

Lately, especially starting from 1999 when Turkey had been formally declared a candidate state in Helsinki until very recently when the negotiation talks started, a debate across Europe began whether Turkey should be a full member and its membership would mean the end of Europe, as Valéry Giscard d'Estaing -former President of France and President of European Convention- claimed.

This paper would be based on the assumption, probably also made by the European leaders, that a proposal to Turkey in the format of a “privileged partnership” will be found totally unacceptable by Turkish people, and indeed, it would mean the discontinuance of Turkish-European relationships on the basis of membership. Therefore, further interpretations here would follow the assumption of losing Turkey in Europe. I do not find it feasible to create a new category of membership, which indeed has not existed so far, because of the following reasons:

The first issue is that Turkey is the only country which enacted the Customs Union prior full membership. In this stance, since March 6, 1995 when the Customs Union was signed, the country was already given a so-called “privileged membership” at the expense of increasing its trade deficit.

Second, the EU project has a **continental dimension** and Turkey cannot remain outside of it. Turkey, when first made an application in 1959, to then-called European Economic Community (EEC) and EEC, when signed Ankara Agreement with Turkey in 1963, knowingly initiated this relationship on the grounds of full membership, not a privileged one. An offer of special status, lacking institutional and political point of view, will create nothing more than a perception by Turkish people as a neo-colonialist approach. Like the Athens Agreement signed with Greece, the Ankara Agreement sought to prepare Turkey for full membership through economic integration (Turkish-EU Enlargement Council of the European Round Table of Industrialists, 2004). I argue that the politicians, mainly

some Christian Democrats, have the intention of carrying a European issue in internal politics. However, EU, with a *sui generis* supranational structure and arguably the biggest civilization project of human history, should be approached above all the short-term political gains.

Third, credibility counts for most of the relationships among people and states. Turkey's eligibility for membership was reconfirmed on many occasions and it "has every reason for expecting to be welcome in the Union, provided it fulfils the relevant conditions." (Independent Commission on Turkey, September 2004, p.45) Any objection should have been raised either in 1959, or in 1987 -when Turgut Özal government applied for the second time-, or in 1999 when Turkey was given a candidate status. Recent ambiguous suggestions by some politicians, with no directions, would lead the EU to nowhere and no politician among these can claim that decisions so far were not taken in complete understanding of all circumstances.

Turkey deserves equal treatment like any other candidate state and European leaders need to act in the direction of equity in order to maintain their convincingness, probably *the* most critical asset of statesmen. Turkey has the right to remind *pacta sunt servanda* principle, with the belief that it is still valid in international relations. Turkish government and European leaders need mutual trust more than ever in their relationships going back to centuries.

Fourth, a proposal other than full membership for Turkey would mean for the new democracies that no matter how much they improve, it is not adequate to become a member to EU. This, in turn, would create a reluctance for other developing nations such as Croatia, Serbia, or Bosnia and would raise the walls between the neighbors; which, after all, conflicts with the claim of EU as the biggest peace project across Europe.

In economical terms, lack of Turkey will mean for Europe a lack of steadily increasing GNP level (460 billion euros -PPP), an export oriented economy and developing information society. Turkey's full integration will bring a fresh impetus to the internal market with its **trade creation** potential. Taking measures to realize full productivity potential, Turkey could create 6 million additional jobs by 2015 and achieve annual GDP growth as high as 8.5 percent (Kaleağası, 2004).

In social terms, Europe is facing a significant problem of an aging population with fertility rate falling since 1965 while life expectancy has increased. The problem of the EU's aging population translates into less taxable income and lower revenues from social contributions. This means more working years, higher taxes, fewer pensions for a shorter period of time. According to a recent UN study (cited from Kaleağası, 2004), "the EU would need an average of 6.1 million immigrants a year from 2015 to 2040 to maintain a ratio of three working-age adults for each retiree."

Last but not least, EU -which owes the roots of its cultural understanding to Renaissance ideals- is a socio-cultural mosaic based on the norms of democracy, rule of law, diversity and multiculturalism. Considering the Union in a single religion and culture would conflict with its universal values and principle of equity. Putting aside the strategic and military power it will gain with Turkey, I argue that to become a real economic and political union, the EU needs an "upper identity" covering all the cultural differences of peoples. And those who are sceptical about Turkey's entry into the EU due to its religious orientation or geographical location should also consider the 1.3 million naturalised Turks living in the EU. Those who reject Turkey by saying that it is a conservative country imply that they are rejecting the Turks living within their borders (Stiftung Zentrum für Türkeistudien, 2003).

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