

**THE EUROPEANIZATION OF MESOPOTAMIA:
CURRENT STATUS OF ITS SOCIETAL STRUCTURE¹**

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ABSTRACT

This study will carry out a three-pronged (socio-economic conditions, the state of civil society and ethno-religious qualities) assessment of Turkey's South-Eastern Anatolian Region (so-called Upper Mesopotamia). In the meantime, an attempt will be made to elucidate the significance of Turkey's Europeanization process for the region, in terms of moving beyond its problems and improving its current, rather bleak structure. The basis of the positive impact of the Europeanization process draws upon the partial improvements evidenced in the region's societal structure from 2001 onwards, which resulted from the wave of fundamental reforms being experienced across the nation in line with EU membership.

INTRODUCTION

This study will explain the existing characteristics and conditions of the societal structure of 'a distant region' and show that Europeanization is the most reasonable path toward the realization of desired changes in said characteristics and conditions. Moving on

¹ I would like to thank the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey for supporting the research study I conducted at the University of Manchester, which also provided the groundwork for this paper.

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from this sentence, which summarizes the purpose of the current study, the focus of the introductory section will be the concept Europeanization, where the said distant region is located and the rationale of the study.

Europeanization has become a fashionable concept especially in the last decade, and there are varying approaches as to its definition; it may be defined as a very broad and interactive construction process within the European Union (EU) framework. It has been observed that during this process, while supranational, national and sub-national actors interact and meet on common ground and shape a European level governance from the bottom-up,³ EU norms and policies also physically and normatively reconstruct national and sub-national structures from the top-down, and in an increasingly visible manner.⁴ In terms of the present study, Europeanization is meant to convey this second aspect of the concept. That is to say, Europeanization refers to⁵:

³ Thomas Risse, James Caporaso and Maria G. Cowles, "Europeanization and Domestic Change: Introduction," in *Transforming Europe*, ed. Maria. G. Cowles et al (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1-21.

⁴ Robert Ladrech, "Europeanization of Domestic Politics and Institutions: The Case of France," *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 32 (Jan. 1994): 69-88; Claudio M. Radaelli, "The Europeanization of Public Policy," in *The Politics of Europeanization*, eds. Kevin Featherstone and Claudio M. Radaelli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 27-56; Heather Grabbe, "Europeanization Goes East: Power and Uncertainty in the EU Accession Process," *The Politics of Europeanization*, eds. Kevin Featherstone ve Claudio. M. Radaelli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 303-327.

⁵ Radaelli, "The Europeanization and Domestic Change," 28.

“Processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies.”

As seen, it accommodates changes in normative elements, identity, norms and beliefs as well as institutional and material ones. In these terms, Europeanization encompasses not only EU member states, but also nations preparing to join the EU, including Turkey.

Putting aside the official regional categories that were developed based on certain technical and statistical criteria in order to be able to determine and implement regional policies, in the European Union, the method used in the discussion of regions that is understood by all, is usually to draw on geographical concepts: South-East Europe, Central Europe, Scandinavia, the Carpathian region, the Mediterranean, the Baltic region, the Balkans, or the Alps, et cetera. Although the land covered by these concepts may differ from one person to the next based on their historical, social, political, economic and cultural perspectives, people generally have no trouble perceiving, more or less, which part of the continent is being emphasized. To put it more clearly, nobody would consider the usage of these regional concepts either surprising or interesting. However, if one were to talk about the Mesopotamian Region of the EU, how many people would consider this normal and not be surprised by it at first?

Once Turkey becomes a member, the ancient and magnificent lands that witnessed numerous developments and advances in human history, above all writing, will become one of the regions of the EU, even if by a symbolic portion of the land. No matter how surprising, just as it was provocatively used in the title of this study, a map of the EU that embraces Turkey—which is currently continuing its negotiation process for full accession to the Union—will also include a landscape that should people choose to, can be referred to as the Mesopotamian Region. Considering that the individuals, institutions, rules and practices in Turkey and the region in question will all have to experience the Europeanization process—as is the case for all nations undergoing the membership process—it would not be so wrong to state that what we are facing, in effect, is the Europeanization of Mesopotamia. We could have chosen to name this study “The Europeanization of Turkey’s South-Eastern Region.” However, the aim underlying our conscious emphasis of Mesopotamia is so the reality that will ensue following Turkey’s probable EU membership may be better understood, and offer the message that both ordinary EU citizens, and experts on the subject will all experience a sense of being an outsider when they then look at a map of the EU, and should be prepared for subsequent and basic visual and intellectual changes.

Prior to Poland’s EU membership, in discussions we had in Poland about the nation’s EU integration process, an argument frequently voiced by bureaucrats was that it would be unjust and erroneous to

assess the Europeanization of Poland—the most populated and territorially largest nation—on par with other Central and Eastern European nations. Taking into consideration its population size and land area, as well as numerous cultural and socioeconomic factors, Turkey’s Europeanization is, in many aspects, more different and complicated than the experiences of any other nation that underwent the EU accession process.

Within this context, the Europeanization of South-East Anatolia is significant not only in terms of the region itself, but in terms of both Turkey and the EU. Not just the Kurdish issue, but as this article will also reveal, taking into consideration various aspects from the societal status of the region to its cultural mosaic, the Europeanization level of the Region is in fact one of the most significant indicators of Turkey’s performance in relation to EU membership. Similarly, since the EU strives to be a political union, the extent to which Europeanization has been achieved in a region that will be the most South-Eastern area in a map of the EU that includes Turkey, and shares borders with Iraq and Syria, will also be critically meaningful for the EU.

Although Turkey’s Progress Reports to the Commission are still criticized on myriad issues, from an institutional-legal standpoint Turkey has focused more and expedited EU harmonization reforms from 2001 onwards, and as a result embarked on the full accession negotiation process. Within the context of the National Programme announced first in 2001 and revised in 2003, a total of ten EU

harmonization packages have been enacted to date, each comprising numerous significant and extensive legal-institutional changes. The transformation process began with the October 2001 Constitutional changes and the first package (the so-called mini democracy package) that came into force in February 2002; a number of people and institutions have declared them the most important reforms in the history of the Turkish Republic, and they are not far from the truth.⁶ These packages include numerous new regulations or changes that are directly or indirectly related to our present study, which cannot all be listed here.

This study, rather than the mentioned institutional-legal changes, will illustrate the existing normative characteristics of the societal grounds (within a given region) on which these transformations are reflected, and argue that if these characteristics, which portray a fairly pessimistic picture, are to improve, this can only be realized via further Europeanization. Our fundamental basis for this argument is that as Turkey has accelerated its EU harmonization reforms, and additionally the EU itself has become more visible through its various programmes there, partial improvements in societal structure have been observed in the Region. It should be noted that the Europeanization of the Region is in no way considered completely distinct from the rest of the country. In other

⁶ Cengiz Aktar, *Avrupa Okumaları* (İstanbul: Kanat, 2003); European Stability Initiative, *Sex and Power in Turkey: Feminism, Islam and the Maturing of Turkish Democracy*, 2007 [article on-line]: available at http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_document_id_90.pdf, last accessed 30 May 2009.

words, certain analyses that will be made for South-Eastern Anatolia may perhaps be true for certain other regions, and even for the country as a whole. Our only aim here is to analyse the present societal appearance of the South-Eastern Anatolian Region during the Europeanization process, based on its significance described above.

In the first section, general geographical and demographic information for the Region will be presented, and data will be provided on the current socio-economic profile of its societal basis. The second section will illustrate the state of civil society in the Region on the basis of volunteer organizations, and the following part will describe the appearance of societal structure in terms of ethnic, religious and cultural differentiation. While the current situation is depicted, the relative impact of the recent Europeanization process will also be explained in each section.

The Geographic, Demographic and Socio-economic Structure of the Region

Called South-Eastern Anatolia in Turkey's geographical zoning system, covering the Euphrates and Tigris Basins and the surrounding area and stretching over nine provinces, the Region also covers three regions according to Eurostat's zoning system Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS):⁷ These regions are TRC1 (provinces of Gaziantep, Adıyaman, and Kilis),

⁷ Eurostat, Hierarchical List of the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics [database on-line]: available at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/ramon/nuts/codelist_en.cfm?list=ccc, last accessed 10 August 2009.

TRC2 (provinces of Şanlıurfa and Diyarbakır) and TRC3 (provinces of Mardin, Batman, Şırnak and Siirt). The populations, population densities and land area of these provinces as of the end of 2007 are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: The Populations and Land Areas of the Provinces in the South-Eastern Anatolian Region⁸

Province	Population	Population Density	Land Area
Adıyaman	582,762	83	7,606
Batman	182,131	88	4,659
Diyarbakır	1,460,714	97	15,204
Gaziantep	1,560,023	229	6,844
Kilis	118,457	83	1,427
Mardin	745,778	85	8,806
Siirt	291,528	53	5,473
Şanlıurfa	1,523,099	81	19,336
Şırnak	416,001	58	7,151
Total	6.880.493	95.2	76,506
Turkey	70,586,000	92	814,578

⁸ Data gathered from the web site of Turkish Statistical Institute [database on-line]: available at www.tuik.gov.tr/jsp/duyuru/upload/adnks_Harita_TR/HaritaTR.html, last accessed 14 August 2009.

Regarding socio-economic development, it can be seen that the provinces in the Region are not at an inspiring level, and with the exception of Gaziantep, situated in the western part of the Region; all other provinces have a negative development index and are very much behind the eighty-one provinces in Turkey (see Table 2). While Turkey's GDP per capita was € 6500 in 2007 and already much lower than the over €24,800 average of the EU-27,⁹ according to the Turkish Board of Statistics,¹⁰ GDP per capita for the Region was \$3,389 (€2,800).

⁹ Eurostat, *Europe in Figures 2009*, [report on-line]: available at http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-CD-09-001/EN/KS-CD-09-001-EN.PDF, last accessed 11 October 2009.

¹⁰ Turkish Statistical Institute, *Regional Statistics*, 2008 [report on-line]: available at <http://tuikapp.tuik.gov.tr/Bolgesel/sorguSayfa.do?target=tablo>, last accessed 03 September 2009.

Table 2: Provinces in the Region by Socio-economic Development¹¹

Province	Socio-economic	Socio-economic
Adıyaman	-0,77647	65
Batman	-0,90456	70
Diyarbakır	-0,66993	63
Gaziantep	0,46175	20
Kilis	-0,41175	54
Mardin	-0,98944	72
Siirt	-1,00644	73
Şanlıurfa	-0,83158	68
Şırnak	-1,13979	78

A study conducted by the Turkish Board of Statistics based on Eurostat criteria showed that while the poverty line rate was 23.8 for Turkey in 2003, this rate was 35.09 per cent in TRC1 (Gaziantep, Adıyaman, and Kilis), 64.33 per cent in TRC2 (Şanlıurfa and Diyarbakır), and 82.37 per cent in TRC3 (Mardin, Batman, Şırnak, and Siirt).¹²

¹¹ Bülent Dinçer, Mevin Öztaşlan and Taner Kavasoglu, *İllerin ve Bölgelerin Sosyo-Ekonomik Gelişmişlik Sıralaması Araştırması (Study on the Socio-economic Development Ranking of Provinces and Regions)* (Ankara: State Planning Organization, 2003), 55.

¹² Ercan Dansuk, Mehmet Özmen and Güzin Erdoğan, "Poverty and Social Stratification at the Regional Levels in Turkey," *Türk-İş Dergisi*, 381(April 2008), 22-39.

Although according to official statistics the unemployment rate in the Region was 14.0 per cent and the non-agricultural unemployment rate 15.1 per cent in 2006,¹³ those familiar with the Region will consider an actual unemployment rate of at least 30 per cent to be much more realistic.¹⁴ One out of every four inhabitants in the region is illiterate (26.8 per cent), and this rate reaches as high as 40.0 per cent among women.¹⁵

It would be possible to provide further examples of all the data presented here, which all illustrate that the Region is socio-economically, rather weak. As has been the case with every Commission report since 1998, the 2007 Progress Report also included a separate paragraph on to the Region, which confirmed this point:¹⁶ “However, the overall socio-economic situation in the south-east remains difficult. No steps have been taken to develop a comprehensive strategy to achieve economic and social development in the region and to create the conditions required for the Kurdish population to enjoy full rights and freedoms.”

¹³ Turkish Statistical Institute, *Hanehalkı İşgücü Anketi (Household Labour Force Survey Results)*(Ankara: Turkish Statistical Institute, 2006).

¹⁴ Ankara Chamber of Commerce, *İşsizliğin ve Göçün Coğrafyası Raporu (Report on the Geography of Unemployment and Migration)* (Ankara: ATO Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmens' Association, *Eğitim ve Sürdürülebilir Büyüme-Türkiye Deneyimi, Riskler ve Fırsatlar Raporu (Report: Education and Sustainable Development-Turkish Experience, Risks and Opportunities)* (Istanbul: TUSIAD, 2006), 75.

¹⁶ European Commission, *Turkey Progress Report*, 06. 11. 2007, [report on-line]: available at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2007/nov/turkey_progress_report_en.pdf, last accessed 11 July 2009, 23.

As the Commission Report also shows, the appalling economic and social indicators of the Region's societal basis clearly illustrate that it is one of the areas in Turkey where the Europeanization process has yet to reach fruition. However, while for instance Diyarbakır is perhaps the Region's most prominent province in terms of economic and political difficulties, official records show that it was the third largest industrial city in Turkey in the 1930s. Its ranking plunged to fortieth in the 1970s, fifty-third in the 1990s, and currently ranks as low as sixty-third in the country.¹⁷ In line with this deteriorating trend, nearly all administrations made promises to improve the economic and social status of Eastern and South-Eastern Anatolia as part of state politics. In the early 1970s, Cohn wrote on this subject:¹⁸ "The present policy of attempting to improve economic and social conditions in the region is certainly an important element in the effort to prevent Kurdistan from becoming a serious threat to national integrity; but perhaps, bringing the nature and dimensions of the problem of Kurdish separateness out into the open would be healthier and might contribute more to its solution than the present taboo on the subject." Because the state made no significant changes to its general paradigm in relation to the region and taboos were still in place until very recently, the so-called economic and social policies promised by all

¹⁷ Union of Municipalities of Southeast Anatolia, *Doğu ve Güneydoğuda Sosyo-Ekonomik Sorunlar ve Çözüm Önerileri (Socio-economic Problems in the Southeast Anatolia and Suggestions)*, (Diyarbakır: GABB, 2008).

¹⁸ Edwin J. Cohn, *Turkish Economic, Social, and Political Change*, (London: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 154.

administrations in office have not brought any results in the decades since.

At this point in time, it might be said that the determination to become an EU member has translated into concrete steps to this end in recent years, and as an inevitable outcome of such efforts, state institutions' view of the Region and its people has transformed. Normative changes obviously do not occur as quickly as legal-procedural changes. However, the Region is now moving from an environment where large portions of society were considered potential separatists and an insecure atmosphere through constant pressure and conflict, to one where the law and human rights are felt to a much greater extent. A number of social and cultural rights that could not be even said out in 1990s has quietly become a part of people's lives (broadcasts in the mother tongue and the freedom to learn this language, regulations made in the area of freedom of thought, the changes made to the Anti-Terror Law, et cetera), and the distinction between those who conduct the struggle for rights and freedoms through democratic-legal means and those who do not is made in a much more sensitive manner than previously.

First Martial law and then the Declaration of a State of Emergency in the Region in an effort to prevent terror were intensely felt via military measures and prohibitions since 1980. Finally, it was lifted in 2002, and official figures show that over the next three years, in the provinces affected by these practices, more than a hundred factories and about 4000 Small and Medium Sized Enterprises opened

and 100,000 people found employment, which is an indicator of normalization. In the same three years, exports from the region climbed from \$812 million to \$2,539 million.¹⁹ The word normalization, as it is used here, refers to the Europeanization of state authority and its functions during the membership process, and reforming itself in line with the reforms made.

Although not yet a tangible economic breakthrough, completion of the South-Eastern Anatolia Project (GAP) that was presented as the grandest investment project in the history of the Turkish Republic, which was planned in the 1970s but often grinded to a halt due to political problems, increased terrorism events, and lack of interest by the administrations in power was indeed considered a priority within the context of such changed conditions. Prime Minister R. Tayyip Erdoğan declared that all investments related to the GAP would be completed in five years.²⁰ This is an integrated project that foresees investments beginning with irrigation and energy-generation plants, followed by other fields including industry, agriculture, education, transportation, and health; once complete, employment opportunities will be created for a total of 3.8 million people, and per capita income will rise by 209 per cent.²¹

¹⁹ Zaman Daily, "OHAL kalkınca 100 fabrika açıldı, binlerce kişi iş buldu (State of Emergency was lifted, 100 Factory were Opened)," 16 April 2006, 4.

²⁰ Abdullah Karakuş, "GAP Dört Yılda Tamamlanacak (GAP Will Be Completed in Four Years)," Milliyet Daily, 11 January 2008, 5.

²¹ South-Eastern Anatolia Project Regional Development Administration, *Latest Situation on South-Eastern Anatolia Project Activities of the Gap Administration*, June 2006 [report on-line]: available at <http://www.gap.gov.tr/English/Genel/sdurum.pdf>, last accessed 11 June 2009, 2.

It has become easier especially for businessmen and even representatives of international capital who used terrorism and the unsafe environment as an excuse to invest in the region, to actually invest in these strategically-situated lands with access to Middle Eastern and Asian markets. As a more specific sectoral example, taking into consideration the cultural and tourism assets of the Region that have remained untapped up until now due only to security issues, the development potential of the area becomes readily apparent. In fact, the Cultural Heritage Development Programme of the GAP has been developed by the EU in response to this matter and has supported 32 projects in the Region that represent a striking beginning for tourism after the chaotic period of 1980s and 90s. According to Programme Director Michael Jay, There are 558 registered conservation areas and 3,646 cultural heritage assets in the South-East.²² About 127. 000 tourists in 2006 and 154. 000 tourists in 2007 visited Diyarbakır which were unimaginable figures in the previous years.²³

All these minor steps are the products of Europeanization. They reflect the change in recent years in relation to how South-Eastern Anatolia is viewed, and also show the path that must continue to be followed. The above explanations also illustrate the potential of

²² Michael Jay, "GAP Bölgesinde Kültürel Mirası Geliştirme Programı (The Programme of Developing Cultural Heritage in the GAP Region," 18 May 2007 [article on-line]: available at www.emardin.com/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=447&pop=1&page=last accessed 08 September 2009.

²³ Diyarbakır Chamber of Commerce, *Diyarbakır in Graphics*, (Diyarbakır: Tasarım, 2009), p.17.

the Region and the fact that it is open to productive investments. This potential will also be sufficient in transforming existent socio-economic hardships and the weak social structure. What has been missing until now is what Europeanization is slowly instilling here: The establishment of the rule of law and a secure environment; the expression of demands and problems on democratic grounds; and the existence of a state that will plan and execute the relevant societal transformation. If investors believe that this process will continue and safety and stability in the region will be established, then, more and more capital seems to flow to the Region.

The State of Civil Society in the Region

One of the outcomes of weak socio-economic status or an insecure environment that resulted from concerns about terrorism is that the communal reflexes are slow in developing civil initiatives. As a particular form of society, appreciating social diversity and interaction and able to limit depredations of political power,²⁴ civil society has a significant place on the way of Europeanization. Civil society is important not only in terms of the process of changing regional and national structures and mentalities in line with EU norms, but also in order to form a societal base on par with Europe that will help achieve a civic-democratic Union.²⁵ In other words, this is a

²⁴ John A. Hall, "In Search of Civil Society," in *Civil Society: Theory, History, Comparison*, ed. John A. Hall (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 25.

²⁵ For an explanation of the increase of civil society issue in the EU context and for links to official reports about this, see Stijin Smismans, *Civil Society in European Institutional Discourses* (Paris: Cahiers européens de Sciences-Po: 2002).

necessary societal quality in both the top-down, and the bottom-up approaches to Europeanization. As is the case in Putnam's comparison of northern and southern Italy, it is possible to assess the extent to which a region or state has the grounds suitable for change (and in the meantime, Europeanize) based on its level of civic traditions and volunteer societal activities.²⁶ The concept of civil society may include diverse dimensions and functions;²⁷ however, within the context of this study, we will present the current situation in the South-Eastern Anatolian Region based on the voluntary membership and active participation in social organizations.

Figures for non-profits and volunteer associations are presented in Table 3. Although the population in the Region is over 6.880.493, there are only 2,792 volunteer organizations overall and total membership amounts to 149.174.

²⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

²⁷ Jerzy Bartkowski and Aleksandra Jasinska-Kania, "Voluntary Organizations and the Development of Civil Society," in *European Values at the Turn of the Millennium*, eds. Wil Arts and Lock Hamlan (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 109-139.

Table 3: The Number of and Membership to Volunteer Organizations in South-East Anatolia²⁸

Province	Number of	Within-Country	Number of
Adıyaman	349	0.44%	14.269
Batman	150	0.19%	8.365
Diyarbakır	512	0.65%	23.276
Gaziantep	774	0.99%	61.028
Kilis	88	0.11%	3.120
Mardin	184	0.23%	7.661
Siirt	162	0.20%	4.819
Şanlıurfa	505	0.64%	24.219
Şırnak	68	0.08%	2.417
TOTAL	2792	0.35%	149.174

Non-governmental organizations are inadequate not only in number, but also in terms of activities. Because financial resources are limited, knowledge and equipment required to generate projects or other activities are insufficient, communication channels are weak, activities

²⁸ Data gathered from the Office of Voluntary Organizations, Ministry of Home Affairs [database on-line]; available at <http://dernekler.icisleri.gov.tr/Demekler/Kurum/IlIereGoreDemekSavisi.aspx>, last accessed 26 August 2009.

²⁹ Data gathered through electronic correspondence with the Office of Voluntary Organizations, Ministry of Home Affairs.

are less effective than hoped, et cetera. Given such a picture, it does not seem possible for these organizations to collaborate with similar national and international ones. Businessmen's associations would be a case in point here, since in terms of both finances and commercial connections, these organizations would be expected to have the capability to engage in dialogue and activities that expand beyond regional borders especially in terms of EU harmonization and membership. The fact that as high as 66 percent of the interest groups organized at the EU level belong to business circles can be an indicator of this.³⁰

Actually, the weakness in lobbying activities is in fact something that exists all over Turkey. However, it is also true that Turkey as a nation is undergoing change in this field, and the point we wish to emphasize here is the fact that NGOs in the Region is not part of this trend. For instance, initially, the top-level businessmen's associations in Turkey stayed away from making their presence felt in Turkey-EU relations for quite some time. When the Customs Union was established in 1996, but Turkey was still not named a candidate nation to the enlargement process at the Luxembourg Summit in December 1997, businessmen's organizations began to play a much more active role in this process.³¹ The businessmen's associations in the Region complain about not having any relationship with the

³⁰ Justin Greenwood, *Interest Representation in the European Union* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 19.

³¹ Serap Atan, "Europeanization of Turkish Peak Business Organizations and Turkey-EU Relations," in *Turkey and European Integration*, eds. Mehmet Uğur and Nergis Canefe (London: Routledge, 2004), ss. 100-123.

relevant institutions of the EU negotiations process, and that decision makers and enforcers are reluctant to consult relevant communities; they also state that they spend a lot effort toward somehow communicating their opinions. They add that such efforts never go beyond the national level.³²

One issue that is apparent in the views of businessmen's associations that is problematic not only in terms of civil initiatives but the societal basis as a whole, concerns the dissemination of information and raising awareness. As Checkel notes,³³ the more the process of cognitive evolution or societal learning process occur and knowledge and understanding is infused among the population, integration (or Europeanization) will be that much successful. Europeanization appears to be a process addressed procedurally only within the framework of the negotiation process that is almost completely run by the central bureaucracy. If information is circulated within these constricted boundaries, this occurs in a top-down fashion where only changes and procedures are communicated. Of the thirteen EU Documentation Centres in Turkey, there is not one situated in the Region. With the exception of a centre established at Gaziantep University, which actually is virtually inactive, nearly all academic centres working on European studies are found in universities in the

³² Data gathered from interview with Fidel Balta, General Secretary of the Eastern and South-Eastern Industrialists and Businessmen's Association, which is the umbrella organisation for 13 associations that have a total of 1,135 member industrialists and businessmen from the region (15 September 2008).

³³ Jeffrey T. Checkel, "(Regional) Norms and (Domestic) Social Mobilisation: Citizenship Politics in Post-Maastricht, Post-Cold War Germany," *Arena Working Papers 99/3* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 1999).

western part of Turkey. The two EU Information Bureaus founded under the auspices of the Chambers of Commerce in Gaziantep and Diyarbakır, constitute the only places in the region to access information. All of these issues combine to produce an environment where EU-related knowledge is limited and concepts such as Europeanness and Europeanization are almost never discussed.³⁴ Because the level of knowledge and awareness is limited, the reflection of revolutionary reforms on societal life, and the mobilization of political, social, and economic transformation processes occur rather slowly.

And now, the Europeanization face of the medallion: Instead of militarist ones, leaning on democratic-legal methods, very important changes have been realized in this process. By changes to the Associations Act, the Foundations Act, and other legislation on different dates from 2001 onwards, Turkey took the legal steps that would bring civil society closer to EU norms and enable it to function better. Unfortunately, there is no statistical data showing the changes in the number of civil society organizations throughout years. However, the Civil Society Index Project, the first and till now the most comprehensive study on civil society in Turkey demonstrates the fact that after the decline of the conflicts, an obvious increase has been

³⁴ For studies investigating the level of knowledge and awareness about the EU among the public, see Hakan Samur and Behçet Oral, "Orientation of University Seniors from South-Eastern Turkey to the European Union," *European Journal of Social Sciences*, (June 2007): 186-205; Hakan Yılmaz, "Swinging between Eurosupportiveness and Euroskepticism: Turkish Public's General Attitudes towards the European Union," in *Placing Turkey on the Map of Europe*, ed. Hakan Yılmaz (Istanbul: Bogazici University Press, 2005), 152-181.

observed in the number of those organizations over the past few years as well as in the financial support of the state and other donors towards civil society in the Region.³⁵

Once the role civil society plays in any given country in the Europeanization process became gradually better understood, from 2001 onwards the Union began to implement a Civil Society Development Programme geared toward Turkey that encompasses various sub-programmes. Similarly, programmes that address Turkey as a whole, such as the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, European Union Education and Youth Programmes, Promotion of Cultural Rights, as well as programmes geared specifically toward the Region, either concluded or ongoing, including the Cultural Heritage Development Programme of the GAP, Development Programme of the GAP Region and GAP Entrepreneur Support Centre were all initiated after 2001. These programmes directly or indirectly prepare the grounds for the empowerment of civil society and are run by very different organizations; consequently, none of the relevant EU centres have any documentation on the number of individual benefactors of these programmes or the number of projects being run regionally.

Nonetheless, to offer a few examples, of the thirty-two programmes supported within the context of the Cultural Heritage Development Programme of the GAP, almost half were or are still

³⁵ Filiz Bikmen and Zeynep Meydanoglu, *Türkiye’de Sivil Toplum: Bir Değişim Süreci (Civil Society in Turkey: A Changing Process)* (İstanbul: Tusev, 2006), 53.

being run by civil society organizations. Civil Society Development Programme endorsed twenty-three comprehensive projects throughout the country between 2003-2005 and two of them were from the region. GAP Rural Development Project supports about ten projects of civil society organizations. Within the context of the Educational and Youth Programmes, since 2004, averagely forty-fifty projects run by civil society organizations have been supported each year by Turkish National Agency.

The numbers of the projects should not be underestimated because they have been the first experience of preparing and conducting such projects for most of the civil society organizations. The target areas and societal groups also vary. All these micro or sometimes macro projects are the remarkable first contacts of most of the organizations with international partners or EU organizations.

The Ethnic and Cultural Aspects of the Region

Situated at a place where numerous nations or communities on a North-South or East-West axis have met, mixed, or settled, the South-Eastern Anatolian Region therefore boasts a truly multi-cultural history. The circumstances not long ago, in the early twentieth century, clearly illustrate this point. The official 1903 yearbook of the Ottoman Empire shows that the population in the area covered by five provinces (Diyarbakır, Mardin, Siirt, Elazığ and Malatya) in present-day Eastern and South-Eastern Anatolia was 480,737 and that 95,209 people (approximately 20 per cent) were members of non-Muslim communities. A higher proportion of these communities were found in

urban centres, and played a visible role in nearly all public offices (with the exception of the army) as well as the commercial life in all these cities.³⁶ Leaving aside the other communities at this point, the Ottomans at the time called the Armenians—one of the most vital parts of this mosaic of a peaceful community—*millet-i sadika* (the loyal people). A lot of things has changed since then. Foreign nations' plans and expectations for the region, wars, killings, relocations, migrations, efforts by the newly formed republic to homogenize and ignore ethnic differences during the process of nation-building, economic hardships, et cetera, all brought the Region and its people to the present day, burdened with accumulated problems and a socio-cultural structure much different than before. An examination of this historical background and determining those responsible, is not within the scope of the present study. Consequently, we must state it all in a single sentence, and move on, just like we mentioned the difference in Diyarbakır's economic status in Turkey in the 1930s and the present day in a single sentence, above. And a considerable proportion of the population that had somehow resisted the challenges of the previous times and tried to stay put until 1990s, ended up having to migrate due to increased terrorist acts, pressures and economic hardships. By the 2000s, from the mosaic of societies that co-resided in the Region for centuries, only a few members of each of the religious communities, abandoned houses of worship, and deserted villages were all that was left, while those who had resettled in the US or various European

³⁶ Mehmet Şimşek, "Milletler Mozaığı Olarak Diyarbakır (Diyarbakır as A Mosaic of Nations)," *Electronic Social Sciences Journal*, 2 (Jan. 2003): 12-19.

countries but still yearned for their native lands, numbered in the hundreds of thousands.

As was said earlier, while Turkey has never accepted the notion of minorities based on ethnicity within its borders since its foundation, only the Armenian, Rum [Greeks of Turkish citizenship], and Jewish communities were granted minority status based on religion in accordance with the Treaty of Lausanne. Presently, there is a very small group of Armenian and Jewish communities in the South-Eastern Anatolian Region. Nonetheless, even if the official discourse does not acknowledge them, many ethnically and culturally distinct communities still exist in the South-East. Arabs, Kurds (Zaza and Kirmanc),³⁷ Orthodox Syriacs (the Asuri, the Keldani), the Yazidi, Alevis, and Protestants. All of these ethnic or religious communities also form various combinations among themselves and make up numerous, but traditionally and culturally distinct subgroups: for instance, the Sunni Kurds and Alevi Kurds, Sunni Arabs and Alevi Arabs.³⁸ Leaving aside the Sunni Arabs, who have no ethnic or cultural problems (demands), and the Alevis, whose problems and status differ from the other groups mentioned and are not limited to the region, a discussion of the developments evidenced in recent years among the more prominent communities in South-Eastern Anatolia

³⁷ There is a continuing debate as to whether Kurds and Zazas are ethnically different or not.

³⁸ Baskın Oran, *Türkiye'de Azınlıklar (Minorities in Turkey)* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2004).

will allow us to return to our main concern here, that is, the changes that have occurred at the societal level as a result of Europeanization.

One point that must be noted here is that although officially the status of being a minority is still defined in rather narrow terms, Oran³⁹ argues that the regulations outlined in the Fourth Harmonization Package concerning the acquisition of immovable property by community foundations, is in fact an indirect means of acknowledgment. Within the framework of democratization and from the first package onwards, other positive regulations that address the people and communities of different faiths have also been passed. Due to the optimistic atmosphere that resulted from the speeding up of the Europeanization process after 2001, and in turn, a decrease of tension-based policies and terror in the Region, members of many communities have begun to return home, examples of which will be provided below. As it currently stands, although low by overall community populations, the trend of return migration has become visible in a relatively short time, and is perhaps one of the most rapid responses to the EU harmonization reforms.

Orthodox Syrians are one of the oldest peoples of Mesopotamia, and although there is no hard data on how many of them are returning to South-Eastern Anatolia, according to one Orthodox Syriac writer's observations, while close to 150 families have migrated back to Mardin and Midyat alone, many others visit their former communities during the summers, rebuilding them and

³⁹ Ibid. 40.

trying to revive a sense of community spirit.⁴⁰ The same writer's impressions of Orthodox Syriacs living overseas suggest that although many more would like to migrate back, because economic and security issues have not yet been overcome in the Region and problems are evident in the realization of relevant reforms, they refrain from actually doing so. From 2005 onwards, Orthodox Syriacs from all over the world have begun to celebrate the *Akitu* festival, one of the oldest traditions on Earth celebrated for over 6,750 years, on April 1st in South-Eastern Anatolia. The positive impact of the Europeanization process is actually much clearer in the words of an Orthodox Syrian, who attended the festival in 2007, whose father was sent out of the country during the relocation in 1915 when he was two years old, and who had never before visited his father's homeland:⁴¹ "...our grandparents have Turkish identities, our identity is here. If Turkey becomes a member of the EU, I will return to Hakkari with my family."

Similarly, the Yazidi, one of the most ancient religious communities of the Middle East, whose population in South-Eastern Anatolia was around seventy to eighty thousand 40 years ago but presently, numbers only in the hundreds after the large scale migration overseas have also begun to return home in recent years. Since 2001, although they have not exactly returned home, about 7,000 Yazidi

⁴⁰ Electronic correspondence with the editor of the widely known Syriac website www.suryani.com, Sabo Boyacı (28 February 2009).

⁴¹ Elif Görgü, "Mezopotamya Bahçesine Bahar Geldi," *Evrensel Daily*, 8 April 2007, 4.

have been trying to renovate their old villages, homes and lands; and instead of hiding their identity as they once did, they are now even establishing their own associations.⁴²

The Jewish community used to live especially at Şanlıurfa (Abraham's birth place) due to religious reasons but was forced to migrate around the late 1940s; the fact that lately they have been directly or indirectly purchasing land in this Region and making significant investments within the context of the South-Eastern Anatolia Project is again, a recent development. Also, activities organized to strengthen and symbolize inter-religion and cross-cultural dialogue in Şanlıurfa, which is historically an important city for Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, (the opening of Halepli Bahce—the so-called Garden of Religions, and scientific-cultural events), gained widespread support.

The Diyarbakır Protestant Church and Jehovah's Witnesses initiated their activities in the city in 2003, and even won lawsuits filed against the associations they formed.

Another point that needs to be raised in conjunction is the situation of the displaced Kurdish population. Kurds are a primary component of the Region. However, their social, economic, political, legal, and cultural problems have remained unresolved for decades, and in many ways, were not even acknowledged by the state for many years. The issue has become a chronic one, and reached even more tragic

⁴² Haşim Söylemez, "Yezidiler Geri Dönüyor (Yazidis Return)," *Aksiyon Weekly*, 594 (2006): 23-26.

proportions when from the mid-1980s onwards the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) increased and embraced bloody armed conflict as a means to an end, to which the state responded by amplifying its oppressive and harsh measures. One of the measures employed by the state to establish control in the Region has been to forcefully displace the populace especially in rural areas; masses of people were displaced from 1984 to 1999, and most intensely from 1991 to 1996. No hard data exists regarding the specific number of these Internally Displaced People (IDP); projected figures vary from 350,000, the official number put forth by the state, to three-to-four million, based on studies⁴³ conducted by various NGOs for example IDMC/NRC⁴⁴ and TESEV.⁴⁵ Regardless of the actual figure, this significant event impacted numerous people and lead mostly to negative outcomes for the displaced people, the Region itself, and places where displaced people resettled;⁴⁶ moreover, not only did the state refuse to

⁴³ IDMC/NRC and TESEV, *Overcoming A Legacy of Mistrust: Towards Reconciliation Between the State and the Displaced*, May 2006 [database on-line]: available at [http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/resources.nsf/\(httpPublications\)/0BFEA7AB96201EFFC1257180003520B0?OpenDocument](http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/resources.nsf/(httpPublications)/0BFEA7AB96201EFFC1257180003520B0?OpenDocument), last accessed 18 December 2009, 12; Joost Jongerden, "So-called Return Policies: An Analysis of Regional Construction and Dwelling Practices," *Türkiye'de ve Dünyada Yerinden Edilme: Uluslararası İlkeler, Deneyimler ve Çözüm Önerileri Sempozyumu (Symposium on Internally Displaced People in Turkey and in the World: Principles, Experiences and Solutions)*, Istanbul (4-5 December 2006), 2.

⁴⁴ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre of the Norwegian Refugee Council

⁴⁵ Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation

⁴⁶ See that source for an analysis of these outcomes: Betül Altuntaş, "Internally Displaced People from the Angle of Social, Economic and Class-Centred Dynamics," *Türkiye'de ve Dünyada Yerinden Edilme: Uluslararası İlkeler, Deneyimler ve Çözüm Önerileri Sempozyumu (Symposium on Internally Displaced*

acknowledge it until the late 1990s, but the oppressive and unsafe environment also made it impossible for academic circles or NGOs to address the issue.⁴⁷ However, as a result of pressure by international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and legal regulations passed within the context of meeting EU membership targets from 2001 onwards, this has begun to change. According to official figures, the number of people returning home as of October 2006, is around 145,000.⁴⁸ Clearly, this number is unsatisfactory; the fact that people are returning does not immediately resolve any problems; and the state still has a lot of ground to cover.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the fact that the resolution of this problem is connected to the resolution of the Kurdish problem is also evident. However, myriad matters in relation to this issue have been overcome, and the return migration process has already begun. The restrictions that were the norm eight to ten years ago no longer apply, and it is much easier to

People in Turkey and in the World: Principles, Experiences and Solutions), Istanbul (4-5 December 2006).

⁴⁷ Bilgin Ayata, "İnkârdan Diyaloga? Türkiye'deki Yerinden Edilmeye Yönelik Ulusal ve Uluslararası Politikalar Üzerine Bir Analiz (From Denial to Dialogue? An Analysis of National and International Policies in Turkey About Internally Displacement," *Türkiye'de ve Dünyada Yerinden Edilme: Uluslararası İlkeler, Deneyimler ve Çözüm Önerileri Sempozyumu (Symposium on Internally Displaced People in Turkey and in the World: Principles, Experiences and Solutions)*, Istanbul (4-5 December 2006), 1.

⁴⁸ Zekeriya Şarbak, "Dünyada ve Türkiye'de Yerinden Edilme (Internally Displacement in Turkey and in the World', *Türkiye'de ve Dünyada Yerinden Edilme: Uluslararası İlkeler, Deneyimler ve Çözüm Önerileri Sempozyumu (Symposium on Internally Displaced People in Turkey and in the World: Principles, Experiences and Solutions)*," Istanbul (4-5 December 2006), 2.

⁴⁹ IDMC/NRC and TESEV, *Overcoming A Legacy of Mistrust*, 15; Jongerden, "So-called Return Policies," 5.

assess and criticize the issue in the dialogue-friendly environment that has formed.⁵⁰

In his distinguished book, Etzioni⁵¹ argues that consciousness was not a prerequisite of action and individuals and societal units could act without being aware of their actions. However, he adds “Consciousness is a prerequisite of an active unit, one which is self-reviewing and self-correcting in order to realize more fully its values.” Our aim here is not to paint a pretty picture of return migration. Nevertheless, regardless of how small the figures seem, and the numbers aside, regardless of the fact that many problems regarding the return migration process still remain; the fact that communities that were torn away from lands they have lived on for centuries because of ethnic and religious identities have now begun a process of return migration, is something, we believe, not to be undervalued. Especially for non-Muslims, the process of return migration is a conscious choice and a desire to revive their values in these lands, in addition, people now have a more optimistic outlook on life; thus, it would not be wrong to assess these developments as a reflection of the Europeanization process. Although there is no concrete date set in the near future regarding Turkey’s accession to the EU, the winds of reform blowing since 2001, and the umbrella of peace and security that the EU already promises, have established the grounds for these people to take steps to quench their yearning for home.

⁵⁰ Ayata, “İnkârdan Diyaloga?,” 9.

⁵¹ Amitai Etzioni, *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 226.

Conclusion: The Process Has Just Begun

Turkey embarked on the path leading to the EU (the then EEC) in 1959; signed the Association Agreement in 1963; applied for full membership in 1987; and joined the Customs Union in 1996. Despite this history that spans half a century, we believe that Turkey's actual EU process has begun just recently, with the onset of the new millennium. The determination and will to become an EU member began to surpass mere discourse in earnest for the first time, and was reflected in actions taken. What we mean by actions is, more democratic and society-centred policies were employed in relation to issues that have been considered taboo throughout the nation's history and assumed would cause great harm should they be approached with a different attitude. It is true that much still remains to be done, that normative transformation is much more difficult than legal-institutional transformation, and that people unwilling to let go of old structures and mentalities resist change. It is also true that in South-Eastern Anatolia, which has socio-economic indicators that are lower even than the average values for Turkey, a poor civil society profile, and problems related to ethno-cultural matters much more so than other regions in Turkey, change will be much more difficult.

Nonetheless, as we said, the real process of Europeanization has just begun. Considering the positive atmosphere and developments that have flourished in just a few years, in the case of South-Eastern Anatolia, the continuation of this process appears to be the only valid way to resolve the socio-economic and political

problems in the region. As the President of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, one of the most important NGOs in the region, said, “Anyone that resorts to a discourse of violence in the region, will lose.”⁵² Almost all of the research studies conducted in the region reveal that the people of the Region (the Kurds) desire the expansion of democratic rights and freedoms more than other groups in society.⁵³

During the short period of time where violence and anti-legal approaches have declined and EU reforms have come to the fore, the fact that finally the loss of blood has stopped in the Region, economic investments have been realized and people have embraced a trend of returning home, are all beginnings that parallel the new Europeanization process. Such beginnings are also signs that the historic lands of Mesopotamia will once again become a multicultural and peaceful region (and very much in line with EU targets) if accession to the EU does actually become a reality, or if a new environment conducive to satisfying ethnic-religious-cultural communities is created through strengthening the Region’s socio-economic status via steps to be taken during the membership process.

⁵² Mehmet Gündem, “Interview with Sezgin Tanrıkulu,” *Yenişafak Daily*, 23 February 2008, 12.

⁵³ Ali Çarkoğlu, “Societal Perceptions of Turkey’s EU Membership,” in *Turkey and European Integration*, eds. Mehmet Uğur and Nergis Canefe (London: Routledge, 2004), 19-47; Hakan Yılmaz, “Swinging between Eurosceptiveness and Euroskepticism,” 152-181.

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