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The Underlying Reasons for Turkey's Application for the Membership of the E.C.

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to examine the underlying reasons for Turkish Membership of the EC. The case is examined in three parts; the cultural reason, named as 'to be European', the Greece reason which can be named as political reason and economic reasons. This study will try to explain the above reasons in a historical as well as a critical approach and try to highlight the main obstacles between Turkey and the EC in the process.

Key words: Turkey, European Community, EC, Turkish Membership of the EC.

Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birligi'ne Üyelik Muracaatinin Temel Sebepleri

Özet: Türkiye'nin Avrupa'ya siyasi ve kültürel manada yönelişi aslı itibariyla Osmanlı'nın son yüzyılında vuku bulmuştur ve bu durum Cumhuriyetin kurulması ve Atatürk Devrimleriyle daha da hızlanarak devam etmiştir. Atatürk Devrimleri Osmanlıdan kalma siyasi, sosyal ve economik sistemleri temellerinden degiştirdiği gibi Türkiye'yi Batıya yaklaştıran yeni kurumlar da inşa etmiştir. Genç Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ilk yillardan itibaren mümkün olduğunca siyasal, sosyal, kültürel ve askeri Batılı kuruluşlara üye olmaya çalışmış ve cereyan eden her türlü faaliyetlere de iştirak etmiştir. Ancak Türkiye'nin bugünkü adıyla Avrupa Birligi ile resmi ilişkisi 31 Temmuz 1959 yılında yaptığı üyelik başvurusu ile başlamıştır. Bu makalede Türkiye'nin AB'ye girmek istemesinin temel saikleri anlatılacaktır. Aşağıda görüleceği üzere Türkiye'nin uzun yıllardır emsali görülmemiş gayretine rağmen halen Türkiye AB ilişkileri ve bu ilişkilerin geleceği pek de parlak gözükmemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Avrupa Birliği, AB, Türkiyenin Avrupa Birliğine Üyeliği

Introduction

The turning to the West initially had begun in the late decades of the Ottoman Empire and continued with more speedy and fundamental Kemalist reforms. Kemalist reforms had substantıonally changed the political, cultural and economic systems as well as created new state apparatuses bringing Turkey close to the West. From the early years of the young republic Turkey try to join every organisation and take part in every European events where it has been possible. However, Turkey's formal journey towards the EC started on 31st July 1959 with its application for an associate membership. This article will suggest that Turkey's historical, cultural/ideological (Turkey's selfidentification with Europe by the Turkish elite). economic, political and military linkages to Europe, determined Turkey's policy towards the EC which will be examined broadly in the context of this this study. The findings of this study will show that despite the unpresented continues desire by Turkish ruling elite Turkey's hope to join the EC which is now called EU as a full member is still look bleak.

The reader should note that thruought the article the EC (European Community) instead of EEC and EU. This has been done for simple practicle reason. The article deal with the main reasons of Turkish desire for the membership of the Community which in the beginning was called as European Economic Communities (EEC) and then to be known as the EC and now EU. Most of the references and official publications used in this article use the EEC or EC, only the ones published in very recent years use EU. Since the 3 terms have been used for the same purpose in defferent times, in aiming to prevent any misunderstanding and confusion we use the EC as common reference in the whole article instead of using them separetly.

a) To be European

"There is no second civilization, civilization means the European Civilization and it must be imported with all its roses and its thorns"

Abdullah Cevdet

Turkey applied to the European Economic Community (EEC) for an Association Agreement on 31st July 1959, some two years after the Treaty of Rome was signed by the Six (Germany, The Netherlands, France, Italy, Belgium, Luxemburg and, more importantly, some two months after Greece's application to the Community. However, the Ankara Agreement for an Associate membership was concluded in September 1963. Later, in 1987, despite the negative mode in the capitals of Europe and in Brussels Turkey also applied for full membership of the EC which turned down by Brussels in December 1989 and ratified in 20 January 1990.

First of all, this must be said here: 'This approach was in line with Turkey's western-oriented foreign policy in the post-war period, a policy which had taken her into the Council of Europe, the OECD and NATO.' (Manisali, 1979, p.16). Nevertheless, it is generally accepted, both in Turkey and in the West, that this move was politically rather than economically motivated. May be that is why in both applications the economic consequences for Turkey and the moude in the western capitals were not considered as it should have been done. As the retired chairman of the country's largest industrial group indicates, 'Both in 1959 and in 1987 the desire to become European was the main driving force in Turkey for wishing to be a member of the EC.' (Ozal 1988 p.3).

To sum up the determination of Ankara to join the Community, one needs to know Turkish policy-makers' attitudes towards Europe and the Community, '.... for Turks of the late twentieth century that there is no second community. If Turkey is to become a constituent part of any wider group of nations, it must become, and be accepted as a member of the European Community.' (IMF Survey: May 1987 pp.151 - 54).

When Brussels offered Ankara more limited trade and aid arrangements which operated in other parts of the Mediterranean such as Tunisia and Israel, the disappointment in Ankara was great and the question suddenly raised was, are we not European? That attitude was to take the Turkish policy-makers towards a decision to move for an association which aimed at full membership of the EC rather than otherwise, i.e. limited trade arrangements. This feeling was repeatedly stressed in Ankara and after the conclusion of the Agreement the outcry in the mass media was, 'We entered Europe'. The government particularly was emphasizing the Agreement as a victory towards Turkey's integration with Europe. **The same attitude in some part of the bureaucratic elite and more importantly by the political leaders of AKP (Justice and Development Party) government were to be seen after 17 December 2005 agreement in Brussels (**Hurriyet 18.12.2005**). Despite the agreement was not offering any guaranty for the membership nor any specific time for the discussions on the inclusion the political leaders celebrated the vocation in the centre of Ankara by bonfire. The Prime Minister acted like a conqueror despite the fact was that Turkey had to give a lot of concessions namely in Cyprus, minority and human rights issues.** This shows that Turkish ruling elite's behavior is always same when it comes to Europe regardless their political stand. It was same in 1963 in 1987 and in 2005.

For instance, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Turan Feyzioglu, after the signature of the Agreement, said in his speech, 'With this Agreement, Turkey's long-standing efforts to become a European State gained a new victory. The desire of Turkey to be a member of the Community is not based on short-term simple economic benefits. With this Agreement, it has once again more strongly proven that the borders of Europe end with our eastern and southern borders' (Alkin, E., 1987, p.45).

On the other side, the Turkish Premier Ismet lnonu described the conclusion of the Agreement as an important turning point in Turkish history. He said, 'Today we have signed an Agreement which is going to tie Turkey with Europe forever. This union was concluded because of historical and geographical realities' (Alkin, E., 1987, p.45).

The Turkish bureaucrats and the other elite also saw the Agreement as a breakthrough on the road to European identity. However, in M.A. Birand's view, 'No-one had the belief that Turkey would be able to complete its obligations which would come into force later.' It was also the generally shared view that the Ankara Agreement was concluded to link up with Europe and we will consider the obligations when the time comes. In fact, Turkey did not even know what it was signing in terms of the economic obligations ('Special Economic Report 1989', p.230,

(hereafter Special Report)). All they wanted was to know that Turkey was on the trail of Europe.

Although geographically only 3% of Turkey is situated in the European continent, both the Prime Minister and his Deputy emphasized the geographical terms along with the historical and cultural ones. Indeed, the official view in Turkey has always been to stress the European character of both the Ottoman Empire and its heir, Turkey. According to the official view, the Ottoman Empire was one of the major European powers and also the Empire was the sick man of Europe, not of Asia or the Middle East, but of Europe, which underlines its European character ('Special Economic Report 1989', p.230).

Another argument maintains that even if Turkey is not European, it has been Europeanizing itself since the late 18th century. After the birth of the Republic, it completely opted for European culture, especially with Kemalist ambitious reforms which aimed at the transformation of Turkish society from an Eastern culture to a Western one. Turkey also tried to prove its European vocation by joining every possible Western organization such as OECD, NATO and OCSE, so Turkey could not be left out of the most important European organization, a European union. Nevertheless, politically, it would be an historical contradiction, in modern Turkish history, if Turkey had not taken its place among the European nations. This political consideration or feeling has always dominated Turkish relationships with the EC right from the beginning up to now. Premier Suleyman Demirel, in his speech in May 1967 in Brussels, explained why Turkey wanted to join the Community. He said, 'Turkey is a country which decided to turn to Europe a few centuries ago.... However, turning to the West fundamentally and in every respect rooted by the foundation of the Republic.... Turkey has always considered itself as an inseparable part of Europe. Turkey sees the EEC as the foundation of the united Europe of the future (Cankorel, B., 1987, p.59).

All these points clearly show that the political and social importance of the Community have always been the main driving force behind the Turkish desire to be accepted into Europe. This should also be seen as a continuation of the Turkish search for a new identity, which was totally directed to Europe after the foundation of the Turkish Republic. Moreover, 'Turkey's European identity, it seems, was taken for granted particularly by the EC-Turkey Association Agreement of 1963 which envisaged eventual full membership. In Ankara's view, the EC should appreciate this European vocation and the desire to put the final seal on its long-lasting orientation to the west.

To be accepted as a European is the most important component of Turkey's long march towards the European Union. Acceptance into the Union for at least some of the Turkish elite means a European passport and a registration of Turkey's European character once and for all. For the elite, since Europe symbolizes civilization, progress and development, it is the ultimate goal or the ideal to be attained. Therefore, in a western journalist words "Turkey enthusiastically joins every European vacation from political, economic, military platforms to football events and Eurovision Song Contest" (Barchard, D., 1985, p.58). This pro-European group contains politicians, bureaucrats, academics, business elite and more importantly writers and media commentators who have great influence on Turkish public. There is also opposition to the above may be in greater number but somehow with less voice.

Although by the time of the second application for a full membership in 1987, Turkey was more conscious of the economic features of the Community and Turkish economic benefits, the political impulse was still the most important indicator. When he submitted the application, Mr. Ali Bozer, the State Secretary for Community Affairs, stressed that 'Turkey has been striving to integrate with Europe in every respect and with this application it has again demonstrated its desire to be part of Europe' (Birand, M., 1990, p189).

b) The Greek Factor

The Greek move towards the Community was another important factor in the formulation of the Turkish application for membership of the EC. As a matter of fact, 'Turkey's application to the Community on 31st July 1959 was mainly a response to the similar application made by Greece two months earlier and can be understood in terms of the long-standing conflict between the two countries' (Birand, M., 1990, p189).

The history shaping the Greek-Turkish relationship has been rooted in hatred, antagonism, suspicion and rivalry. Greece had been under Ottoman rule for more than four centuries, until the end of the 19th century, and then had shaped its nation state identity through its struggle against the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, Turkey gained

nation state status only at the end of an armed struggle against occupying Greek forces. 'Turkish people refer to this as their War of National Liberation, whereas the Greeks still recall the 1919-1922 period as the 'years of catastrophe" (Barchard, D., 1985, p.58).

Again, between 1955 and 1974, Turkey and Greece came very close to a war many times because of various disputes, mainly over the Cyprus question and the sovereignty of the Aegean Sea. 'The extent of territorial waters, continental shelf and air space and the arming by Greece of the Islands.... Each side holds the other responsible for this deterioration and accuses them of expansionism in the region.' (Association Agreement). Therefore, although Turkey and Greece have been in the same Western Bloc and are members of various organizations, their relations have always been shaped by competition and rivalry.

The Turkish traditional foreign policy has been based on watching Greece closely. This is not just because of historical reasons, but also because the two countries have similar political and economic interests. Turkish and Greek export items are similar and they share the same market. These and other reasons led Ankara to believe that Greece should be watched very closely, especially in Europe. Therefore Turkish policy-makers, particularly those in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, believed that Turkey had to be presented on each and every platform where Greeks figured.

Naturally, when Greece made its application to the EC, Turkey could not stay out. Although in 1959 the EC was an unknown entity and the implication of Turkey's membership had not been considered in depth, what mattered was the possible damage that Greece could inflict on Turkey in the Western Alliance if it were to monopolize the European arena, which was thought to be an important prospective site for Turkish-Greek rivalry (Special Report p.230). Therefore, at the time the Greek application was tabled, the mood in Ankara was one of panic. Birand describes the news 'as if it were a bomb in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs'. He said, 'The Foreign Secretary, Fatin Rustu Zorlu, was very angry and after he told off his bureaucrats, he ordered them to complete an application similar to the Greek one immediately' (Additional Protocol,).

When a Cabinet meeting was held to discuss the situation, the Foreign Secretary was to put his proposals on the table and suggest that, politically, Turkey must apply for an associate membership sooner rather than later. All the Cabinet members agreed with him. However, Agaoglu, Secretary of State, displayed little hesitation and proposed a deeper consideration of the application. In his view, 'It is not yet known the destiny of the EEC and, in the future, the membership could bring some obligations on Turkey. Therefore the decision to set up membership should be considered deeply.' The Premier, Adnan Menderes, replied to him angrily, asking what he meant. 'In spite of Greek admission into the Community, would Turkey stay on the sidelines? The Turkish Republic cannot stay out of this. What else can there be that they (the Greeks) could handle but we could not?' (Association Agreement). Next day, 31st July 1959, in Brussels and in six other capitals of the Member States, Turkish ambassadors were to submit the application letter.

All the indicators clearly showed that if there had not been a Greek application, Turkey would have taken much longer to decide what kind of relationship to establish with the Community. The Turkish application was also modeled on that adopted by Greece. In fact, the Turkish application was no more than an adapted translation of the Greek application, with a few minor changes in the text. Consequently, Turkey signed the Agreement some two years after Greece, in 1963.

Since then, the conflict between Turkey and Greece has been one of the determinant aspects of Turkish policy within the EC.

When the Greek government decided to apply for full membership in June 1975, Ankara was fearful of the possibility that Greece would eventually gain entry. There were reservations as to whether the Community, which included Greece, could be impartial on the Greco-Turkish conflict. Turkey, therefore, sought assurances on these points. The Commission recognized the importance of the Community's traditional policy of maintaining a political balance between the two rivals. The Commission also recognized that 'The prospect of Greek membership raises the problem of the disagreements between Greece and Turkey' 18 (Provisional Protocol Annex, p.7). Therefore the Commission stressed its opinion on the Greek application for membership of January 1976 that 'The European Community is not

and should not become a party to the disputes between Turkey and Greece' (Provisional Protocol Annex, pp.7-8).

Later, in 1979, when the Demirel government declared that it would apply for full membership again, the fear of Greece entry into the Community was regarded as the most important reason for the early, immature declaration of the application for full membership. However, this decision had to be postponed because of the military coup in September 1980. After the military coup, the EC suspended its relations with Turkey until the first general election was held and a civil government came into power in 1983.

As a matter of fact, 'Since 1981, Greece has used the EC institutions to harm the Turkish interest. This has ranged from the continuous use of the meetings of the European Political Cooperation mechanism as a forum to promote the Greek cause on Cyprus to blocking every advance in EC-Turkey relations and sponsoring by Greek Parliamentarians of a large number of anti-Turkish resolutions in the European Parliament, such as the Kurdish and Armenian questions, and other resolutions about Turkey's democratic future and violation of human rights in Turkey (Birand, 1990, pp.251-270). All these clearly influenced the Turkish policy-makers' decision to apply earlier than the envisaged time. Although the mood in Brussels was against the Turkish move for full membership and the time was immature, the Turkish government made the application on 14th April 1987 on the basis that it has the right for full membership which is envisaged by the Association Agreement (Association Agreement, Article 4). The main reason for this move was regarded as that of the negative effects of Greece on Turkish-EC relationships. Turkey was in fear of Greece greater influence on the Community and also wanted to apply for full membership before the Community complite its second enlargements. As a matter of fact the same reason that pushed Ankara for the application later became one of the main reasons for the Community to reject the Ankara application for full membership.

c) Economic Factors

As illustrated so far, Ankara's struggle for membership of the Community has been an expression of political and social choice of identity in both foreign and internal policy. The economic factors in this struggle have always been of secondary importance. This should not, however, lead us to underestimate the economic motives. It is obvious that without some economic considerations, the political desire would have been insufficient. The economic factors were also used as tools in reasoning the move towards the EC. From time to time the economic reasons were greatly used to convience the public towards the EC by the pro-western governments despite the fact that the main striving reasons to join the Community were not economics.

The decision in 1959 to seek associate membership was based on wide political considerations, not on 'Comprehensive studies of the implications for the Turkish economy and development strategy of the envisaged Customs Union' (Association Agreement,).

Again, some of the economic considerations were linked to the problem of competition with Greece. At the time, over 80% of Turkish exports to the Six were agricultural and Greek exports were of the same nature. The idea was that the rich markets of the Six would be lost to Greece if Turkey did not have the same trade concessions. It must be taken into account that at that time the Community was Turkey's main trading partner. '35% of total exports and 32% of imports were conducted with the Six. Obtaining a firm trade arrangement would provide Turkey with certain advantages. Also, the expectation was that in such a relationship, more financial assistance could be received for economic development (Association Agreement,).

All these considerations still apply today. Moreover, they have become much stronger as the Turkish economy has made a transition from one primarily based on agriculture to one in which industry occupies a significant place, mainly the textiles industry. This achievement is often linked, particularly by Western observers, to the policies and economic mentality of Turgut Ozal, who had effectively been in command of the economy for a decade, first as Head of the State Planning Organization (SPO), then as Deputy Prime Minister and Prime Minister until he became President.

Ozal's main aim was to liberalize the economy and establish free market principles in the country (Penrose, vd. 1987, p.64). To achieve this, in his words, he started on radical reform or economic revolution. His reforms included the elimination of price controls, reduction of subsidies to State-owned enterprises and their privatization incentives for

exports, liberalization of foreign investments and the adoption of a flexible exchange rate mechanism (Penrose, at all. 1987, p.64).

In all this the aim was to overcome Turkey's main economic difficulties, such as shortage of foreign currency, debt, repayment problems, unemployment and high inflation. The second important goal was to integrate the Turkish economy with the world free market economies, mainly with the European Community.

As a matter of fact, all the structural changes in the Turkish economy were made according to EC requirements in order to complete the Customs Union with the Community.

The overall feeling among political and business circles was that integration with the EC would accelerate and consolidate the process of rapid change of Turkish economy. In this context, membership of the Community would bring to Turkey the following advantages:

i) The large and relatively stable market of the EC would create great opportunities for Turkish exports of both agricultural and industrial products, particularly for textiles, which constituted about 50% of exports to the EC.

ii) EC entry was seen as the key to direct foreign investment to Turkey.

iii) The EC labor market would be opened up for Turkish workers, which would help to decrease the number of unemployed people in the country.

iv) Turkish agriculture would benefit substantially from the price support system of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

v) Financial assistance from various Community funds, especially the regional and social funds, would make a big contribution to the country's economy.

vi) The possibility of using Western know-how and technology would increase (Penrose, at all. 1987, p.64).

It was also a dominant view that the future of the Turkish economy must lie in Europe because its markets have higher purchasing power and are relatively stable, unlike the volatile Middle Eastern market, which is another major export market for Turkish goods, or the unstable Central Asian market, which was only created after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

As to those who objected to Turkey's integration in the Community, they mainly insisted on the following disadvantages in economic terms:

a) Membership of the EC would result in free trade as well as the free entrance of capital. This would result in the collapse of Turkish industry, which is far from able to compete with European industry.

b) Inflow of foreign capital would increase the economic dependency of Turkey as it would soon take over domestic markets and resources.

c) The membership would result in one tariff for the whole Community and this would have negative effects on Turkish external trade with the third parties, especially with the Middle Eastern, newly independent Turkic Republics and Asian countries.

After all, these economic arguments gained importance in Turkey particularly after 1981. Moreover, despite the negative opinion on its request, Turkey was already committed to completing the Customs Union with the Community by the end of 1995.

The question raised here was whether Turkish industry would be able to compete with the Community industries, as

we have seen there are two different approaches, but the overall answer among the Turkish policy-makers was a positive one. The big industrial groups have already claimed to be prepared for competition. Most of them were now in favour of an integration with the Community, though worries were expressed about small companies. A study conducted in 1986 by the SPO indicated that '40% of the industry was in a position to compete, 57.7% would gain the chance of competing through some measures and the
remaining 2.3% had no chance' (Pomfret,1986, p.50).

According to the Head of EC Affairs Department at the SPO, 67% of imports originating from the Community were already making a zero percent Customs basis. That, he argues, indicates the high chance of survival and competitive strength of the Turkish economy. He contended that once barriers are removed, the energetic entrepreneurial spirit in the (Turkish) economy would be able to adjust quickly to the Community conditions.' (Barchard, 1985 p.67).

These bold assertions by the Turkish authorities sum up how Ankara saw Turkey's position in relationship to the EC. How the EC sees Turkey's position, particularly in the case of full membership, will be subject of another article.

Conclusion

As illustrated above there were three main underlining reasons for the Turkey's application to join the EC. However, why did Turkey apply for an associate membership rather than a more limited trade and aid arrangement which later operated with some other Mediterranean countries? In David Barchard's words, this is partly 'because of the example of Greece and, most importantly, because of the desire to enter Europe which was then at its peak in Turkey'. 29 (The Times).

One should emphasis that, the Community initially did not want to complete an associate agreement and even many times they cancelled their appointments with their Turkish counterparts. The Community was willing to offer an alternative trade agreement, but Turkey insisted on an associate agreement. Moreover, at the 1950s of Europe wide political and strategic considerations were on the Turkish side. The EC could not for long resist an important NATO member's insistence on the case (Ozal, 1987, p.22). Eventually, after four years' negotiation, the Association Agreement was signed in Ankara on 12th September 1963, with great enthusiasm and celebration on the Turkish side, but the Agreement came into force in December 1964. Turkey's NATO membership 'is still regarded by some EC officials as the chief reason why Turkey gets different treatment from Tunisia or Israel in its dealings with the Community' (Ozal, 1989, p.6).

As illustrated above the role of Greece was a factor influencing Turkish policy towards the EC, it should be said that Greece's move towards the Community has provided an additional incentive to Turkey's European venture. The fact that this venture is in line with Ankara's Western vocation and that there has been an ardent desire to join all European forums both suggest that Turkey would have striven to join the Community even if the Greek connection had not existed. However, since the aim here is to analyze the Turkey-EC relationship as it has developed, it should be said that the Greek factor speeded up Turkey's journey to the Community.

However the foundings of this study suggested that among the above several reasons the cultural/ideological one (self-identification of Turkish elite) has been the driving force and fundamental reason behind the whole process as well as Turkey concerned. Whereas the economic reason has always been secondary important in the Turkish considerations despite the fact that it has been put to the public as a premier reason, at least from time to time.

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