

ASIAN DIMENSION OF TURKEY'S CHARACTER: AN OBSTACLE OR A CATALYST FOR EUROPEAN UNION MEMBERSHIP

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ÖZET

Türkiye'nin Avrupa'yla yakınlaşmasının öyküsü yüzyıllar öncesine dayanır. Osmanlı Devleti'nin Batılılaşma ve Modernleşme çabaları içinde Avrupa önemli bir yer tutar. Cumhuriyetin ilanından sonra da Batılılaşma, Çağdaşlaşma ve Avrupalılaşma çoğunlukla aynı anlamlarda kullanılmıştır. Bu makalede önce Türkiye'nin Batılılaşma-Avrupalılaşma serüveni kısaca anlatılacak, AET, AT ve AB ile ilişkilerde dönüm noktaları üzerinde durulacak, ardından da günümüzde Türkiye'nin AB üyesi olmasını geciktiren faktörlerin değerlendirilmesi yapılacaktır.

Keywords: *History of Turkish European relations, Enlargement and Turkey, Cultural Dimension of Turkish EU Relations.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Türkiye Avrupa Birliği İlişkilerinin Tarihçesi, Türkiye ve Genişleme Süreci, Türkiye Avrupa Birliği İlişkilerinde Kültürel Boyut.*

Introduction

Valery Giscard d'Estaing, President of the 'European Convention', an important assembly to shape European Union's (EU) future legal and administrative architecture, announced *Le Monde* on 8 November 2002 that "Turkey can not be admitted as a member to the EU, simply because it is Asian".¹ With these words Giscard d'Estaing not only expressed his objection, as an outstanding figure in the EU, to Turkey's integration with Europe, but he

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¹ *Le Monde*, "Pour ou contre l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union Européen", 9 Novembre 2002.

also opened the *Pandora's Box*. Following him, a growing debate over Turkey's place in Europe and its identity has been intensified. Those who defend the idea that EU should continue its close relations with Turkey but should not let it in, mostly depend on the 'cultural difference' assumption.

Nonetheless, it is not a new story. As Turkey speeded up its efforts to get access to the EU since mid-1990s, objections emphasizing 'non-European' identity of Turkey increased. For instance, during sessions of the European Parliament in January 1997, EU President Van Mierlo (the Netherlands) said that the EU had to be honest and he added: "Nobody could officially announce the point before. Shall we admit a Muslim country to the EU? This is the real problem. Do we wish it?"²

Turkey locates at the Eastern most of Europe and Western most of Asia. Thus historically and culturally it includes the marks of the both continents within its identity. Turkish cultural infrastructure, such as family structure, gender relations, place of religion etc. mostly originates from Asia. One can trace the signs of Central Asian nomadic past, religion of Islam, or even traditions of ancient people of the *Asia Minor*. However, as a result of two centuries-long efforts of modernization and westernization Turkey carried some European values into its identity: Democracy, secularism, free market economy etc. became indispensable parts of Turkey's character.

Since its application in 1959, for more than four decades Turkey is waiting to become a member to the EU. If admitted, Turkey will be the only country in the club which has a large land, population and deep cultural roots in Asia. This phenomenon, however, is also brought as an obstacle before its membership by conservative Europeans. Thus, Turkey's destiny vis á vis EU membership will be decided through the ongoing debate: "Will the EU become a *Christian Club* raising on the heritage of former 'Holy-Roman Empire' and excluding *others* for their cultural difference; or will it be a multi-national and multi-cultural body?"

This article will examine the significance level of the Asian dimension of Turkey's character for EU membership. First, a story of Turkey's transformation efforts from an underdeveloped society to a modern nation will be given. Subsequently, details on Turkey's domestic and foreign policy mechanisms will be analyzed. Finally, Asian effects on seven important areas in Turkey and critics on them from Europeans will be presented.

² Nuri Yurdusev, "Avrupa'yı Kurmak, Türkiye'yi İdare Etmek", *Türkiye'nin Dış Politika Gündemi*, Şaban Çalış and İhsan Dağı (eds.) Ankara, Liberte, 2001, p. 163.

Turkish Process of Transformation

In 1560 Imperial Habsburg Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq wrote in one of his letters to Vienna:

No nation in the world has shown greater readiness than the Turks to avail themselves of the useful inventions of foreigners, as proved by their employment of cannons and mortars, and many other things invented by the Christians. They can not, however, be induced as yet to use printing, or to establish public clocks, because they think that the Scriptures, that is, their sacred books – would no longer be *scriptures* if they were *printed*, and that, if public clocks were introduced, the authority of their *muezzins* and their ancient rites would be thereby impaired³

These few words clearly represent the pragmatic approach of the Ottomans towards the West in the 16th century, during a time coinciding to climax of their dominance in Europe. However, when victorious campaigns were replaced by continuous defeats, Ottoman statesmen started to search for means of reformation in the Empire. After long lasting wars with Venice, Austria, Russia and Iran, which deeply depressed the state, first initiatives to import and imitate some selected methods and instruments from the Europe to the Empire came in the first half of the 18th century, during the period between 1718-1730 or in its special name, the *Tulip Age*. During this period, Ottoman interest in European achievements increased. Ottoman envoys to Vienna, Paris and Moscow, as well as negotiating trade agreements, served as observers reporting back to the capital on aspects of life and culture which might be 'applicable' to the conditions in the Ottoman Empire.⁴ In accordance with those reports, first printing house was opened and a fire brigade was organized in Istanbul; textiles and porcelain industries were developed and new kiosks and palaces were built. But, when new taxes were imposed on the subjects in order to finance those activities, a revolt in 1730 came out, which resulted with dethroning of the reformist Sultan and the end of the *Tulip Age*.

Another reform initiative came during the reign of Sultan Selim III (1789-1807). By sending envoys to European capitals and by negotiating with military and bureaucratic elites, he searched the causes of weakness of the Empire compared to European monarchies, and started a period of reforms, called the New Rule (*Nizam-i Cedid*) in 1792. New reforms aimed at curbing provincial autonomy and achieving political centralization and modernization through Western-style military, administrative and fiscal reforms. Although all the

³ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 41.

⁴ Alan Palmer, *The Decline and Fall of the Ottoman Empire*, New York, Barnes and Noble, 1992, pp.33-34.

reforms were inspired from the Europe, the change in the composition of the military troops was not only inspired but also implemented by Europeans: In 1796 a delegation of French military officers came to Istanbul and started to train newly established *Nizam-i Cedid* infantry and artillery troops.⁵ Selim III opened first Ottoman permanent diplomatic legations in the important European capitals, thus he maintained the continuous flow of information from the West. Selim III was dethroned by a revolt in 1807, but his successor Sultan Mahmud II continued to the reforms vigorously.

Without doubt, the most important legacy of Selim III to Mahmud II was creation of a new social instrument in the Ottoman military and civil officialdom, a group of young officers and officials who had information on the Western civilization, spoke at least one foreign language, generally French and who were not against developing contacts with Europe. The diplomatic missions gave an opportunity to a number of young men to reside for a while in a European city, master a European language, and make the acquaintance of some of the revolutionary ideas current among their European contemporaries. In the following years, upon their return, some of those young people became officials at the *Sublime Porte* (*Babiali* – Ottoman Government) where they formed a Westward-looking minority among the bureaucratic hierarchy parallel to that created by young officers in the navy and army.⁶ Not surprisingly, they would become the reformers of the 19th century.

Starting with establishing new European-typed troops, Mahmud II abolished the traditional *Janissary Army* in 1826, opened modern military and civil schools instead of old fashioned *medreses*, and replaced the traditional *Divan* with European-typed ministries in 1836. Additionally, during his reign, the first postal service was established, the first census was made, the first newspaper was published, and a total change in Ottoman official and civil dress was done. Mahmud's son Abdulmecid continued to the reforms and he proclaimed the Noble Edict of 1839 (*Gulhane Hatt-i Humayunu*), an important document which proclaimed such principles of life, honor and property of the subject, the abolition of tax-farming and all the abuses associated with it, regular and orderly recruitment into the armed forces, fair and public trial of persons accused of crimes, and equality of persons of all religions in the application of these laws.⁷

With the proclamation of the 1839 Noble Edict, a new era called Reorganization Period (*Tanzimat*) was opened in the Ottoman Empire. Throughout the new period, provincial representative assemblies were established, together with the state courts that ruled independently of the

⁵ Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-60.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

religious learned; the local administrations started to function as parts of large state structure; new codes of commercial and criminal law – mostly originated from European countries- were introduced; monopolies on certain goods were lifted; a new conscript system based upon Prussian patterns was started and new – Western typed – schools were opened.

Along with initiatives to make a substantial transformation in the Ottoman Empire to create a contemporary monarchy out of underdeveloped Oriental one, philosophical debates among the Ottoman elites on the meanings of *transformation*, *modernization* and *westernization* were also started. The legitimizing ideology of the Ottoman power structure was Islam. Though the Islamic law was never strictly applied, Islam remained as the basis of Ottoman political identity. Therefore reform initiatives of enlightened Sultans and Western oriented bureaucrats were opposed by conservatives. The main accusation against them was to merely copying Western ideals, which did not suit to the Ottoman society. In fact, the members of opposition were not against all of the reforms, but they preferred to be inspired not with the Western civilization but with the pure Islamic values. According to them, it was sufficient to import from Europe the latest industrial, agricultural and commercial technologies and know-how unless the reforms should lead to a denial of Islamic past. Faith and heritage of Islam should be kept after having been re-evaluated and compared to the new Western values.⁸

With the initiation of the *Tanzimat* reforms, the dilemma of the achievement of a balance between the materiality of the West and the spirituality of the East became quite clear. The main problematique of the Young Ottomans – a literary movement that was inspired by French writings – became crucial in coming to terms with the ongoing modernization by focusing on such a balance.⁹

According to sociologist Serif Mardin, “one of the questions raised was the extent to which European or Western civilization is an indivisible force... Every time the question came up, whether in the 19th century or in the 20th. The idea of equality as a fundamental value of the Ottoman system emerged as one which competed with the idea of an untrammelled bourgeoisie. This is possibly one of the subtlest strains of survivals’ which can not be neglected in considering the position of Turkey vis-à-vis Western Europe. In the 19th century, one of its manifestations was the disapproving attitude of much of the Ottoman middle and lower-class population towards the behavior of Westernized *Tanzimat* statesmen. Ottoman grandees who had borne the responsibility and the risk of initiating new policies had also developed Western European consumption

⁸ Turgut Özal, *Turkey in Europe and Europe in Turkey*, London, Rustem, 1991, pp. 6-10.

⁹ Ayşe Kadioğlu, “The Paradox of Turkish Nationalism and the Construction of Official Identity”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32, 2, p. 180.

patterns. Crinolines, pianos, dining tables and living-room furniture were new ideas which the official class soon adopted, and these were often seen as foolish luxuries by the section of the population that had lived on the modest standards imposed by traditional values.”¹⁰

Thus, Westernization efforts from above did not find support from the masses, in contrary it alienated the certain segments of the society to each other and deepened the problem of identity. Ayşe Kadioğlu asserts that “with the modernization-Westernization efforts while the ‘cause of the unjust’ was affiliated with the Westernizing elites, the ‘cause of the just’ which was characterized by a sense of grievance gradually began to be embraced by the Islamic discourse.”

On the other hand, the transformation of the Empire in the 19th century was run parallel with the economic, political and ideological impact of the Western capitalism. The peripherilization of the Empire set in a motion process of ‘modernization’ transforming the state from a patrimonial empire to a rational bureaucratic state. The modernization of state included granting equality to the non-Muslim subjects of the Empire, which provoked Muslim reaction. Those, who alienated by the modernizing elite and who perceived the transformations as the penetration of the alien, used Islam as an ideological weapon to oppose the reforms.¹¹

Meanwhile, reformist bureaucracy was in search to be included within the European family of nations through becoming a member of European Concert, in order “to have a word” in political shaping of the continent. For them, “locating in Europe without being European” was the main source of political and economic difficulties of the Empire. Due to the insisting efforts of Ottoman statesmen, the Empire was granted “European status” by the 7th article of the Paris Treaty of 1856 signed after the Crimean War. However, the general perception of the Ottoman Empire “as an Asian monarchy having some land in the European continent” persisted among Europeans.¹²

While the “Eastern Question” or problem of sharing of the Ottoman lands was becoming one of the priorities of the European Powers in the mid-19th century, Ottoman intellectuals were in search of finding a solution to prevent probable dissolution of the Empire as a result of external pressures and nationalistic rebellions of non-Muslim subjects mainly under influence of French Revolutionary ideas. Along with modernization-Westernization efforts, some Ottoman intellectuals developed the idea of *Ottomanism*, which basically

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹¹ Haldun Gülalp, “The Crisis of Westernization in Turkey: Islamism versus Nationalism”, *Innovation The European Journal of Social Sciences*, 8, 2 (1995), p.176.

¹² Yurdusev, *op.cit.*, p. 164.

aimed to keep all the Ottoman subjects together and the Ottoman lands united by developing an Ottoman identity, some others focused on *Pan-Islamism*, an ideology to create a consciousness among the Muslim subjects of the Empire and assemble them under the supreme authority of the caliph-Sultan, and finally some others built the *Pan-Turkism*, which targeted the cultural and political unification of all Turks inside and outside the Ottoman Empire within one single 'national' home.¹³

Though a constitution was introduced and Ottoman Parliament was opened in 1876, Abdulhamid II suspended this initiative until 1908 and reigned as the last omnipotent of the Ottoman Empire. In 1908, as a result of the Young Turk Revolution, the Constitution was once more put into force and the Parliament was re-opened. Political re-organization of the state system and ideological efforts to 'save' the Empire neither prevented the collapse nor helped to solve Ottoman problem of defining its identity.

Deeply feeling the pain of the identity question inside, one of the outstanding ideological figures of the early 20th century Turkish thought, Ziya Gökalp sought for a rational synthesis of Turkism, Islamism and Modernization on a solid basis and tried to pave the theoretical basis of modern Turkish identity. For him, "civilization without a cultural basis became a matter of mechanical imitation. The source of cultural values was located in the social unit called *nation*. Therefore Ziya Gökalp tried to develop a concept of a modern Turkish nation as an independent cultural unit within the confines of contemporary civilization."¹⁴

In his famous book *Essentials of Turkism (Türkçülüğün Esasları)* which was published in 1923 and became a *vade mecum* for most of the Turkish nationalists Ziya Gökalp proposed methodology to strengthen national conscience and dependence, simply to build a Turkish nation out of Turkish subjects of the Ottoman Empire. He offered purification of Turkish language from Arabic and Persian words and syntax; advancement of Turkish arts; strengthening Turkish dimension in ethical values, in religion, in economics, in politics and in philosophy.¹⁵ He described the nation as follows: "The nation is neither race nor tribe, nor the whole of the people who live in the same country, nor all the Muslims together. The nation consists of the complex of individuals who have a common language, a common national loyalty, a common morality and esthetic feeling, that is to say, of those who derive their culture from these sources."¹⁶ In spite of his noteworthy works, Gökalp could not find an answer to

¹³ Azmi Özcan, "Osmanlılarda Hilafet", *Osmanlı Ansiklopedisi*, Vol:7, pp. 467-477; Jacop Landau, "Kültürel ve Siyasi Panturkizm", *Osmanlı Ansiklopedisi*, Vol:7, p. 492.

¹⁴ Kadioğlu, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

¹⁵ Ziya Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları*, İstanbul, İnkılap ve Aka, 1978, *passim*.

¹⁶ Eleanor Bisbee, *The New Turks Pioneers of the Republic*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1956, p. 47.

the problem of how Turkish society would modernize while solving its identity crisis concurrently, or how it would preserve its cultural values, which in Gökalp's thought, are the essentials to be a nation, while modernizing with the Western civilization values.

First World War brought the end of six century old Ottoman Empire. But at the end of Turkish National Struggle led by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) against occupation forces in Anatolia, Turkish Republic emerged out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, in 1923. One of the substantial problems of the newly emerged Turkey was the almost 50 years lasting problem of creating a national identity. Most prerequisites in the Western experience, such as market economies, a proliferating middle class and industrialization prioritized liberty, social justice and equality as important political values and brought about a political and economic transformation that led to the creation of modern national identities, did not exist in Turkey when the Republic was established. The founders of the Republic were composed of young military and civilian bureaucratic elite of the late Ottoman administration, who had strong centralist tendencies, a desire to bury the dynastic and semi-theocratic past, and to create a national and secular regime, which would legitimize their position as the ruling class.¹⁷

While breaking the ties with the Ottoman past, the new leaders searched for a unifying myth, an essential of the nation-building process. In Doğu Ergil's words, "The long forgotten roots of the pre-Ottoman and pre-Islamic era were re-introduced. However, this process was construed not as a scientific endeavor but as ideological glue for national cohesion. In the absence of a medieval high culture that could be labeled 'Turkish', the nationalist elite found their glory in a history that never was. The search for, and consolidation of, a national identity were carried to such extremes in the 1930s that theories like the 'Sun Theory of the Language', which asserted that all languages emerged out of Turkish."¹⁸

Parallel to the nation-building process, the Republican elite was in pursuit of modernization, or Westernization, through the adoption of a series of rapid reforms was nothing less than a *revolution form above*, and similar to the preceding Ottoman attempts, was elite, state driven and quite alien as far as the rural population of the new state was concerned.¹⁹ But without suspicion, those efforts were the most rapid and definite transformation effort ever initiated in Turkey, targeting creation of a national political state in full possession of its sovereign powers, a steady advance to a Western standard of living by

¹⁷ Doğu Ergil, "Identity Crises and Political Instability in Turkey", *Journal of International Affairs*, 54, 1 (Fall 2000), pp. 47-49.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁹ Henri J. Barkey, "The Struggles of a Strong State", *Journal of International Affairs*, 54, 1 (Fall 2000), p. 88.

marshaling the physical and human resources of the country and a slow but continued movement toward more liberal political and economic institutions.²⁰

Within a period of 10 years, the state abolished the Caliphate, the spiritual pinnacle of the Sunni Muslim world; adopted the Latin alphabet instead of the Arabic letters which had been used by the Turks for more than 1000 years; a program, just as Ziya Gökalp offered a decade ago, to purge the language of Arabic and Persian loanwords was put into effect; Swiss, French, Italian and German laws replaced Ottoman ones that had been partly based on religion; the traditional attire was discouraged and Western-type garments were introduced to the society – government civil servants were obliged to wear hats-; the educational system was unified and secularized; all autonomous religious institutions and their financial resources were brought under government control; old Ottoman measures were replaced by contemporary European ones; the weekend days were changed to Saturday and Sunday as it was in the West and the Western calendar instead of Muslim (*Hijri*) one was introduced.²¹

Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) was basically aiming modernization of the Turkish society as fast as possible. He said that the purpose of Turkish revolution was to render the people of Turkish Republic a modern and civilized society, in every and true sense of the words, in substance and in appearance. Before starting the 'attire revolution' Mustafa Kemal addressed to the peasants in Kastomonu in 1925 as follows:

Gentlemen, the Turkish people who founded the Turkish republic are civilized; they are civilized in history and in reality. But I tell you as your own brother, as your friend, as your father, that the people of the Turkish Republic, who claim to be civilized, must show and prove that are civilized, by their ideas and their mentality, by their family life and their way of living. In a word, the truly civilized people of Turkey must prove in fact that they are civilized and advanced persons also in their outward aspect. I must make these last words clear to you, so that the whole country and the world may easily understand what I mean. I shall put my explanations to you in the form of a question.

- Is our dress national? (Cries of no)
- Is it civilized and international? (Cries of no)

I agree with you. This grotesque mixture of styles is neither national nor international. My friends, there is no need to seek and revive the costume of Turan. A civilized, international dress is worthy and appropriate for our nation, and we will wear it. Boots or shoes on our feet, trousers on our legs, shirt and tie, jacket and waistcoat-and, of course, to complete these, a cover with brim on

²⁰ Richard D. Robinson, *The First Turkish Republic A Case Study in National Development*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1963, p. 90.

²¹ Lewis, *op.cit.*, pp. 262-281.

our heads. I want to make this clear. This head-covering is called hat.²²

Despite those enthusiastic efforts, by 1930s it was generally agreed by the Republican elite that the reforms had not taken root in masses of the Turkish society. Ayşe Kadioğlu explains the search to solve that problem as follows: “This problem was to be remedied with further reforms from above that were geared towards creating a new Turk. The emerging new Turkish identity, then, was distinguished by its manufactured character. Turks were a ‘made’ nation by virtue of emphasizing their difference from the Ottomans along the similar Jacobin lines that the French revolutionaries followed in creating the Frenchman. The fervent desire to break with the past was clearly manifested in the ensuing reforms.”²³

After the Second World War, first multi-party elections was held in 1946. Four years later Democrat Party came to the power. The new rulers clearly saw that the Republican reforms had reached and taken over about one-third of the Turkish population. Two-thirds of the (rural) majority was either unaffected, undecided or non-committal.²⁴ During the Democrat decade between 1950 and 1960 more emphasis was given on rural development projects, and the *reforms from above* process during 1920s and 1930s were smoothed.

During the *Cold War* years, Turkey take part in the *Western Camp*, however, the main direction of Turkish transformation was shifted from Europe to the United States, the new leader of the West. Democrat Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and his colleagues often spoke about creating the *little America* in Turkey and Americanization of Turkish way of life was given impetus. Democrat decade became a scene for struggle between the traditionalist-liberals and *etatist-elites*. Menderes used the popular support against the *etatist-elites*, who were the Republican reformers of the pre-1950 period, but when he started to use his power to demolish the opposition, Turkish military intervened the politics and the first military coup in Turkish history came on 27 May 1960.

27 May Coup was an *etatist-elitist* action in nature, aiming to resume Atatürk’s reforms and from above transformation efforts. A new constitution was prepared, Menderes and his two ministers were tried and executed, strict emphasis to Atatürk’s revolution was made in all aspects of Turkish social, political and economic life. Nevertheless, in 1965 elections, Justice Party

²² *Ibid.*, p. 269.

²³ Kadioğlu, *op.cit.*, p. 188.

²⁴ Bozkurt Güvenç, “Quest for National Identity in Turkey”, <http://ignca.nic.in/lis_03012.htm>, p. 7.

(*Adalet Partisi*), which was successor or the Democrat Party in some sort came to power, and initiated populist policies as before.²⁵

During 1965-1980 period two more coups came. In 1971 Turkish military forced Justice Party to leave the power and in 1980 military directly intervened to the politics like in 1960. The 1980 coup basically came after the political turmoil and anarchy in the country. After 12 September 1980 coup, the constitution was suspended, all political parties were banned and huge number of arrests, trials and sentencing were done.

General Kenan Evren, leader of the coup, thought that the main cause of the anarchy and terror was the lack of ethical values, thus, while making emphasis on the Atatürk's revolution he took extra ordinary steps, which were in contradiction with Atatürk's reforms: a constitution with strict limitations on political and basic civil rights and freedoms was introduced, more religious schools were opened, religious courses in elementary to high school level were made compulsory and medium for the activities of religious foundations was facilitated.²⁶

From the second half of the 1980s until the end of 1990s terrorist activities of Kurdish separatists (*PKK*), which cost 30000 lives and rise of political Islam occupied most of Turkey's agenda. Turkish armed forces gained a substantive victory over the *PKK* and Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the terrorist organization was captured, tried and sentenced to death. However, due to amendments in Turkish penal law in 2002, the death penalty abolished and Öcalan's sentence was altered to life time in prison. On the other hand, rise of political Islam stimulated the secular powers in Turkey, which were committed to safeguard the democratic and secular identity of the Republic. Thus Turkish Army once more, but this time indirectly, intervened to the politics and forced the ruling Islamic-oriented Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) to leave the government in 1997. Later, the Welfare Party and the Virtue Party (*Saadet Partisi*), which replaced it were banned by the Constitutional Court due to their anti-secular activities.

Nevertheless, in the parliamentary elections of 3 November 2002, Islamic-oriented Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) gained 34% of the votes and came to the power, a surprising event despite all secular opposition.

Consequently, after the 80 years of Western oriented secular-Republican experience, the meaning of basic Western values such as secularity, pluralism and human rights are still being discussed in Turkey. Although a huge step was

²⁵ Emre Kongar, *Türkiye'nin Toplumsal Yapısı*, İstanbul, Remzi, 1993, pp. 163-180.

²⁶ Kongar, *op.cit.*, pp. 205-216.

taken towards modernization, transformation from an underdeveloped Middle Eastern society to a contemporary European democracy was not achieved by all means yet. This situation makes difficult to analyze the characteristics Turkish political and social life. It would be more explanatory to give a brief information on Turkish internal and foreign politics.

Turkish Domestic and Foreign Policy

Turkish Political System

Turkey is a pluralist parliamentary democracy since 1946. According to the Turkish Constitution, which was introduced in 1982, three powers, namely the executive, the legislative and judicial branches work separately and independently. The president of republic is elected by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi – TBMM*), by two-thirds majority of the votes, for a seven-year term. In addition to his representative duties, the president has also some important authorities such as appointing some high level public officials and vetoing the laws passed by the Parliament (The president can use his veto power only for once. If the parliament insists on the law, he is obliged to approve it).

The Prime Minister is appointed by the President according to the results of the Parliamentary elections and the cabinet members are nominated by the Prime Minister and appointed by the President. The government serves in consistent with the Parliamentary term, which is five years.

TBMM is a unicameral parliament with 550 members who are elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms. Members of parliament have a privilege not to be tried before the courts during their legislative term.

Constitutional Court is the supreme authority in judicial matters, which decides on the contradiction between the laws and the constitution. It also decides to ban a political party. Finally it serves as the High Council (*Yüce Divan*), a supreme court to try members of cabinet, for their illegal activities such as corruption.

Along with these three separate branches, which can be seen in most of contemporary democracies, the Turkish Constitution created another important body taking part in decision making process, the National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu-MGK*). Consisting of the certain members of the cabinet –the prime minister and ministers of foreign affairs, national defense, justice and internal affairs-and representatives of Turkish Military –the general chief of military staff, commanders of army, navy, air force and gendarmerie, the MGK gathers once a month and ‘advises’ the government on critical internal and

foreign policy issues. The function and role of the MGK in running the Turkish politics are often questioned and criticized by the European Union, in which Turkey tries to become a member for almost 4 decades. Details of these critics will be presented under the next title.

Traditionally and ideologically Turkish parties are divided among two poles, similar to European democracies, 'the right' and 'the left'. Turkish Right historically incorporated three portions: the religious right, the radical nationalist right and the center-right, represented by the Democrat Party and Justice Party tradition, which held power during most of the multi-party period (See above). In the polarized atmosphere of 1970s, the Turkish Right was a strong bulwark of anti-communism and conservatism committed to populist and bureaucratic controls over society. Party politics was structured in relation to the state-administered incentives created by the populist state. Beginning with mid-70s the components of Turkish Right started to express themselves within new parties, such as Islamic-oriented National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*) and nationalist National Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*) while center-right portions of the society remained with the Justice Party.

On the other hand, Turkish Left, historically represented by the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* - CHP), locomotive of 'reforms from above' in 1920s and 1930, was gone into a separation in mid-1960s. CHP remained to be the main political body of center-left and 'left of center' tendencies, while Turkish Labor Party (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*) became the political party for radical left.

When the leaders of military coup on 12 September 1980 banned all political parties, foundations of Turkish political system were deeply shaken, and traditional choices of Turkish people was forced to change. In 1983 the generals let three parties, the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*) at the right, the Populist Party (*Halkçı Parti*) at the left and Nationalist Democracy Party (*Milliyetçi Demokrasi Partisi*) at the center, to enter the elections.

During 9 years of Motherland Party's governments led by Turgut Özal, a new trend in Turkey's political tradition was set in three essential ways: First, it ended the Turkish center-right's historical suspicion of political and economic liberalism, by emphasizing liberalism as the primary component of its discourse. Özal's commitment to an expanded political space for the new social actors set the course for Islamic and Kurdish demand for a new consensus that recognized their differences. Second, Motherland Party mobilized Turkey's traditionally conservative constituencies and some Islamic platforms around the cause of economic liberalism without using the disguise of official Kemalism and secularism. Third, it represented the first frontal assault against the policing

and sentry role of the bureaucracy. Privatization, monetary stability and austerity policies all pointed in that direction.²⁷

Within a decade after the Motherland Party left the power in 1991 elections, two parallel developments in Turkish politics emerged: First, the representatives of the parties banned by the generals after the 1980 coup, formed new parties or re-opened the old ones, thus Turkish politics were run by the new and 'traditional' faces at the same time. This situation strengthened the political division, and caused an extra-ordinary climate in which the mostly the same values and tendencies, differed by minor nuances, were represented by more than one party at the right and at the left. For instance, central right was represented by the Motherland Party and the True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*) and the central left was represented by Republican Peoples Party, Social Democrat Populist Party (*Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti*) and Democratic Leftist Party (*Demokratik Sol Parti*).

When the division of politics and large number of political parties came together with the Turkish electoral system, which leaves the parties gaining less than 10% of the nation wide votes out of the Parliament, Turkey started to be ruled by coalitions. Coalition governments, changed with fast cycles, might be seen in some other democracies, such as the situations in Italy in 1970s. However the situation in Turkey was totally different than any other examples and may only be described by 7-time prime minister and the 9th President of Turkish Republic Süleyman Demirel's words: "Solutions in democracies are unlimited".

For 11 years Turkey was ruled by almost all kinds of coalitions: A colalition between a center right and a center left party (True Path Party – Social Democrat Populist Party (replaced by Republican Peoples Party after 1995) 1991-1996); between two center right parties (True Path Party and Motherland Party, 1996); between a center right and an Islamic-oriented Party (True Path Party and Welfare Party, 1996-1997); between two center right and one center left parties (Motherland Party, Democratic Turkey Party and Democratic Leftist Party, 1997-1999); a center left party minority supported by two center right parties in the Parliament (Democratic Leftist Party, supported by Motherland and True Path parties) and finally a coalition between a center left, a center right and a nationalist party (Democratic Leftist Party, Motherland Party and National Movement Party, 1999-2002).

The second development during the last decade emerged as a natural consequence of the first one. Turkish electorate, who tried all of the alternatives gave 34% of its votes to a newly founded party, Justice and Development Party

²⁷ Ümit Cizre Sakalhoğlu, "The Anatomy of Turkish Military's Political Autonomy" *Comparative Politics*, 29, 2, pp.151-167.

and brought it to the power alone in November 2002. While Republican Peoples Party became the opposition party in the Parliament by gaining 21% of the total votes, all other parties, which ruled the country for a decade remained outside the parliament. Therefore, 42 years after the 1960 military coup, Turkish Parliament shifted back to bipartisan system.

Last decade witnessed the emergence of the civil society in Turkey as well. Yet weak in nature and could not find a prestigious place in Turkish domestic politics, the number and power of civil society organizations, which spread on a wide spectrum from protection of human rights to disabled people's rights, increased enormously since early 1990s. Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, a Turkish political science scholar explains the rise of civil society with two interrelated but externally induced developments. He writes, "The first of those developments is the democratizing impulse of the post Cold-War climate in the world. The second, ironically, is the changing features of Turkey's social structure which the new orthodoxy gave rise to. The new shift to strategies of 'wealth creation' instead of the decades-old strategy of 'wealth distribution' by the state forced key social groups and strata to rely on their own schemes and devices, with a limited degree of autonomy from the state".

Essentials and Priorities of Turkish Foreign Policy

Turkey's foreign policy resembles and differs at the same time, to / from its predecessor Ottoman Empire's foreign policy in certain points. For the similar part, being founded in the same geography, both countries depended their political entities on principles of benefiting from the balance of power and refraining from entering an armed struggle between other states unless a threat of occupation was real. However there exists a deep difference between the two, especially in area of philosophy of ruling: Ottoman Empire was based on the principle of 'not to be changed', basically aiming to keep its heterogeneous population divided into different nations, religions and sects. On the other hand Turkey, from the very beginning, was based on the principle of 'modification', targeting to homogenize its population and to rapidly modernize by adopting the Western values. Briefly, these similarities and differences functions as the determinants of the foreign policy formation in Turkey.

Firstly, the cultural dimension is an important component of Turkish foreign policy. Having 97% of its land in Asia and having a population, which had been mostly originated from steppes of the Central Asia, Turkey from time to time bears the marks of a nomad and feudal society. In domestic politics, people have a tendency to 'destroy' the rival instead of keeping a dialogue with. Obeying to the leaders is more common than obeying the institutions. Respect for the authority, sometimes in the level worshipping, creates strong support for the military coups from the society.

Having an Asian dimension Turks behaves in patience even passively against pressures and deep troubles. But at the same time Turks become angry easily and might sometimes react disproportionately. One can see reflection of this characteristic in foreign policy too. Turkish statesmen and diplomats might sometimes leave the 'negotiation table' and might cut 'personal' contacts with the foreign representatives due to disagreements.

Besides their Asian character, Turks bear the specialties of the Middle East as well. The prior instrument which Turkey shares with the Middle East is religion. %98 of Turkish society are Muslims. Sympathy with the oppressed people of Palestine, Chechnya or Bosnia in Turkish society originates from the sense of religious brotherhood, and Turkish foreign policy delicately approaches to the issues.

On the other hand, there is a strong Western influence in Turkey, although only %3 of its land locates in Europe. Turkey is the only democracy with a Muslim population in the Middle East. Moreover, Turkey is the only Muslim country with a constitutional principle of secularism. As a result of a radical process of 'reforms from above' all ruling elites were Westernized successfully.

Different aspects of Turkish culture results in various ways: There exists a continuous struggle between the Asian-Middle Eastern dimensions and the Western dimension, which creates identity crises in society level; the West, in particular Europeans, do not admit Turkey as European; and there is a non-negligible distinction between the ruling elites and the ordinary people. Nevertheless, since the foreign policy is formed and implemented by the Westernized elites, in final analysis, Western values gain superiority in state system and therefore in foreign politics.²⁸

Another (second) determinant of the foreign policy in Turkey is the legacy of history. Although it was commonly characterized as the 'sick man of Europe' by its Western counterparts in the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire was an indispensable component of European balance of power, thus it was European. Besides, in the Ottoman Empire, the implementation of Islamic laws (Şeriat) was quite different than all of other Muslim states. The earthly authority of the Sultan was above the religious authority, and the state was partly run by non-Islamic laws inherited from Byzantine and Sassanid Empires. In this sense, Turkish diplomacy is a natural continuation of the Ottoman diplomacy.

On the other hand, history brought burdens on Turkish foreign policy too. Turkey is still being proclaimed responsible by certain circles for controversial

²⁸ Baskın Oran, "TDP'nin Kuramsal Çerçevesi", *Türk Dış Politikası Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne*, Baskın Oran (ed.), vol. 1, İstanbul, İletişim, 2001, pp. 20-21.

issues such as the spoiling activities of the Ottoman armies in Europe, so-called colonization of the Arab nations, and so-called enslavement of the Balkan people or the Armenian genocide allegations during the First World War. Turkey never refuses that the Ottoman Empire was its predecessor. But while accepting the Ottoman 'state', Turkey rejects Ottoman 'regime'.²⁹

The third determinant is the strategic dimension. Turkey locates in one of the most strategic places in the world, stretching from Balkans in the west to Caucasus in the east, and from the Black Sea in the north to the 'fertile crescent' of the Middle East in the south. This place is also a bridge between the natural resources of the Caspian basin, Central Asia, Middle East and the Western markets. This position gives Turkey a strong advantage on one hand, but it increases security concerns on the other.

There exists a correlation between the number of neighbors - shared boundaries of a country and its security. Turkey was neighboring six countries (Greece, Bulgaria, Soviet Union, Iran, Iraq, France via Syria and Italy via Dodecanese islands) before the Second World War. This number reduced to 5 (Greece, Bulgaria, Soviet Union, Iran, Iraq, Syria) after the War but increased to 8 (Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan via Nachcivan, Iran, Iraq and Syria) when the Cold War ended. Total boundaries with these countries measure 2648 kilometers. Besides Turkey has 7200 kilometers of coastline. The nature of the neighbors is clearly more important than their numbers, and Turkey is not lucky with respect to this dimension: During the Cold War years it was one of the two NATO countries sharing a common border with the Soviet Union. After the Cold War, Turkey become a neighbor for most troublesome regions, and most problematic regimes.

Another strategic instrument is the possession of the Turkish straits. While, controlling an important water-passage gives advantages to Turkey, difficulties to defend them against probable aggressions creates disadvantages too.

The fourth determinant is the regional 'security circles' and global 'power axes' which locate around Turkey or pass across the country. Existence of five different and interlocking regional security circles (Europe, the Balkans, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Caucasus) around Turkey makes difficult for the Turkish foreign policy decision makers to find solutions to Turkey's regional problems. Therefore, when taking and implementing foreign policy decisions by taking into account of the balances in each of these 5 regions, Turkey often falls into dichotomies.³⁰

²⁹ Mustafa Aydın, "Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy: Historical Framework and Traditional Inputs", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 35, 4 (October 1997), pp. 152-186.

³⁰ Oran, *op.cit.*, pp. 25-26.

As for its relations with Europe, Turkey's classical dichotomy during the Cold War years was to actively take part in the Western alliance by fulfilling its commitments in NATO but, at the same time, not to jeopardize the Soviet Union, the 'big neighbor in the north'. After the Cold War this concern was replaced by another dichotomy: To take part in the European Union without permitting it to intervene Turkey's internal affairs.

Meanwhile, the Balkans, which is Turkey's gate to Europe bears enormous importance for Turkey. In this region Turkey tries to keep this 'gate' open all times, without jeopardizing Greece or Bulgaria at the same time.

As for the Mediterranean dimension, Turkey targets to prevent creation of a block by Greece and Cyprus around its coasts, but Turkey also tries not to alienate Greece, the most important country for its European connection.

The Middle East, with its huge energy capacity naturally attracts Turkey's attention. Turkey, on one hand tries to implement an active policy for maximizing its interests in the region, but refrains to be pulled into ever lasting instabilities on the other.

Similar to the Middle East, Caucasus with its underground resources is listed among Turkish foreign policy's areas of interest. Here as well Turkey has a dichotomy: It supports friendly countries and regimes in the region to diminish Russian influence, but tries not to attract Russian anger.

Finally, global power axes pass across Turkey also influence Turkey's foreign policy. During the Cold War years, the axis which divided the Eastern and Western blocks, vertically passed through Turkey. Having memberships to NATO, the Council of Europe and OECD maintained Turkey to remain at the western part of this division. Starting with the 1980s, another axis, the North-South division between the developed and underdeveloped (or developing) countries passed through Turkey, but this time horizontally. After the Cold War, the axis symbolizing a division between the civilizations as set forth by Samuel P. Huntington in his famous book 'The Clash of Civilizations', passes again vertically through Turkey. This time Turkey, not by political or economic parameters but by the cultural ones, locates between Christianity and Islam.

When above mentioned elements are brought together, one can evaluate that Turkish foreign policy is run under the shadow of dichotomies and with a prior objective of not changing the status quo. However, while regional developments makes almost impossible to keep the balances in the region, Turkey's dichotomies makes it difficult to reach its targets. One clear example of this situation is Turkey's relations with the EU.

Turkey and the EU

A Brief History of Turkish-EU Relations

Turkey applied to become a member to the European Economic Community (EEC, the predecessor of European Union) in 1959. Three main factors shaped Turkey's tendency towards the EEC: As for the historical and ideological factor; since 19th century all institutions and organizations that had emerged in Europe attracted Turkey's attention. Because since the Ottoman times, Turkey turned its face towards Europe and gave more importance to developments in the West than those in the East. For almost 150 years the 'modernization', 'westernization' and 'Europeanization' were perceived as having the same meaning in Turkey. Turkish Republic tried to enhance its relations with the European countries rather than its Asian neighbors throughout its history. While refusing to attend the Asian Conference in 1949, and acting like the speaker of the West in Bandung Conference of Asian and African Nations in 1955, and pursuing close policies to the colonialist powers during independence movements in late 50s (such as in the Algerian case), Turkey sustained enthusiastic efforts to participate all initiatives of Europe.³¹

Economic situation of Turkey in late 1950s also played as a factor in its application to the EEC. Turkish rulers thought that being a member to the 'riches' club of Europe' would facilitate for Turkey to take more credits and would change its financial balances in a positive way. Besides, as six members (Germany, Italy, France, Luxembourg, Belgium and Netherlands) of the EEC were traditional trade partners of Turkey, Turkish rulers did not hesitate to apply for taking part in a single market with them.

Finally, Greece, Turkey's rival in foreign politics had applied for membership. Thus, Turkish rulers who wanted not to remain behind of Greece reached an evaluation that Turkey should not miss the same opportunity.³²

Meanwhile, EEC's approach to Turkey in late 1950s was shaped mainly by three factors too. At official level, then rulers of EEC members were focusing on similarities rather than differences, therefore historical and ideological factors were not put as obstacles before Turkey's application. However, at unofficial society level, there was a negative approach to Turkey and Turks, mainly based on the relics of 10 centuries of confrontation.³³

³¹ Çağrı Erhan, "AT'yle İlişkiler", *Türk Dış Politikası Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne*, Baskın Oran (ed.), vol. I, İstanbul, İletişim, 2001, p. 813.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 815-816.

³³ Bozkurt Güvenç, "Avrupa ve Türkiye İlişkilerinin Tarihi Kaynakları, Gelişmesi ve Bugünkü Sorunları", *Avrupa Siyasi Birliği ve Türkiye*, Ankara, TCMB, 1999, pp. 79-81.

EEC members perceived the economic weakness of Turkey as a negative factor. However, its huge population, geographical location and growing economy were making Turkey a market should not be missed.

As for political dimension, since the Cold War dynamics were in force, Turkey and EEC members were at the same block: They were members of NATO, the Council of Europe and OECD. In addition, during 1950s and 1960s the indispensable European values of 1990s, such as respect for the human rights and democracy etc. had less importance.

Turkey signed an association agreement with the EEC in 1963, which opened the way for full membership after preparatory and transition periods, which both would prepare Turkish economy for the mechanisms of the EEC. Having finished the preparations Turkey entered to the transition period in 1973. According to the 'Additional Protocol' signed in 1973, customs would be nullified between the two parts in 22 years, and during this process Turkey would become a full member to the 'club'. However, deep economic and political instabilities in Turkey in 1970s and reactions from European societies to activities of the military rule after the 1980 coup, brought tensions to the relations. Although Turkey applied for full membership in 1987, EEC rejected this application asserting that Turkey was not ready to fulfill its obligations within the Community.

As the Cold War ended and the 'iron curtain' between the east and west Europe perished in late 1980s, priorities of the EEC totally changed, and this new situation made it more difficult for Turkey to become a member. Mainly 6 parameters influenced the conduct of relations in this period:

First, the European part gave priority to develop its relations with the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), which entered a transition period after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Europeans intensified their economic and political sources on a process of absorbing these new regimes. Therefore, they created 'membership criteria' (known as the Copenhagen Criteria) to make those countries' political and economic level closer to the West Europe. All candidates for membership, including Turkey, which in fact was not an ex-Communist country, invited to fulfill those criteria for membership.

Second, beginning with the mid-1980s, EEC gradually transformed to EU. With the signing of the Treaty on European Union at Maastricht in 1992, European integration gained a political meaning along with the economic one. Therefore, the EU started to approach to the candidates countries not only with economic but more precisely with political concerns.

Third, as the political integration of Europe gained impetus in early 1990s, the problems of identity, culture, ideology and borders inevitably raised. In addition to its economic and political situation, the place of Turkey in Europe with respect to identity, started to be discussed among European intellectuals and rulers.

Fourth, as for most of the world, the notion of human rights raised in 1990s, and Turkey was criticized widely for human rights violations in the country.

Fifth, issues like Turkey's relations with Greece, which was a EU member since 1981, Cyprus dispute and Turkey's struggle against PKK terrorist organization entered into agenda of Turkey-EU relations.

Sixth, with influence of former five factors, the EU developed the idea of 'special relations with Turkey', which was briefly, offering enhanced and multifaceted relations between the two parts without giving a full member status Turkey. In conformity with this, Turkey and EU concluded a customs union in 1995. However, evaluating this step as a natural consequence of its gained rights with the 1963 agreement, Turkey never gave up its objective to become a full member.

But Turkey's performance in fulfilling Copenhagen Criteria was below EU's expectations. Therefore, Turkey was excluded from EU's enlargement perspective at Luxembourg European Council of 1997, while 12 other countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Malta and Cyprus) were listed among candidates for EU. Turkey reacted in a strong manner to this decision and suspended its political ties with the EU.

Turkey's this reaction smoothened approach of the EU, which in fact did not want to cut all of its ties with Turkey for political and economic purposes, and candidacy status of Turkey was registered by EU at the Helsinki European Council in 1999. One year later, the EU adopted the Accession Partnership Document for Turkey, which was a road map in nature telling what to do to fulfill membership criteria in the following year (short term) and until 2004 (medium term).

According to political aspects of the Copenhagen Criteria, all candidate countries should prove their will for democracy, supremacy of law, respect for human rights and protection of minorities, by establishing strong institutions. Only after this step the candidates would be invited for negotiations on economic criteria of Copenhagen. Thus, fulfilling political criteria was a

prerequisite for further steps towards membership.³⁴ Bearing this in mind, Turkey prepared its *National Program* – a timetable- to complete these prerequisites. But Turkish *timetable* was not fully compatible with EU's *road map*.

For instance, necessary modifications in Turkish legal system with respect to; 'freedom of expression'; 'freedom of association and demonstration'; 'struggle against torture by government officials'; 'termination of human rights violations'; 'human rights training for government officials especially for judges and public prosecutors'; 'termination of regional disparities'; 'constitutional guarantees for eliminating all kinds of discriminations with respect to religion, faith, language and gender'; 'revision of the Turkish Constitution consistent with the European Convention of Human Rights' etc, would be made within the same terms proposed by the EU. In contrary, modifications for 'broadcasting and education in mother tongue' (for people who speak ethnic languages such as Kurdish, Arabic, Laz etc.); 'removal of death penalty' and 'admission of International Court of Justice's right to verdict on Turkey's disputes with Greece, especially on nautical boundaries in the Aegean', would be either made in different terms or not to be fulfilled ever.³⁵

Differences between the EU's and Turkey's documents were criticized by EU Commission's annual enlargement strategy report in 2001 and Turkey was evaluated separately from other 12 candidates. To remove this critics Turkish Parliament made substantive constitutional reform in summer of 2002 but this move was found inadequate by the EU Commission's report in September 2002.

By the last months of 2002, Turkey's relations with the EU reached its most delicate level because of the approaching Copenhagen European Council in December, in which the enlargement process of EU until 2007 will take its final shape. Trying to start membership negotiations with the EU in 2003 started an enormous activity in domestic level by making more regulations to democratize Turkish legal system and in international level by strengthening its diplomatic pressure in the European capitals.

Nevertheless, it is seen in recent debates over Turkey's EU membership in European circles, that fulfilling Copenhagen Criteria is not adequate to convince European societies for admitting Turkey into the club. Current debates are focused on differences of Turkey than Europe, rather than its democratic or economic performance. It will not be an exaggeration to say that basic European opposition against Turkey is based on the assumption that Turkey has not a

³⁴ Sanem Baykal, "AB'yle İlişkiler", *Türk Dış Politikası Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne*, Baskın Oran (ed.), vol. II, İstanbul, İletişim, 2001, p. 362.

³⁵ Haluk Günüçür, *İsveç Günü Paneli*, Ankara, ATAUM, 2001, p. 41.

European but an Asian identity, as it is most clearly expressed by president of European Convention and former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

How Turkey Differs from Europe?: Europeans' Critical Approach

According to the recent opinion polls 75 % of the Turks supports Turkey's EU membership. In contrary, support of the EU citizens for Turkey's membership is around 30% (And there is a strong opposition around 50%).³⁶ More and more EU citizens in recent years, especially after the September 11 terrorist attacks to the US, explain the cause behind their opposition with identity parameters. In spite of Turkey's great transformation in the past 150 years and especially after the foundation of the Republic in 1923, differences rather than similarities are being mentioned when opposing Turkey's EU membership.

So the problem locks over a series of questions. Bozkurt Güvenç, a prominent Turkish scholar known by his book titled 'Turkish Identity' (Türk Kimliği) literally puts that network of uncertainties in Europeans' minds as follows:

Who are the Turks? What is their historical allegiance and geographical orientation? Are they East European or West Asiatic people? Is Turkey a Muslim-secular state? Are they natives of Asia Minor or 'nomadic hordes' from Turanian steppes of Asia? Are they despotic rulers or innocent bystanders despotically ruled? Are they descendents of ancient people from Hittites to Romans, or the last surviving mercenaries of Genghis Khan, trying to conquer the world on a divine mission? Are the Turks wandering orphans of the Ottoman Dynasty, defending the Muslim faith against the neo-Crusaders? Or else, as reflected in the eyes of Western World, fearsome inmates of a prison-turned mad house, as portrayed by the movie film *The Midnight Express*? Or simply the trigger-happy invaders of peaceful islanders? Or still, slave-drivers of oppressed minorities, such as the Armenians and the Kurds? Are they, in retrospect, conquerors or the conquered? Are the Turks solely responsible for the biased judgments or anti-Turkish feelings?³⁷

To understand European concerns for Turkey better, we can classify main controversial issues into seven points.

First is the 'Origin of the Turks'. Many Europeans believe that the Turks not European but Asian. Without a doubt, Turks are not the native people of the Anatolia or Europe. They are the principal descendants of large bands of

³⁶ Eurobarometer, 53 (April-May 2000).

³⁷ Güvenç, "Quest for...", op.cit., p. 3.

nomads who roamed in the Altai Mountains (and thus they are also called Altaic peoples) in northern Mongolia and on the steppes of the Central Asia during the first centuries AD. The original Central Asian Turkic nomads established their first great kingdom in 6th century AD, a nomadic confederation named 'Göktürk'. Pushed by Mongols in 11th century, during 'Seljuk' Empire, Turks penetrated into Asia minor and admitted this land as a new home. In 1353, during reign of Sultan Orhan of the Ottomans, Turks passed to the European continent through Dardanelles and within two centuries they formed a large empire extending on the west to Vienna. Presence in Anatolia for a thousand years and in Europe for 650 years, and mixing with other ethnic groups such as Arabs, Serbs, Bulgarians, Persians, Caucasians etc., inevitably changed Turks' physical and cultural character. Although, mostly dark haired and dark eyed, there are visible differences in appearance when compared to their cousins still living in Central Asia. Therefore Turks' origin can be traced in Asia, but one should also take into consideration of the developments in the last millennium.

Second is the geographical location of Turkey. 237th article of Rome Treaty, the founding document of the EEC and therefore EU, puts clearly that "only countries geographically located in Europe may become member for the organization". When Turkey applied for membership in 1959, nobody at the European side objected this application with geographical explanations, because Turkey had some land in Europe. In contrary, Morocco's application for the EEC was rejected on geographical arguments. Turkey, since 1856 (see above) has become member to a quite number of European institutions such as Council of Europe, European Bank For Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Eurovision etc. Hence, it is illogical to call Turkey, 'non-European'. Nevertheless, the problem lays with the recent debate on Europe's boundaries. Many Europeans assert that the Europe in the east ends not with the Ural Mountains and Turkish Straits, but with Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldavia and Turkey.³⁸ For that reason, in today's Europe, definition of boundaries is not a geographical but political and cultural question, and this negatively influences Turkey's relation with EU.

Third is the Turkish language. It belongs to the Altaic branch of the Ural-Altaic language family and thus it has close relations not with European languages but with Mongolian, Manchu-Tungus, Korean and perhaps with Japanese. Turkish is a very ancient language, goes back 6000 years, with a flawless phonetic, morphological and syntactic structure. The basic features distinguish Turkish from Indo-European languages of Europe are 'vowel harmony', 'absence of gender', 'agglutination', 'adjectives precede nouns', 'verbs at the end of the sentence'. One similarity is the usage of Latin alphabet in writing.

³⁸ Nail Alkan, *Avrupa'da Sınırlar*, Ankara, ATAUM, 2002, *passim*.

Fourth is the religion. As an indispensable component of identity description, the argument of religious difference is being widely used to legitimize opposition to Turkey's EU membership. Having a secular state system 98% of the Turks are Muslims and majority of them are Sunnites. As mentioned above, in 1959 when Turkey applied for membership to the EEC, religious difference was not taken as an important distinction. Mainly three developments gave impetus to rise to usage of religious parameters for emphasizing Turkey's difference from Europe: First is the growing existence of Turkish immigrant workers to European countries beginning with mid-1960s. Reaching a great population as much as 3 millions in EU countries, mostly in Germany, France, the Netherlands and Belgium, Turks brought their life styles to European cities. As the number of mosques, Turkish associations, foundations and cultural centers increased, on one hand Europeans had an opportunity to know Islam better, but on the other hand this phenomenon created an alienation to Islam due to Turks' non-integration with European societies. Second, when the Cold War was ended and the two Germanies had reunited and a huge number of unemployed East Germans immigrated to West to find jobs. However, existence of the 'guest workers' mainly Turks limited the number of jobs for the 'new comers'. Depending on economic reason, reaction to the 'guest workers' had raised. Due to increasing unemployment in other European countries, xenophobic movements such as 'skin heads' and 'neo-Nazis' gained impetus and thus negative approach to Muslims intensified. Third, parallel to the intellectual debate on the 'clash of civilizations' and especially after the tragic events on September 11, European people's perception of Islam negatively affected. As fundamentalist terrorist organizations increased their activity against Western targets all over the world, ancient argument of 'struggle between the Crescent and the Cross' entered into European intellectual agenda. In sum, last 15 years witnessed a growing alienation in Europe to Islam and thus to Muslims. This atmosphere constituted an appropriate area to separate Turkey, ideologically from Europe. Although deeply criticized by secular European intellectuals who believe that the EU should have a scope of embracing all kinds of faiths, this tendency is still spreading.

Fifth is the characteristic of the Turkish society. Turkey has the second biggest population in Europe with 67 millions and a high population increase rate by European standards (1.2 %). 27.8% of this number is between 0-15 in age, thus Turkey has the youngest population in Europe as well. With this size, if Turkey once becomes a member to the EU, all current economic and political balances will change.

In addition to its size, basic qualities of Turkish population is quite different than that of Europeans. For instance, 40 % of Turkish people live in rural areas. Even in big cities with populations more than 3 millions, traditional

life patterns persists, although challenged by speedy and unplanned industrialization. Asian values such as family and community dependence, paternal family structure, and kinsmanship are common. Religious values are respected by a majority of the population.³⁹ This strong composition, on one hand decreases the negative influence of uncertainties brought by industrialization and globalization on society, but on the other, it limits individualism, which is one of the leading patterns of European societies.

Sixth is the nature of Turkish economy. Though having achieved a fast industrialization beginning with mid-1980 (frequent references were made to the Korean Miracle by Turkish governments of this period), traditional agricultural sector is still accounted for 40 % of employment similar to spatial distribution of population. Agriculture sector is still being subsidized by the state mostly with political purposes. Basic components of Turkey's GDP, which was 443 billion dollars in 2001, are agriculture (14.5 %), industry (28.4%) and services (57.1%). The growing trade deficit in 2000 and 2001, coming together with a serious weakness in the banking sector plunged the economy into crisis. Unemployment rate raised to 20% and inflation rate climbed up to 70%. Both are the highest among the EU countries and candidates for EU, ad in contradiction with economic criteria for membership. In spite of huge IMF assistance as much as 21 billion dollars and tight fiscal policies for rehabilitation, Turkish economy is far behind fulfilling the EU's economic criteria. If membership negotiations under 31 different titles will start with the EU, surely Turkey will have certain difficulties in areas such as 'free circulation of goods, individuals, services', 'competition policy', 'agriculture', 'economic and monetary union' and 'taxation'.

Seventh is the level of democracy. As expressed above Turkey took giant steps toward fulfilling Copenhagen political criteria in the last two years by making comprehensive constitutional amendments and legal modifications. However, it is still being criticized in EU enlargement reports for the 'level of respect for human rights including the rights of different ethnic and religious communities in the country', 'the place of military in ruling mechanisms', and 'limits before participation to politics'.

Conclusion

In the EU, which is at the threshold of the most comprehensive enlargement ever, less people support Turkey's membership than any of other 12 candidates. For leaving it out of the door, in the official level, Turkey is being charged by not fulfilling the necessary criteria, and in the unofficial level it is being openly described as being *Non-European* and *Asian*. It can hardly be

³⁹ Musa Taşdelen, "Toplumsal Yapımızın Dayanımcı Karakteri ve Değişim", *Cumhuriyet Ansiklopedisi*, Vol : III, p. 1821.

denied that a majority of western European politicians and even more members of general public are of the opinion that in a cultural and political perspective the Turks are not really Europeans and Turkey is not an integral part of Europe.

This can be seen as the result of centuries-old European identity creation. Since the Middle Ages, the *Turk* was assigned a role of the *other*. In spite of more recent political experiences with Turkey as a reliable ally within the Western security mechanisms and its association with the EU, the deeply rooted European view of the *Turk* has not gone into a substantial revision. Economic problems, democratic deficiencies, and political conflicts quickly become scapegoats for a much more fundamental and deeply rooted unwillingness to accept Turkey as a part of European *civilization*. As long as the mixture of cultural prejudice and religiously motivated fear of an *Islamic Threat* to the *Christian West* continues to influence European perceptions, Turkey's dreams to take part in European integration will encounter difficulties unknown for other European states.

Consequently, the process of shaping European architecture is passing through a delicate period: Whether the EU will keep the door open for Turkey, which has a *sui generis* country-character reflecting Asian and European patterns together, or will leave it outside and lose an opportunity to make the Union an admirable establishment where civilizations come together.