

TURKISH IDENTITY AND EU INTEGRATION ISSUE OF TURKEY WITHIN THE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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ABSTRACT: Turkey-EU relations has 50 years past with many hesitations and ambitions. Nevertheless, these relations may interrupt many times for some political reasons. Recently, we were informed by the mass media that the political discussions between the EU and Turkey will be resumed after an interruption of three years. These discussions have as their main objective the eventual membership of Turkey of the European Union, a membership that is characterized on both sides by several hesitations. During many years the enlargement of the European Union by the inclusion of European states as members of the EU has been a process that, excluding for Turkey's membership, did not arouse much public discussion in spite of the fact that it was far from being a democratic process. In this context, we will attempt to analyze Turkey's accession issue into the EU within the identity perspective and recent developments.

Keywords: Turkey's accession process, EU Enlargement, Turkish identity, European modernity, westernization

TÜRK KİMLİĞİ VE SON GELİŞMELER BAĞLAMINDA TÜRKİYENİN AB'YLE BÜTÜNLEŞME MESELESİ

ÖZET: Türkiye-AB ilişkileri içinde pek çok kuşku ve endişe barındırır da, 50 yıllık bir maziye sahiptir. Ne var ki, bu köklü ilişkiler bazı siyasi nedenlerin tesiriyle pek çok defa inkıtaat uğramıştır. Son zamanlarda, AB ve Türkiye arasındaki ilişkilerin ve bu ilişkilere dair tartışmaların üç yıllık uzun bir kopuştan sonra yeniden başladığını ve Türk hükümetinin 2014 yılını AB Yılı ilan ettiğini kitlesel medyadan öğrenmekteyiz. Bu tartışmalar her ne kadar nihai anlamda Türkiye'nin AB'ye tam üyeliğini hedeflemiş olsa da, bu üyeliğin niteliğinin ve muhtevasının ne olacağı konusunda her iki taraf henüz bir uzlaşma sağlamış durumda değildir. Türkiye'nin üyelik süreciyle diğer Avrupa ülkelerinin üyelik süreçleri mukayese edildiğinde, gerek ortaya konulan kriterler ve gerekse öne sürülen siyasi mülahazalar bakımından, derin farklılıkların mevcut olduğuna şahit olmaktayız. Öyle ki, hiçbir ülkenin üyelik sürecinde bu kadar anti-demokratik bir müzakere çerçevesi belgesi ve süreci işletilmemiş, aday bir ülkeye bu denli eziyet çektilmemiş ve çifte standartlar abartılı bir biçimde hissettirilmemiştir. Tam da bu konjonktürde biz, kimlik boyutu ve güncel siyasi gelişmeler çerçevesinde AB-Türkiye ilişkilerinin alacağı yeni formasyonu farklı yönleriyle çözümleme teşebbüsünde bulunacağız.

Anahtar kelimeler: Türkiye'nin katılım süreci, AB genişlemesi, Türk kimliği, Avrupa modernliği, batılılaşma

1.Introduction

The present period seems not favorable in Europe for the acceptance of Turkey as a member of the EU. Since several years there is, in certain circles, an increase of anti-European attitudes. Le Front National of Marine LePen in France, the Partij voor Vrijheid (PVV) of Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, to give some examples, are clear exponents of this trend. We witness a rising tide of nationalism and or regionalism, a tendency in political life to plea openly for a return to a national currency because the Euro is too expensive and does not favor the national economy, a return to the time that the national frontiers were protected by the different nation-states, the expression of a preference for products of the own nation (the publicity on television and in the newspapers gives daily examples of this trend), (Robins 1996: 44) all this related to ideas about throwing out the country foreigners and products that are produced in low-costs countries.

We must not forget that the rise of an anti-European mood is certainly also thanks to a long period during which the political classes in the EU were not showing a lot of zeal to reduce the democratic deficit of the EU (Cıngı 2007: 49-66) Since many years they developed a policy of integration of new member-states in the EU, of the development of economic integration, combined with the introduction of the Euro, of the liberalization and of economic relations (globalization-trend), but neglected the enhancement of the democratic quality of the EU, the development of the European citizenship, the creation of a European passport for those persons who opt for this, the create a sound-board for 'Europeanness' on the level of culture, and the creation of real European politics on the international relations on the international level.

Instead of this, several countries propagated only their own national international politics, utilizing the EU only as an instrument of their own political objectives. This is especially the case of France ('France and Germany as the natural leaders of the EU') without understanding that this is a continuous humiliation of the other members of the EU. It is perhaps better not to start a new round of the discussions about Turkey's eventual membership, but to use this period for an elucidation of many of the obstructions that hamper a lucid and rational discussion of this relationship.

2.European Culture/Identity and Turkey's EU membership

An analysis of the major arguments against and for the integration of Turkey may sustain on both sides the positive decision to enter the EU. An alternative for such a decision is of course to continue the existing good neighborliness and to try to improve this. Such a policy may finally lead to the political incorporation of Turkey.

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A recurrently heard argument within Europe among large parts of the populations and also often uttered on the political level is that Turkey is not part of the European continent (Garcia 1993: 27-29). Moreover, Turkey's cultural traditions are different from those that have marked Europe and the EU, such as Christianity, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and Romanticism (İnaç & Erdoğan 2012: 34). It did not share the great tragedies like the Great Wars of the 20th century that finally bound the Europeans together. Its dominant religion does not easily fit in the European way of life, as is demonstrated almost daily – in the eyes of many Europeans – by the behavior of Islamist (tiny) groups in several European countries. The secondary schoolbooks in Europe as the invader of the Balkans and of the siege of Vienna in 1529. This image is not completed with information about the time that the dominant part of Turkey, Anatolia, could certainly be seen as a part of Europe in the pre-Islam period. But we could change the nature of the debate about this issue by turning our perspective towards the question: 'What is the nature of the European culture?' And can we speak about the existence of a European identity? The answers to these two questions are very important for our present theme about the eventual integration of Turkey in the EU.

Nevertheless, in the national history of some European countries there are also indications of a more positive view on Turkey. I give an example from the Netherlands, dating from 1566. This is a short time before the Netherlands (in that time the Netherlands included also Belgium and a part of North-western France) entered in the Eighty Years War with Spain (1568-1648). The Netherlands were governed by Philip II, king of Spain. The Dutch/Flemish rebelled against the absence of tolerance and the severe persecution of the Protestants. The latter started the use of the slogan: 'Liver turcx dan paus' ('It is preferable to be Turkish than pope/papal'). The Beggars (Geuzen) wore a medal, shaped as a Crescent with above mentioned slogan on it. The Protestants were quite aware that the Ottoman Empire was at war with Spain, so in a certain way they considered Turkey as a friend. More importantly, they were also aware that the religious liberty in Turkey was relatively better in Turkey than in the Low Countries under Spanish rule.

In this context, we can distinguish between 5 ways of looking at the culture of Europe by borrowing the analysis of Berting (Berting 2006 : 159-164).

The first one is to regard the European culture as a common European heritage with a specific cultural identity. This conception of Europe is laid down in many political documents. I refer in the first place to the concluding document of the Vienna meeting of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in 1986 and to some more recent documents of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (Snow 2010: 188-189). Without reproducing this common heritage, we can observe that this core does not delineate 'Europe' from its environment by sharp frontiers. It is clear that this core was the result of a lot of borrowing from the outside world and it did spread and still spreads a lot of its immaterial and material culture abroad.

Secondly, we encounter –often in political documents- the idea of Europe as a totality of national states, each with its specific cultural identity that can be enriched by mutual cultural exchanges.

Thirdly, Europe can be regarded as a modern culture in the making. While the preceding conceptions of the European culture, with their emphasis on collective identity and cultural exchanges, this conception regards culture as an ongoing process, resulting from many modernizing forces. It is forwards looking, not oriented in the first place to the conservation of traditions and engrained ways of life.

Fourthly, we encounter also the idea of Europe as a totality of cultures, existing as the culture of minorities living within one or several nation-states (like the Basques in Spain and in France, or the 'cultures' of minority groups resulting from immigration to Europe during the last decennia).

Finally, we encounter the idea of the 'European 'culture areas': the North-western, the Slavic and the Mediterranean areas.

Our borrowed analysis showed clearly that cultural diversity dominates and this diversity goes together with a very weak collective European identity. During the last few years it becomes evident that a growing part of the European inhabitants even rejects totally the idea of having a European identity.

Does this analysis of the nature of the European culture provide solid arguments against the integration of Turkey in the EU? The collective identity of the EU, being extremely weak, cannot be an argument against Turkey's integration. Also the different conceptions of the European culture do not reveal solid arguments against this integration. Turkey's culture and institutions share a lot of Europe's cultural heritage (İnaç 2004: 24-27). As a national state, Turkey can easily be treated as part of the totality of national cultures. And certainly, the vision of Europe as a culture in the making in the process of modernization can be considered as giving the most positive argument for the acceptance of Turkey as a new member of the EU. In the process of modernization, Turkey could play an important role by widening the road to the Islamic and Arab worlds.

3.Further arguments in favor or against Turkey's membership of the EU

Not only culture and religion play a role in this political discussion about the eventual membership of Turkey in the EU. Another recurrent theme in the political discussions is the argument that Turkey is, in comparison with the European member-states of the EU, not enough modernized and that this lagging behind will cause a lot of troubles when Turkey is a member of the EU. These discussions about modernization and modernity introduce a lot of vagueness and uncertainty, because these key-words are far from having well-delineated meanings. In fact, in different periods and in different regions their meanings are very varied. In our time, modernization generally stands for such things as progress, increasing importance of rationality, rational management of states and enterprises, technical and social innovation, individualism, individual autonomy and responsibility, open market relations, rejection of traditional obstacles and acceptance of globalization of the world. However, reflecting about the nature of the major elements of

modernization, it becomes quickly evident that this modernization is full of contradictions. For example, the rational management of enterprises leads systematically to the reduction of the autonomy and personal responsibility of many workers. The dominance of market relations often destroys stabilizing social structures, etc. Such developments necessitate political interventions in order to regulate the social, political and economic problems that are consequences of 'modernization'. As the different nations of the EU do not have the same historical backgrounds, we can observe that in many cases the ways of dealing with consequences of modernization are in different parts of the EU strongly influenced by their historical past. An example of this is given by the different ways in which the integration of foreign minorities is treated.

A very important consequence of this observation is that the political discussions about the integration of Turkey in the European Union must also be based on a good understanding of the different collective representations about the nature of the different societies that are part of this enterprise. These differences are an integral part of the cultural and other types of pluralism that characterizes the EU (Çakır 2011: 144). And it would be a sad story when a candidate member of the EU would not be accepted because of the idea that specific elements of the candidate-state are incompatible with the EU. As in the past, it must be seen as a challenge to integrate new elements in the existing diversity of the EU. There may be good reasons on some occasions to block the inclusion of a new member. But in such cases, there must be very precise arguments and not such vague arguments that the modernization of the candidate-state is not enough developed.

The complexity of the concept of modernity is very well demonstrated in the recent study of Jacques Attali (Attali 2012: 76-79) In this book, Attali distinguishes between seven ways of looking at the future, seven possible projects for the next generations. And he adds that each of these projects corresponds with specific developments that are already at work in our time. So for him, modernization is not a specific fixed process, but a way of looking at the future and making choices that lead into the desired direction.

Such an approach could very well be introduced into the debates about the present relations between the EU and Turkey. This would imply a changing perspective. Instead of discussing elements that are considered not to fit Europe's modernity and Europe's modernization, the major orientation of the debate are the following questions: 'In which way do we want to see Europe's future in 2060?' and 'Which elements favor a development into the direction of this desired future?'. This change of perspective is very important, because this change directs the attention on the role of favoring and blocking elements both in the EU and in Turkey. We could, as part of this exercise, also include Russia.

Such an approach also necessitates an analysis of the major historical changes that produced the present appearances of Europe and Turkey. But these major changes have also influenced both Europe and Turkey. Would the rise of a constitutional state under Mustafa Kemal, Atatürk, been possible without the European Enlightenment and the rise of democracy in Europe?

Another argument that pops up in the discussions about the membership of Turkey is that this country is too big (76 million inhabitants) to be absorbed by the EU and that Turkey is economically underdeveloped with a per capita GDP of \$14600. But it can be remarked that Turkey's economy is flourishing and had during the last decade an average growth rate of 7%.

But why is Turkey considered to be too big? This question would be understandable when we were considering Russia as a candidate for membership with its 144 million inhabitants. Turkey with its 76 million inhabitants would be situated, as a member state of the EU, between Germany (81 million inhabitants) and France (64 million) (Tocci 2011: 96-97) It is evident that the couple Germany-France considers itself as the comprising the most important member-states of the EU and as the 'natural leaders of the Union. The membership of Turkey would endanger their role as the 'natural' leaders. But we can add to this that this danger only exists when the EU continues its existence with its present enormous democratic deficit. A deficit to with their leadership contributes a lot as they have not yet proposed resolutions to reduce the democratic deficit and to develop the EU further in such a way that it can play a more important role as EU on the international level. Especially France shows a strong tendency to play its role in the international relations while disregarding the EU, or to use the EU only when it reinforces the French influence.

4. Conclusion

As a conclusion, the nature of the European culture and its identity do not provide solid arguments to block Turkey's membership. But it remains a challenge to elucidate further the historical relations between Europe and Turkey to avoid as much as possible mutual misunderstandings.

Modernity and modernization are a very important challenge for the EU and Turkey, because both key-words, the source of enormous confusions in political life, invite us, as I already said, to change our perspective. Instead of discussing arguments pro and contra Turkey's membership of the EU we have to turn to the choices before us to construct the future of the common generations. Every day we are confronted with the necessity to take up this challenge when we hear the arguments of political leaders, arguments that in several instances bring us back to a past in which exclusion and hatred dominated.

A challenge is certainly also the stagnation of the democratic quality of the EU. The present democratic deficit explains, partly at least, the present rise of nationalism and regionalism. The European leadership has during a too long time given priority to the enlargement of the EU and to economic questions. It is time to fill the democratic gap.

The promises depend of course of the major decisions that we, as Europeans, with Turkey make, decisions that construct our future in approximately 2050 – 2060. The EU will continue to be a large territory without war. A territory that succeeds in blocking evil political movements that are based on the exclusion of the Other, on exploitation, on racism. A territory in which property is more equally divided than at this time, in which the dominance of the liberal market shows us that in a period of crisis the rich become increasingly richer and in which the middle-classes pay the bill. And also a territory that plays a major role in the battle against the ruthless exploitation of our natural resources. It is not up to me to formulate promises about the future before us. This task is

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primarily related to the challenges that we described earlier. And this task needs to be accompanied by a strong collective positive or optimistic mood in order to counteract the dominating pessimistic mood that pervades the EU since several years.

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