

TURKEY'S APPROACH TOWARDS THE EU: VIEWS FROM WITHIN

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Introduction

Even a cursory view of different Turkish perceptions of the European Economic Community (EEC), or as it later became, the European Community (EC) and then the European Union (EU), reveals quite different opinions and positions amongst Turkish political parties, labor unions and trade and business associations at different periods of time. On one side, one can notice the attitude of moderate circles, which regarded association and accession as the continuation of the traditional westernization drive of the modern Turkish state, even while they also found words of criticism for the association. On the other, the extreme left and right both considered the EEC as a power strange to Turkish culture and rejected it vehemently. After the military intervention of 12 September 1980, most political parties and interest groups increasingly linked Turkey's EC membership to the protection and stabilization of Turkish democracy. The reasons for this were the domestic political consequences of military intervention (democracy and human rights), and developments with regard to foreign policy (especially regional re-Islamizing tendencies). Although the negotiation process for the Customs Union was criticized by most Turkish opinion-makers, the furthering of the integration process with the EU was mainly welcomed. Voices of criticism from the Islamic right fell increasingly. The reasons for changes in some points of view will be analyzed in this paper.

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Support from the beginning

Only two months after Greece's application for membership of the European Economic Community (8 June, 1959) Turkey followed suit, applying for membership on July 31, 1959, in accordance with the provisions of Article 238 of the Treaty of Rome. For Turkey, this was a part of its desire to become an unchangeable part of Europe; therefore its decision to apply was a political one. Membership of the EEC held the promise of various kinds of cooperation possibilities in the political, social and economic fields. Turkey planned to use these opportunities in the near future. The Association Agreement between the EEC and Turkey, signed on 12 September, 1963, was ratified in the Turkish Grand National Assembly and the Senate with one dissenting vote and only a few abstentions. The public reaction was mostly favorable. It was remarked in the Turkish press that the agreement was "the most permanent and productive step in Turkey's efforts of the last 150 years to westernize and become an equal member of the Western world." (*Hürriyet*, 13 September 1963). The Chamber of Commerce and Industry and labor unions also endorsed the association. Türk-İş issued the following statement: "History will show whether [this Agreement] will be beneficial for our country or not ... It constitutes the latest and maybe the most important one of all the opportunities of westernization since the Tanzimat If we make good use of this opportunity, Turkish workers will be the first to rejoice."¹

Because business circles tied westernization, democracy and economic, political and social development to Europe, they advocated association with the EEC. Just one year after the Association Agreement entered into force, in 1965, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry established the Economic Development Foundation (İKV) in Istanbul. The foundation was given the task of invigorating Turkish integration into the EEC and to prepare studies for future relations between Turkey and the EEC. The only opponent of the Association Agreement was the Turkish Workers' Party. Its criticism was directed towards Turkey's backwardness compared to the EEC states: "For an underdeveloped country like Turkey to join such a community, and to expect to benefit from it is like the lamb waiting to

¹ Quoted in Selim İlkin, 'A Short History of Turkey's Association with the European Community', in Ahmet Evin and Geoffrey Denton eds. *Turkey and the European Community* (Leske Verlag, Opladen 1990) p.39.

be eaten by the wolf We say no to the Common Market! We want Turkey to develop and progress by making use of its own resources and its own means as an independent entity.’²

Early controversies

Turkey’s integration into the EEC was scarcely a topic of debate during the 60s, but a polarization of positions quickly set in during negotiations over the Supplementary Protocol in the 1970s. During the ratification debate in the Turkish Grand National Assembly in July 1971, proponents and opponents of the association put their points of view. The Justice Party approved the ratification of the protocol because of the favorable political circumstances and the necessity to change and open up the domestic market oriented economy policy. The Republican People’s Party stressed that it was against the protocol, but not the Association Agreement. The reasons for its objections were the insufficient concessions of the EEC and the insufficient state of Turkish industrialization.³ Therefore the party proposed to have a longer preparatory stage and to revise the protocol in favor of Turkey during this period. However, this proposal was not accepted.

Loud voices of criticism were to be heard in Turkey after the signing of the protocol and the beginning of the transitional stage. Many groups, despite their different social opinions and ideologies, condemned en bloc Turkey’s entry to the EC, fearing that it would have a negative impact on Turkish industry. On the extreme right wing there were fears of the impact of western culture on Turkish language, culture and education as the integration process moved forward. The Islamic right, for its part, argued that Turkey belonged to the Islamic world and for politico-cultural reasons (the undermining of cultural and national identities) could not become a member of a ‘Christian community’, apart from the loss of political influence within the Islamic bloc. The politicians of the Islamic right primarily belonged to a group of people who were familiar with traditional Turkish culture and applied Islamic rules tightly, but also knew Western culture and ways of life, which they felt to be threatening to well-known and trusted Turkish values, knowledge and securities.⁴

² İlkin op. cit. p.38.

³ See Kramer, Heinz, *Die Europäische Gemeinschaft und die Türkei*, (Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft Baden-Baden 1988, p.52.

⁴ See Werle, Rainer & Kreile, Renate, *Renaissance des Islam. Das Beispiel Türkei*, (Junius Verlag, Hamburg 1987) p.89.

The ideology of the Islamist National Salvation Party (NSP) was based on the question why a state like Turkey – a great power in the past – had in the modern period fallen into the category of underdeveloped states. The answer to this was said to be Turkey’s alienation from its own cultural inheritance, unsatisfactory industrialization and the acceptance of Western culture. The NSP declared the westernization drive of the Ottoman Empire to be the main reason for its decay. Accordingly, Turkey had to give up the “false, western point of view” and reconsider its own values. Only then would it again become “one of the strongest” countries. To regain its “national welfare” Turkey should -- so went the party’s argument -- “recover its consciousness as a Muslim society with a peculiar historical mission and realize the Godly demand for a fair Muslim community.”⁵ It also needed to engage in fast track industrialization if it wanted to achieve its full standing as a nation state, but its economic development ought to be advanced in a socially and regionally balanced way and should be based upon its own resources and industry rather than foreign input.

The economy policies of the NSP bore a strong resemblance to the right-wing extremist Nationalist Action Party: “Just like the other right-wing parties, the NSP has the desire energetically to support the emergence of an economically strong working private industry on national basis without formations of monopolies within. This also excludes the support for foreign private capital and rapprochement with the West.”⁶ In this sense the party required the termination of relations with the EC, as further approaches to the West would alienate Turkey from its Islamic cultural heritage: “Turkey ought not to be in the Common Market of the Western states but in the Common Market of the Eastern nations. Turkey is backward in relation to Westerners but advanced in relations to Easterners. If Turkey enters the Common Market under today’s conditions it will become a colony.”⁷

The right-wing group Ülkü Ocakları Birliği (Ideal Hearths Union) opened a ‘say no to the Common Market’ campaign, explaining its fears of Turkey’s entry into the EEC in these words: ‘Our country will become an open market for foreign giants and the Turkish nation will no longer be able to retain its economic, social and finally political independence.’⁸

⁵ *ibid.* pp.82-83

⁶ *ibid.* pp.83-84.

⁷ Quoted in Dankwort Rustow ‘The Roses and the Thorne’, in Dankwort Rustow and Trevor Penrose *Turkey and the Community*, The Mediterranean Challenge: V, (Sussex European Research Center, Sussex 1981) p.31.

⁸ İlkin op. cit. p.40.

Expressions of opposition by the extreme right and the extreme left were very similar. The left labor union DİSK argued that the EC ‘would obstruct economic development and condemn Turkey to live in semi-colonial conditions.’⁹ Left student groups protested against the Supplementary Protocol with slogans such as ‘We want a sovereign Turkey!’ or ‘They are the partners, we are their market!’ (*onlar ortak, biz pazar*). The left parties and their proponents hoped for the rupture of Turkey with the West, since they considered connections with Western Europe that were too close represented the danger of a colonial dependency being re-established. Therefore they stood up for Turkey’s own way of social, political and economic development, which ought to arise from the peculiarities of Turkish culture and history. The Workers’ Party said it was “100 percent against the Common Market, which will hinder our economic development and condemn Turkey to live in semi-colonial conditions”. It asserted that it was “determined to uphold the customs barriers to protect our industry, still in its infancy, against foreign oppression”.¹⁰

Further opposition to the protocol came from Turkish companies which feared, without protection, the loss of profits from import substitutions. There were also the intellectuals and bureaucrats, who kept insisting that Turkey’s development could only be achieved through etatism. Those holding these views were apparently not able to recognize the political meaning of the EC in general, and Turkish association in particular, and therefore neglected the dynamic long-term perspectives of this integration.

The Justice Party of Süleyman Demirel and the Confidence Party of Turhan Feyzioğlu were important proponents of closer association and eventual integration into the EC. Both parties held the opinion that Turkey could bring its backwardness to an end only by a close connection with Europe. They stressed that the Turkish economy could be strengthened only by reinforcement of integration. Other groups and individuals supported accession because they thought Turkey’s most serious problems – the establishment of a civil democracy and the reduction of high unemployment among them – could only be resolved through integration into Europe. These supporters, however, were not able to see the possible short term negative effects of the integration on the Turkish economy.

⁹ Kramer op. cit. p.45.

¹⁰ İlkin op. cit. p.41

The Confederation of the Turkish Employers' Association (TİSK), some chambers of commerce and some private business concerns and organizations were among the main supporters of closer Turkish integration. The Economic Development Foundation (İKV) stressed the opening of a large market for Turkey and the inflow of new technologies and important know-how arising from further integration with the EC. The foundation was also confident of the adaptability of Turkish industry: "If our industry cannot become competitive within the transition period, it is better and preferable from the standpoint of our national interests to dissolve our industry right away. It is inevitable that consumers will revolt against an industry that can survive only with protection of customs barriers."¹¹

The private sector hoped for progress through the opening of markets and accessibility to new technologies, and hence it also advocated closer integration with the EC. Corporate leaders asserted that Turkish companies were flexible and mature enough to master the difficulties of competition that would come with the Customs Union. Thus, the Ankara Chamber of Commerce endorsed a liberal economic system and the intensification of the process of association. Other business organizations argued that the Supplementary Protocol would further stimulate Turkish industrialization.¹² Overall, it can be said that the Association Agreement was endorsed by the majority of the Turkish population. However, the Supplementary Protocol was criticized by some parts of the population, who feared the negative effects on Turkey of the contractual obligations.

Different opinions concerning integration should not cause astonishment in view of the actual and potential interests involved. What were amazing, however, were the controversies, obstacles and conflicts between the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Planning Organization (SPO). These conflicts lasted for years. The SPO was afraid that a future Customs Union, which would also include tariff reductions and abolitions, would have catastrophic consequences for Turkish industry, and opted for slowing integration until Turkey's industrial basis was much stronger, and the development gap between Turkey and the EU had been reduced. This point would be reached "when sufficient foundations for such basic industries as metal, machinery production, oil and chemicals have been laid ... [and when] ... the economy ... has a structure of such strength, from a standpoint of quality, that it may adopt some basic structural characteristics peculiar now to the West European and North

¹¹ İlkın op. cit. p.41.

American countries.”¹³ For its part the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed the political aspects of the association and advocated the deepening of relations. Of the economic fears of the SPO the ministry stated: “We cannot take pride in an industry we were unable to improve in 27 years.”¹⁴ These showdowns in the governments help to explain the inactivity in the EC’s policy towards Turkey in the following years.

Shortly after the beginning of the Transitional Stage, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, İhsan Çaçayangil. was still optimistic about the potential effects of the further integration: “Now an enormous market is opening up with high purchasing power under acceptable conditions for all possible products and finished goods of Turkish exporters, industrialists and entrepreneurs. With the entrance into the Transitional Phase we are not yet members of the EC. On the contrary, we are still at the beginning.”¹⁵ The fact that the same minister demanded an amendment to the Supplementary Protocol in another government coalition in spring 1976, and said that Turkey’s industrial and economic development could be threatened by the application of the protocol, proved that this expression did not correspond with the reality of the regulations and effects of the protocol.

In the Republican People’s Party government that came to power under Bulent Ecevit’s leadership in 1978, national independence and national interests were very strongly emphasized. This led to a more critical position being adopted towards association, which can be recognized in remarks made in the following government declaration: “Our present relations with the European Economic Community ... create certain obstacles for our development and industrialization efforts and prevent Turkey from pursuing a foreign trade policy in relation to the developed nations that fits well with its own economic and political interests ... but our government ... will strive to give the Turkish economy a structure which is not crushed by relations with the Common Market and which strengthens the independence of Turkey.”¹⁶

Attitudes on the effects on Turkish industry of association were of great importance. The initially positive attitude of industry leaders began to weaken in the 1970s as the economic

¹² Kramer op. cit. p.45.

¹³ İlkin, Selim op. cit. p.42.

¹⁴ ibid.

¹⁵ Kramer op. cit. p.54.

¹⁶ Kramer ibid. pp.70-71.

situation in Turkey worsened. Although most industrialists still supported Turkey's further integration into the community, they turned against one important step forward – the Customs Union. In April 1976 the presidents of 11 prominent industrial chambers in Izmir published a letter demanding the modification of the Supplementary Protocol. In particular, they wrote, the goal of a customs union with the EC at the end of the transitional stage should be abolished. They wanted a system “which would definitely not interfere with the use by Turkey of instruments rendered necessary by our industrialization policy (e.g. customs tariffs, quantitative restrictions, export promotion measures, economic relations with non-EEC countries) at the moment and to the degree judged necessary by Turkey.”¹⁷

These expressions point to a deep contradiction within Turkey. On one hand, Turkey committed itself to the Association Agreement as a means of liberalizing its economy. On the other, it declared a policy of import substitution with the goal of achieving self-sufficiency in nearly all Turkish industries by 1980. By doing so, Turkey, in its criticism of the Association Agreement, did not recognize that the increasing foreign trade deficit was the result of a domestic oriented economic policy that did not attach sufficient weight to the questions of export structure and export performance.

Military intervention

In the late 70s political and social tensions in Turkey reached the point of a civil war like situation. Terrorism, political polarization, crisis and political violence were on the daily agenda. More than 5,000 people became the victims of political murder. In this situation the military intervened, for the third time in Turkey's history as a multiparty democracy, during the early hours of 12 September, 1980. This intervention complicated relations between Turkey and the EC. After assurances given by the military authorities about the reestablishment of democratic institutions, respect for human rights and the preservation of foreign relations, the EC decided to continue its relations with Turkey. However, with no signs that democratic institutions would soon be restored, and with the military taking a harder stance, EC criticism soon began to mount. In October 1981 the European Commission decided not to pass the Fourth Financial Protocol to the Council of the European Community. As the protocol could not operate without a decision of the council, EC financial aid to

¹⁷ Penrose op. cit. p.66.

Turkey was de facto frozen. The association went through problems; it was not as successful as expected. Especially in the fields of free movement of people and the agrarian and textile sectors were problematic. But the EC financial aid for Turkey went on without any major problems – until 1981. So the last positive element of the Association was blocked, too. From autumn 1981 onwards the association was actually frozen.

The first elections since military intervention finally held on 6 November 1983 brought Turgut Özal's Motherland Party (ANAP) into government. In his first major statement as Prime Minister, on 19 December 1983, Özal called membership of the EC the "ultimate aim" while also stressing that "we shall act in a spirit of considering the balance of interests as the basis relations at all stages."¹⁸ Following the restoration of normal democratic life, Turkish political parties and interest groups worked even harder for the further integration of Turkey into the EC, especially after the local elections of 1984. The social democratic parties went through the most interesting transformation. Surprisingly, just like the conservative parties, they started to advocate EC membership. The reason for this change was obvious: EC membership was essential for the consolidation of democracy in Turkey and the prevention of further military intervention. This view was clearly reflected in the opinions of the Republican People's Party under Bülent Ecevit's leadership. The Islamic right, however, remained faithful to its attitudes. The Welfare (Refah) Party under Necmettin Erbakan was the successor to the National Order Party and the National Salvation Party and retained their policies on the issue of approaches to the EU. Its opposition to EC membership was strongly rooted in the bad historical experiences of the Muslim Turkish people with the West. It took the view that the EC was a 'Christian community'. In its party program from 1991 the party called for stronger relations with countries that had religious, cultural and historical connections with Turkey: it also sought the building of a 'Islamic Common Market'.¹⁹

Labor unions and employer groups, however, supported EC membership. Türk-İş and the employers' association TİSK considered membership the only guarantee of increasing industrialization, increasing prosperity and the strengthening of union rights and parliamentary democracy. Industry and business lobby groups such as TÜSİAD (Turkish Industrials and Businessmen Association), TOBB (Union of Turkish Chambers of Industry

¹⁸ Klaus-Detlev Grothusen, 'Außenpolitik' in Klaus-Detlev Grothusen ed. *Türkei* (Südosteuropa-Handbuch, Band 5 Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1985) pp.167-168.

¹⁹ See Ridvan Karluk *Avrupa Birliği ve Türkiye* (Beta Basım Yayın, Eskişehir 1994) p.344.

and Commerce) and the IKV (Economic Development Foundation) also argued strongly for EC membership. They were particularly encouraged by export successes after the economic liberalization program in 24 January, 1980. This program was kept by the military government and furthered by the ANAP government successfully. The same liberalization, however, weakened the influence of the small business sector and its influence as an interest group on the foreign and economic policy of Turkey was reduced. Turkish business circles shared the conviction that Association and eventual EC membership would push forward the process of economic modernization. They believed that the pressure of competition from the Western European competitors would increase the economic efficiency of Turkish industry, improve the distribution of resources and the incomes, and therefore increase the international competitive advantage of the Turkish economy and industry. Therefore the reinforcement of the integration into the EC was seen as a guarantee for the pursuit of the “right” development and economic policy.²⁰ In addition to this, the Turkish economic circles hoped for the transfer of European innovations, technologies and know-how. Furthermore, Turkey could become a “bridge” for the joint venture development of markets in the Near and Middle East

The Association Agreement between Turkey and the European Community was deficient in several important fields such as free movement of people, textile sector, agrarian sector. Therefore the Motherland Party government decided to apply for full membership and satisfy the necessary prerequisites for this important historical step. On 14 April 1987, Turkey applied for full EC membership under Article 237 of the EEC Agreement, which enables every European state to apply. The Turkish Ambassador to the EC, Özdem Sanberk, explained the reasons for the application in the following words: “We felt it was necessary to remove the general uncertainty surrounding EC-Turkish relations and reinforce the consensus about becoming fully European, in order that the policy of economic reorientation and political and social modernization might succeed ... Indeed, the opening of these negotiations should reassure the Turkish people that they are at the first stage of an irreversible chain of events leading to full EC membership ... We are convinced, that we must prepare for the future, and implement the measures adopted in the framework of a coherent timetable that clearly demonstrates the economic, social and political benefits to the Turkish people.”²¹ In Turkey the application was endorsed with jubilation not just because of the positive

²⁰ Kramer op. cit. p.21.

²¹ Marc Paoloni ‘The Outlook for EC-Turkish Relations’, in Mary Strang and Arlene Redmond eds. *Turkey and the European Community* (Forum Europe, Brussels, 1991) p.42.

implications but because acceptance would mean the endorsement by the EC of Turkey's 'European' nature.

On 18 December, 1989, in the context of the Turkish application, the European Commission reported on the structure and development of the Turkish economy. The European Council endorsed this report on 5 February, 1990. The Commission's report confirmed Turkey's 'eligibility' for membership, adding that relations should continue to be developed within the Association Agreement. However, due to the difficult economic and political situation in Turkey, and due to the realization of the EC domestic market planned for 1 January 1993, no new accession negotiations were entered into. The Commission Report, that is, the response by the EC, was not what Turkey had hoped for. According to Eric Rouleau, the former French ambassador to Turkey, the EC ambassadors in Ankara were "overwhelmed by the unfurling of protests, bitter reproaches and accusations of racist discrimination and anti-Muslim prejudices directed at them by government representatives, political parties and the media alike."²²

Although Turkey's disappointment was perhaps justified, the government knew that the adoption of EC obligations would cause economic difficulties. The level of Turkey's integration into the EC was not much higher in 1987 than it had been in 1973 during the process of ratification of the Supplementary Protocol. Consequently, the government soon took a pragmatic stand, declaring that it welcomed the acceptance of Turkey's 'eligibility' and the Commission's proposals for the deepening of relations. The delay of the EC Commission's decision and the Turkish disappointment after its presentation therefore could not influence Turkey's orientation towards Europe in a negative way.²³ But on the road to integration there was another step to take: the Customs Union with the EC. Turkey soon began to take the necessary steps to realize this, as it hoped that the Customs Union would finally open the door to full EC membership.

In the following years the EC took some definite decisions that were to make her closer to Union. The EU Council in Copenhagen in June 1993 was of main importance. According to the Copenhagen Criteria, declared at the meeting of the EU Council in Copenhagen in June 1993, all candidate countries had to achieve the following goals:

²² Eric Rouleau, 'The Challenges to Turkey' in: *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (1993) 5, p.116.

1. Stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for minorities;
2. The establishment of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union;
3. The ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

Consent to and criticism of the Customs Union

Negotiations for the Customs Union with the EU began in 1994 and were finalized on 6 March, 1995 at the meeting of the Turkey-EU Association Council, with the adoption of decision 1/95 on the completion by 31 December 1995 of the Customs Union between Turkey and the EU in industrial and processed agricultural goods. The signing of the agreement triggered off a lively debate in Turkey on the pro and cons of the Customs Union. The negotiations were sharply criticized. This criticism was directed at the fact that the EU had made firm commitments to candidates from central and Eastern Europe whose economic, political, social and legal structures were relatively underdeveloped, while Turkey was expected to wait even though it had shown that its economy could meet the obligations of the Customs Union and its democracy was more strongly developed. The Turkish government also criticized the EU's contradictory policy on Turkey. It had gone ahead with the Customs Union Agreement, and had thus accepted Turkey's further integration into the economic, social and legal system of the EU. At the same time, despite contractual connections and obligations, there was no sign of Turkey being merged into future European planning. Politicians of all parties criticized the government and the customs agreement, because they thought that Turkey had performed badly during the negotiations. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mümtaz Soysal, spoke of the "Europe passion" (*Avrupa tutkusu*) of the government, as the result of which the opportunities to improve Turkey's position in the Customs Union had been lost.²⁴

Ideological opposition to the whole idea of integration with Europe primarily came from the Welfare Party, which criticized the Agreement as a "surrender" that would turn

²³ Marc Paoloni op. cit. pp.17-18.

Turkey into a European “colony”. The party said it would dissolve this agreement as soon as it came into government. In fact, after Necmettin Erbakan and Tansu Çiller formed the coalition government of the Welfare Party and the True Path Party on 8 July, 1996, representatives of the Welfare Party avowed that they had actually always stood for the Customs Union and EU membership on condition that Europe recognized Turkey as an equal partner. The reason for this change could be seen in contemporary political and economic realities – the Turkish economy’s dependence on trade with the EU, the impossibility of giving up relations with the EU states in favor of relations with Islamic states and the role, as well, of the mainly Western-oriented Turkish elites. The right extremist Nationalist Action Party also criticized the agreement, saying that Turkey ought not to go into a Customs Union with the European Union when it had not developed a Common Market with the Turkic Republics.

While regarding the creation of the Customs Union as a necessary and positive step, the opposition Motherland Party criticized the negotiating process. The chairman of the party, Mesut Yılmaz, said the EU still had not yet realized some of its obligations – including the question of free movement and the financial protocols – to Turkey. “To celebrate the customs union as if it were a victory would give Europe the idea that Turkey is satisfied, whereas in fact the important thing [for us] is that the customs union should be a vehicle [moving Turkey] in the direction of full membership of the EU.”²⁵ Other opposition parties were also critical. Parties on the left feared that the union would make it more difficult for the government to increase its already small social welfare budget. It was also feared that wages would be badly affected. Doğu Perinçek, chairman of the Workers’ Party, asserted that the Customs Union Agreement had not been signed between two equal sides but that Turkey had been given the role of a “site for dirty industry and a store of cheap labor“. Perinçek argued that Turkey could compete in none of the larger industrial sectors. Rıdvan Budak, the leader of the worker trade union DİSK, said he hoped that Turkey would join the Europe of social rights, not the Europe of capital. He also stressed the importance of human rights, liberties and trade union rights.²⁶

²⁴ Mümtaz Soysal, ‘Tutku’, *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, 19 (1995) 178, p.17.

²⁵ ‘The Customs Union: For Better or Worse?’ *Briefing* no. 1032, March 13, 1995, pp.6-7. .

²⁶ *ibid.* p.7.

Turkey's large-scale enterprises strongly supported the Customs Union. They regarded foreign investment as being essential in the process of integrating the Turkish economy into the world economy. Arguably, the desire to participate in this world-wide process of globalization was far stronger than the fear of Turkey becoming dependent on foreign economic interests. In fact, Turkish enterprises were already exporting a considerable quantity of goods to the EU, and in technological terms were partly comparable to European companies.

While mainstream trade associations such as TÜSİAD (Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği- Turkish Industrials and Businessmen Association), TOBB (Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği- Turkish Chambers and Stockmarkets Union) and İSO (İstanbul Sanayi Odası- Istanbul Industry Chamber) welcomed the Customs Union, the Islamic-conservative trade association MÜSİAD (Müstakil İşadamları Derneği- Independent Businessmen Association) warned about its inherent uncertainties: "We hope that in endangering the economic and social well-being of 60,000,000 Turkish people, the future of Cyprus in national foreign policy and even in future the unity of the country in connection with the question of the Southeast, the government has done its sums well."²⁷ The conservative trade union, HAK-İŞ, also criticized the Customs Union, fearing a rapid increase of the numbers of the unemployed.

The one-sided adjustment to the EU's existing common customs tariff, which excluded Turkey from participation in the decision-making process, implied that Turkey was expected to effect a partial renunciation of its sovereignty without recognizable political compensations being made by the EU. Considering the importance and the meshing of the external trade relations with foreign policy, the journal *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi* judged that the delivery of decisions in Turkish foreign trade to the European Union were the delivery of sovereignty in foreign policy itself.²⁸ Indeed, the fact that Turkey had to follow decisions taken within EU committees without having the right to take part in this decision-making process met with broad Turkish criticism. Articles 16, and 52 to 64 of the Customs Union Agreement were regarded as the criteria that Turkey would have to realize the same obligations as the EU members. In December 1995 numerous Turkish university professors

²⁷ *ibid.* p.6.

²⁸ 'Gümrük Birliği'ne Hayır! Gümrük Birliğine Karşı Kamu Vicdanına Sesleniş' *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, 20 (1996) 187, pp.46-47.

from eight large universities issued a declaration arguing against the Customs Union, and demanding the institution instead of a foreign trade zone, which would not limit Turkey's rights as much as the Customs Union had done²⁹

The fact that the Customs Union would result in closer economic cooperation between Turkey and the EU was also received positively. However, the discrepancy between the economic and political aspects of Turkey's EU integration would be increased: Turkey would become one of the most important EU trade partners because of the Customs Union, but would remain in the last category for possible EU accession. In Turkish circles it was asserted³⁰ that the Customs Union Agreement had been reached without Turkish accession being considered at all, and that such matters as the free movement of people (due in 1986 according to the Supplementary Protocol) and the disbursement of funds to support and prepare the Turkish economy for the Customs Union, in accordance with the Financial Protocols, were not even discussed.

With the Customs Union agreement finally being realized on 1 January 1996, Turkey took an important step towards further integration with the EU. For the first time a non-member EU-state was bound to the EU by the Customs Union. Up to this time all new member states had joined the EU first and entered into the Customs Union only after a transitional phase designed to minimize disadvantages. But with Turkey, the process was different. The customs agreement was reached first, and Ankara received only a small amount of financial help to cushion the effects. Nevertheless, Turkey somehow managed to prove that its economy – despite crises and long phases of negative development – could cope with the short-term effects of joining the union and remain on the road to integration into the EU.

Most Turkish opinion-makers clearly wanted Turkey to stay on this road. However, the EU Commission's "Agenda 2000" of July 16, 1997, while confirming Turkey's eligibility for membership, excluded it from this historical process. Clearly, Turkey was not being judged by the same criteria that were applied to other candidates for membership and the Turkish government criticized the EU for its discriminatory approach. The Luxembourg EU Summit from 11-12 December, 1997, confirmed Turkey's eligibility and invited it to the

²⁹ See 'Gümrük Birliği Hakkında Bildiri' in *Atatürkçü Düşünce*, December 1995, pp.38-41.

³⁰ *Atatürkçü Düşünce: Gümrük Birliği Hakkında Bildiri*, Ankara December 1995, p.41, and Korkut Boratav: *Yaşasın Gümrük Birliği*, in: *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, 19 (1995) 178, p.21

European Conference in March 1998 for the preparation of the candidate countries for EU membership. but this invitation was linked to economic and political pre-conditions which Turkey had to fulfill. This revealed that the EU regarded Turkey as a country to have good relations with – no more and no less. The Turkish public and the government were deeply disappointed by this decision in the Luxembourg Summit Declaration. The government issued a statement saying that although the association relations would be kept alive, Turkey would not debate topics outside the existing contracts, that is the Customs Union Agreement until the EU took an attitude more in favor of Turkey.

The EU Council meeting held in Helsinki on 10-11 December 1999, was of great importance for Turkey. It was officially recognized as a candidate for membership but was the only one of 13 candidates not to be invited to the accession negotiations. Nevertheless, the results of Helsinki were welcomed by most Turkish opinion makers and a new era and a process of transformation began within Turkey. The further democratization of the country was promoted with some amendments and reforms of the Turkish Constitution. During the autumn of 2001 and the summer of 2002 the Turkish Grand National Assembly worked hard on reform legislation that was necessary to meet the Copenhagen Criteria for EU accession. These reforms included abolition of the death penalty, the permission to use and learn the mother tongues and the possibility for television and radio programs to be made in these languages.

On 13 June 2002, more than 100 labor unionists and academics published a declaration in the Turkish daily *Cumhuriyet* in which they accused the proponents of EU membership of working against the economic, cultural, legal and political independence of Turkey. But other voices were heard, too. In July the same year 175 non-government organizations came together under the leadership of the IKV in order to urge the government to speed up the accession process. Their message was that ‘Turkey’s place is in the European Union.’ According to a poll conducted by the opinion research foundation TESEV more than 64 per cent of 3060 people polled in 17 Turkish cities advocated Turkey’s entry into the EU. Turkey’s EU membership went on to become one of the most important topics in the campaign for the parliamentary elections to be held on 3 November 2002. However, while most parties advocated Turkish membership and considered it as the most important step on the way to modernization, the Nationalist Action Party criticized the EU for not being

sensitive towards Turkey, and asserted that it wanted a membership that was build on honor and equality. The Workers' Party remained critical of the EU.

The Happiness Party, however, showed a remarkable change. It actually helped to pass the necessary legislative changes in Parliament in August 2002 thus bringing Turkey a step closer to EU membership. At the same time, however, it revealed that it did not consider the EU as a modernizing process and that the EU was not the only alternative for Turkey. Nevertheless, the fact that it stressed the importance of being an equal part of the EU revealed a change of heart. Another, even more radical change took place within the Justice and Development Party (AKP), whose predecessor was the Virtue Party. This party stressed that the EU membership was the “most important aim” of its foreign policy.

The elections of 3 November 2002 fundamentally changed the domestic political landscape. The Justice and Development (AK) Party, which had been founded only 15 months before the elections, received 34.1 per cent of the total vote and, on this basis, 363 of the 550 seats in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, thereby paving the way for the first single-party government for more than a decade. The Republican People's Party received 19.5 percent of the vote. None of the other 18 parties succeeded in passing the 10 percent threshold required to enter Parliament. The day after the elections AK Party leader Tayyip Erdoğan proclaimed that cooperation with the International Monetary Union Fund would be continued, and that the most important duty of the new government would be focusing on the process of accession to the European Union. A few days later senior figures in the Turkish Industrials and Businessmen Association (TÜSİAD) made their way to Brussels in order to underline the association's wish for accession. TÜSİAD also issued full-page advertisements in newspapers in Europe and the USA to raise public awareness abroad of the Turkish point of view. Two weeks after the elections, Tayyip Erdoğan visited nearly all-15 EU states in order to convince them to give Turkey a concrete starting point for accession negotiations at the forthcoming meeting of the European Council (December 2002). Whereas the leader of the banned Welfare Party, Necmettin Erbakan, had made his first international trips to Egypt, Libya and Iran, the first countries Mr. Erdoğan visited were Italy and Greece. This revealed a clear change in attitude.

The European Council, meeting in Copenhagen on 12-13 December 2002, enabled the accession of 10 new states under the slogan of “One Europe”. However, Turkey was again

asked to wait a little longer. December 2004 was given as the date when Turkey's readiness for accession would be assessed. If Turkey passed the test, accession negotiations could start in 2005. Although the newly elected government, along with opinion-makers, was disappointed by this decision it soon took a pragmatic view, asserting that the "EU had never said never to Turkey" and declaring that the Copenhagen Criteria were in fact the "Ankara Criteria" that Turkey would soon realize for its own sake. Turkish public opinion mostly agreed with these sentiments. Certainly Europe's dream of one Europe 'from the Atlantic to the Urals' cannot be realized without Turkey. Knowing this, the Turkish people keep on hoping that one day the dream of membership will become a reality.

Conclusions

From the very beginning there have been different perceptions about the association with the EEC/EC/EU within Turkey. These views have ranged from popular support to deep criticism. The Association Agreement was welcomed by the majority of the Turkish people. However, the Supplementary Protocol was criticized by some people because of possible negative effects. After the military intervention of 12 September, 1980, most political parties and interest groups worked for the further integration of Turkey into the EC, as it seemed critical if parliamentary democracy were to be consolidated. The Customs Union was broadly criticized because of the implied loss of Turkish sovereignty, but most Turks still managed to remain committed to the ideal of EU membership. They regarded EU membership as confirmation of Turkey's European identity and its acceptance as part of European civilization. This psychological factor has to be understood as an important element within the relations between Turkey and the EU.

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