for imports. The EU also constitutes a little more than half of Turkey's export market, with Germany emerging as the most important recipient in this regard. Economists recently were able to report that Turkey's trade statistics have become similar to that of several EU member states, including Portugal, Poland, and the Czech Republic. In terms of membership in overarching multilateral institutions besides the EU, Turkey is an essential part of NATO and the OECD. A growing confluence on national reforms required for EU entrance yields the conclusion that the negotiations surrounding Turkey's entrance into the EU might be completed by the end of 2004.

It has been the expansion of viable economic markets that has energized the EU enlargement process, so that the union will now encompass the countries of the European east as well. A similar energizing force is heading the EU towards the inclusion of Turkey. However, a lingering reticence on including Turkey in the EU seems to have overshadowed this process. This hesitation may not only be based on more obvious questions of religious and cultural differences. In particular, it may be issues raised by the EU's new borders, if Turkey is included in the organization, that might soon be open to discussion.

A portion of these discussions may be the fact that Turkey shares a 386-mile border with Syria, much of which is demarcated by fencing and clusters of land mines. The two countries also share continuing tensions about the usage, quality, and quantity of water derived from the Euphrates River. The Euphrates itself flows in a cross-border fashion irrespective of territorial claims and civil engineering designs. Turkish irrigation plans have been able to produce sophisticated dams and facilities upstream. However, they have long inspired a Syrian complaint that when water finally reaches its own usually fertile farming areas, it has become too salty for adequate usage, ---- harming crops on Syrian land and eroding necessary agricultural soil. Turkey, fearing a rise in Syrian political support for an ethnic Kurdish separatist movement within its own country, once completely stopped Syria from receiving Euphrates' water supplies. Turkey's water denial policy was originally planned for a full month. It was reduced to two weeks only after multinational, high-level talks in London had occurred in 1999, and when American backing of the negotiations was secured.

Iraq is also the site of a critically needed water distribution from both the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, over which Turkey maintains a technically vigorous control. Whatever disagreements they have, Syria and Iraq thus remain jointly dependent on the presence of a continuous supply of water for their agricultural sectors. In this regard, the mid-1990's saw political and agricultural specialists from Iraq visit the Syrian capital of Damascus for the purpose of evolving a common strategy towards Turkey, should needed water supplies to agricultural areas be once again placed in serious doubt.

An additional cross-border situation involves the Kurds, once a nomadic people, but now relatively settled in pasturage and agricultural lands that stretch across Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and to some extent, Syria as well. What tends to unite the Kurds is a common sense of ethnicity and history, rather than a common language, which has several significant divisions. The 15-20 million Kurdish people have never achieved a homeland as promised in the post-World War I Treaty of Sevres (1920). As a consequence, they have often been referred to as members of the largest ethnic group in the world without their own nation.

Most have given up any trenchant nationalist design. But it is hard to ignore that an active, largely socialist movement for Kurdish independence, still exists within Turkey, and continues to frame itself in international terms. This movement was often given violent expression, and after an attempt to mobilize Kurds in northern Iraq in the mid 1990's, a Kurdish incursion from Turkey into Iraq ensued with 35,000 troops. After much criticism from the West, troops were withdrawn, and the all –Kurdish rebels finally announced a ceasefire. However, the desire of many Kurds for an autonomous area, as is now the case in Northern Iraq, or for self-government itself, proceeds despite a loss of significant leadership figures. The UN's humanitarian activities in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq, the Gulf War there of the early 1990's, and administrative activities during the current Iraqi war, have acted to underscore the Kurds' autonomous feelings irrespective of the quality of leadership in Baghdad. The Turkish branch of the Kurds, or those who may be thinking of actual Kurdish independence sometime in the future, remain especially ambitious for the creation of a world that is a geographically inclusive one, and not dependent on a variety of cross-border population placements and interpretations.

The European Union's enlargement to its East has been largely based on the need for, and appeal of, economic market expansionism. The economic development of eastern European nations has included help for industrial and manufacturing privatization, insurance, education, and job training and placement. Major cross-border problems are recognized to lie primarily in some patterns of drug trafficking and illegal immigration. But encouragement from the original 15 EU nations on economic growth, job generation, and the reduction of budget deficits through a decline of state-sponsored enterprises, have been of primary concern.

The coming expansion of the EU to include Turkey appears to contain questions for debate that move beyond the current attention to religious differences, or economic projects that will further trade, import-export cycles, or international communications' development. Turkey's strategic location on the border of several Middle Eastern states, in particular, may raise issues of EU participation in water regulation and conservation, or how best to deal with ethnic statehood movements that have sheltered some violent visions in the past.

Above all, the hoped for inclusion of Turkey into the EU brings with it a potential need to respond to development in the EU's prospective south-eastern boundary with more than its customary, successful policies of economic consultation, restructuring advice, and humanitarian aid. The cross-border, Middle Eastern ties of a possible next member also highlight the complex character of inter-regional foreign relations. In this light, contemporary attitudes towards a preference for EU-wide foreign understandings, the evolution of a mutual defense guarantee, or the retention of national vetoes over specific EU foreign policies, may come to occupy some attention and review, even as current EU members gather in Brussels to debate the details of a long-awaited Constitution that has been several years in the making.

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