

# **Turkey and the European Union**

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Conclusion



# 1. The Luxembourg debacle: Slammed door or launching pad for Turkish membership?

Where does Europe stop? And, more importantly, how should it cope with increasingly disorderly political conflicts on its south eastern fringes? In particular, how should the European Union<sup>1</sup> proceed in its dealings with Turkey? Both the cantankerous relationship between Turkey and the EU countries—ever since last December’s EU summit in Luxembourg — and the start of negotiations on Cyprus’s accession to the Union make the resolution of these questions urgent.

*<sup>1</sup>In the rest of this report, for the sake of simplicity, I shall refer to both the pre-Maastricht Community and post-Maastricht Union as the European Union (EU).*

At the Luxembourg summit the EU announced that six countries—the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, as well as Cyprus—would start accession negotiations in April 1998; that a second group of Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia and Lithuania and Slovakia would have to wait, but would benefit from closer economic ties through “accession partnerships”; and that Turkey, “eligible” for membership but without an accession partnership, was by itself in the third division..

Remarks at the summit by the Luxembourg prime minister, Jean-Claude Juncker, to the effect that the issue of torture separated Turkey from the other applicant countries, and even that Turkey’s leaders might bear a measure of direct responsibility for this, heightened the Turks’ bitterness still further.

In Ankara the Luxembourg summit was taken as a slap in the face. Eight months previously Turkey had announced that it expected to be placed in the same basket as the front-line applicants by the end of the year. But Turkey had been leapfrogged in the queue for membership by the first group of post-Communist applicants, despite its association agreement, customs union and an application first lodged in 1963.

Turkey, feeling snubbed, stayed away from the special “European Conference” that was held in London in March 1998 for all countries aspiring to join the EU—and had originally designed specifically for Turkey’s benefit. It even threatened to withdraw its application by summer 1998.

In Brussels a rather different outlook prevails, especially in the Commission. Eurocrats regard the widely-held view that Luxembourg marked the end of the road for Turkey’s application as almost certainly wrong. The summit left a signpost pointing towards eventual Turkish membership and all the member-states—for the first time—committed themselves to the goal of Turkish membership. Some Commission officials claim that the Luxembourg summit, far from having slammed a door in Turkey’s face, marked a substantial advance in its efforts to join the EU and will prove to have been the launching pad for its eventual accession.

<sup>2</sup>*European Strategy for Turkey: The Commission’s initial operational proposals; 3 March 1998.*

<sup>3</sup>*Report on developments in relations with Turkey since the entry into force of the customs union; 3 March 1998 pp.4 & 5.*

In some sense the EU can even claim that the key elements of a process that will conclude with Turkey’s accession are already falling into place. There are plans to extend the customs union to agriculture and for an aid package of 2.5 billion ecus. On March 3, the Commission unveiled a wide-ranging strategy for Turkey,<sup>2</sup> outlining areas for co-operation that would the customs union with Turkey more effective. At the same time it published a report which concluded that, despite triple digit inflation and the withholding of financial assistance pledged by the EU, the Turkish economy “has proved itself able to adapt to the increasingly tough competition in the customs union.” The only disappointment was that “major foreign investment...has sadly fallen well below expected levels since the union came into being.”<sup>3</sup>

All this could mean—given the likely timetable for the rest of the eastern European enlargement — that the Union is in fact contemplating letting in Turkey at around the same time as the second group of applicants, 12 to 15 years.

But at present relations between the two sides are in serious disarray. EU leaders must cope not only with the direct rebuff of Turkey’s application

but also with the consequences of the decision to start entry talks with Cyprus in spring 1998. The Turkish Cypriots have refused to participate in negotiations for an application that they did not make and whose legal validity they do not recognise. Thus the effect of Cyprus's accession may be to divide the island permanently and to bring the EU—containing a two-state Greek-speaking mini-bloc—into permanent confrontation with Turkey.

Cyprus, of course, is only one part of a broad set of conflicts, based on competing nationalisms, that have erupted in the last twenty years in an arc around the eastern Mediterranean from Bosnia to the Caucasus. The expansion of the EU to eastern and southern Europe is bringing it into contact with regions where the nation-state is much less securely based than in western Europe, and where international relations hinge on nationalist-driven contests over symbols, irredentist aspirations and minority populations. The EU has so far been powerless to diminish these tensions and has in some ways perhaps even exacerbated them. For the admission of Greece in 1981 was followed by an upsurge in ultra-nationalist politics in Greece which might not have happened without EU membership making that country more secure and self-confident.

Though Turkey is now linked to the EU by something that seemed an absurd fantasy for long after 1963—a successfully functioning customs union—permanently bad relations between Brussels and Ankara seem more likely than rather than a convergence of views.

How deep are the divisions between Turks and the EU, and why have they arisen? What are the dangers of the current impasse? What could be done to reduce them? Is there a chance Turkey's social and economic progress could eliminate the principal problems over the next generation? These are some of the questions which this pamphlet seeks to address.

## 2. Turkey's bid for membership

Turkey's hopes for full membership of the EU go back to the early 1960s when it followed Greece in negotiating an association agreement with the 'Six.' The French and the Germans hesitated before going into this arrangement, but Chancellor Erhardt in particular seems to have been concerned with the need to maintain an equilibrium between Greece and Turkey. In 1973, when Turkey was still under military rule, an Accession Protocol, outlining a 22-year programme of tariff cuts for a customs union, was agreed. There were many hesitations in Turkey, because of the desire to protect fledgling industries. So in 1988 Turkey unilaterally suspended the tariff cuts for ten years.

By that year Greece had been a full member of the EU for seven years. It had brought Turkish-EU relations to a virtual standstill by blocking all EU aid and financial co-operation with Turkey. Its bilateral disputes with Turkey were clouding the operation of the Turkey-EU association agreement

This had not been expected by either the EU or by Turkey, which had signally failed to secure guarantees for itself before Greece's accession—the importance of which was only belatedly grasped in Ankara. In retrospect the Turks can perhaps claim that the Europeans did not stick to their word. In June 1975 the European Council declared formally that the examination of Greece's membership application would not affect relations between the Community and Turkey, and that the rights guaranteed by the Association Agreement with Turkey would not be altered. The Greek government of Constantine Karamanlis gave verbal assurances that it would not attempt to block or veto a future Turkish application.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a curious combination of rapid economic progress but a serious political deterioration in Turkey's relations with the EU. Turkey became an increasingly important trading partner with the EU and the Community's main supplier of textiles. But its dialogue with the

community was often stormy and unfriendly, entailing on one occasion an attempt to throw out the Commission's Ankara representative. The immediate sources of these poor relations were human rights issues and the growing role of the European Parliament.

There had been a huge increase in tensions in the eastern Mediterranean after Turkey's 1974 invasion of Northern Cyprus. An abortive Greek Cypriot coup, fomented by the military regime then in power in Athens, temporarily overthrew the government of Archbishop Makarios and would have united Cyprus with Greece, if Turkey had not intervened. Though the coup quickly collapsed, Turkish troops remained on the island and, under their protection, a separate Turkish Cypriot state began to emerge in the north. Once in the EU, Greece insisted on placing Cyprus on the agenda at all EU meetings concerning Turkey, and that brought institutional links to a virtual halt.

Against this unpromising background, Turgut Özal's government formally applied in April 1987 for full membership. But it did not prepare the ground as effectively as Karamanlis had done for Greece in 1975. As a result the Commission's 1989 opinion reaffirmed Turkey's eligibility for eventual full membership but did not recommend the opening of negotiations.<sup>4</sup> Instead the Commission recommended 'a series of substantial measures' to help Turkey prepare itself for membership and said that the question of the Turkish candidacy should be revisited after 1995.

*<sup>4</sup>Commission  
Opinion on  
Turkey's  
Request for  
Accession to  
the  
Community  
SEC(89)  
2290 final/2  
20 December  
1989*

The practical measures included (1) the completion of the customs union; (2) the resumption of financial co-operation, including access to EU risk capital and the disbursement of the Fourth Financial Protocol, frozen since 1981; (3) the promotion of industrial and technological co-operation; and (4) the strengthening of political and cultural links. These were all manifestly sensible steps to take. To speed up progress, the EU enshrined them in a set of measures, known as the Matutes Package, in June 1990. The rest of the Union squashed Greek attempts to block it.

In practice, however, only one of the measures, the customs union, was achieved in the face of Greek opposition. Financial, technical, and industrial co-operation remained blocked. Political and cultural links



became steadily weaker as the 1990s progressed. But the customs union came into effect in 1996 — though only after massive lobbying of the European Parliament to get its grudging endorsement, and a promise to Greece that negotiations for Cypriot accession would start within six months of the end of the Intergovernmental Conference that would culminate in the Amsterdam treaty.

Once again, the chances of Brussels and Strasbourg supporting full membership appeared slim. Turkey nevertheless took the European Parliament's vote on the customs union in December 1995 as a signal that it should press on with an application. Why did it do so? The main reasons seem to have been the difficulties that Greece was causing in its relations with the EU, and the fear that its situation would get even worse if it was overtaken by East European applicants. In some ways the timing of this move was logical. The intergovernmental conference that was due to begin in Turin in March 1996 was supposed to deal with the institutional consequences of enlargement. Turkey's emphasis in making its case for membership rested primarily on appeals to EU government leaders. There were virtually no attempts to woo European opinion-formers, let alone grassroots public opinion, in the way that Constantine Karamanlis had done with such aplomb in 1975.

The 1996-97 Turkish campaign for early accession rested on four main arguments, and they remain the pillars of Turkey's case.

- ★ Turkey has had a long-standing contractual relationship with the EU, through its Association Agreement, which none of the other applicants have had.
- ★ Turkey is now economically on a par with or more advanced than many of the former Comecon applicants, and it has a parliamentary democracy which had been established for much longer.
- ★ Turkey offers the EU strategic and economic advantages in terms of stability on its south eastern flank, and influence in the emerging countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia.
- ★ The application is crucial to Europe's future relations with the Islamic south of the Mediterranean. The cold-shouldering of the

secular and democratic Turkish Republic would signal that the European Union was 'Christian club'. Then the rift between the Christian north Mediterranean countries and the Muslim south could widen dangerously.

Commission officials reckon that Turkey made substantial progress towards becoming a suitable applicant during this period, despite the fact that the coalition government was then headed by the Islamist Welfare Party, one strongly opposed to EU membership.

However, the Turkish campaign did not address the issues which the country's European critics regarded as the most salient ones. Inside the EU the debate about Turkish membership focused mainly on political issues such as human rights, the situation in south eastern Turkey and Islamic fundamentalism. Within a few months of December 1995, members of the European Parliament were expressing their disappointment at the course of events in Turkey. They then imposed a ban on the financial assistance that had been promised as part of the customs union package.

At the same time Greece stepped up its opposition to any sort of Turkish links to the EU. It was helped by a series of events in December 1995 and January 1996 which it was able to portray as potential Turkish territorial aggression, though the circumstances were somewhat ludicrous. A Turkish vessel ran aground close to the Turkish mainland coast on two previously obscure rocks, known as *Imia* in Greek and *Kardak* in Turkish. Both sides promptly issued conflicting claims to the rocks (until then known only as a shipping hazard) and tried to plant their national flags on them. Greece cited documents going back to 1932 to claim that as the rocks were a sovereign part of its territory and the dispute was therefore non-negotiable. It suggested that Turkey's challenge extended to Greek sovereignty over a much wider area in the eastern Aegean, potentially even including major islands rather than simply rocks and reefs.

With a few weeks, the two countries were closer to armed conflict than at any time since 1974. White House efforts, rather than European diplomacy, averted a Turkish commando expedition to regain the rocks from the Greeks, with only a few hours to spare. If it had gone ahead, there would have probably been an exchange of fire and the sea and air forces of the two countries might have been sucked into armed conflict.

Greece was eager to make this argument an EU issue. For some time, it had been seeking to present its differences with Turkey as a matter that potentially concerned the defence of the Union. Some of its politicians had even argued that it was morally entitled to EU financial aid, to the tune of several billion dollars, to offset the cost of arming against Turkey. But the other EU governments were understandably reluctant to get dragged into any war between Greece and Turkey. In 1992, the Western European Union (WEU), the Union's defence arm, made it clear that it would not defend Greece in a conflict with Turkey. In the light of the Kardak-Imia crisis, the European Council avoided inserting references to the territorial integrity of the European Union into the conclusions of the June 1997 Amsterdam summit.

Nevertheless EU leaders seem to have decoded Turkey must reach an accommodation with Greece before its can pursue its ambition of membership. This point was made several times by EU leaders, including Chancellor Helmut Kohl, in 1997. In Turkish eyes, this seems to give Greece a blank cheque to exact whatever terms it chooses for Turkey's admission; hence a good deal of the bitterness against the EU and Chancellor Kohl in particular.

### 3. The economy

The customs union between Turkey and the EU has for the most part worked much better in its first two years than anyone dared hope in 1995, let alone in previous decades. This is a remarkable tribute to the progress made by the Turkish economy, amid conditions of chronic political instability, even since the Commission's opinion of 1989.

Turkish industry can compete on an equal footing with the rest of European industry. This does not mean of course that the economic difficulties involved in Turkey's membership of the EU have entirely disappeared. But Turkey's economic progress has been under-reported, for several reasons. One of the most important is that it has been achieved through a mixture of policies which make most conventional economists blanch.

Sooner or later Turkey will have to confront a substantial agenda of difficult choices, and accept their short term political and social costs. The most obvious of these is the need to curb inflation, rather than cope with public sector deficits by borrowing. Over the last three years, Turkish price inflation has averaged more than 80 per cent a year and is currently just over 100 per cent. Since the 1980s, the Turkish lira has shrunk to become one of the world's most microscopic monetary units. Currency reform cannot be delayed much longer.

In the EU, attention tends to focus on several points. For example:

- ★ Turkey is still a poor country in terms of per capita income. Income levels are substantially lower than those of western Europe, for example. Expressed in purchasing power parities, *per capita* consumption is only \$5,500 and *per capita* GDP is about \$3,000. This is far below the poorest existing members of the EU. The comparable figures for Greece in 1994 are \$12,100 and \$7,458 respectively.

- ★ Much of the economy is still agricultural. The size of Turkey's workforce engaged in agriculture is no longer above 50 per cent, as it was in 1989, but it is over 40 per cent (compared with around 2 per cent in the United Kingdom). This rural workforce of over 15 million people is larger than the population of several EU member states and its income levels are far below even the average for Turkey. Shifting it out of traditional agriculture and into modern economic activity will require enormous and prolonged structural reforms.
- ★ There are very severe regional imbalances. Istanbul and western Turkey now enjoy something close to the prosperity of an industrialised European country. In much of central and eastern Turkey, however, incomes are far lower and the economy is still overwhelmingly agricultural.

But the Turkish economy is clearly modernising much faster than anyone expected a generation ago. It has now attained a scale where it is a very significant trading partner for other European countries. According to the OECD's annual report on Turkey in 1997: "Economic growth was amazingly strong, despite the prolonged absence of effective government and growing macro-economic imbalances."

Turkish business has come to accept rapid growth, interrupted only by the occasional sharp financial crash each decade, as a fact of life. But the air of pessimism and stagnation which had prevailed in Turkey for many years has gone. There is now a much more dynamic and optimistic

<sup>5</sup> For example,  
Graham  
Leicester;

*'Turkey and the  
European  
Union: The Case  
for a Special  
Relationship'*  
University of  
Reading 1995

business world, in which first generation fortunes seem to be made easily. The private sector now offers its employees a quality of life unknown in the country two decades earlier.

The turn-around has been swift and dramatic, giving rise to a consumer society which sustains 20 national satellite TV channels. Predictions that Turkish economic growth would falter or decline have not been borne out by events and show no sign of doing so.<sup>5</sup> Despite the continuous political crises and weak governments of the 1990s, and notwithstanding a financial collapse in 1994, the Turkish private sector is extraordinarily resilient. Even the state economic enterprises made a small overall profit in 1997.

Furthermore Turkey's regional role is also growing. Russia has re-emerged as one of Turkey's main markets for exports and services. Informal 'suitcase' trade between the two countries is thought to amount to billions of dollars. Turkish contracting companies and Turkish investors are to be found throughout the countries of the former Soviet Union. A complex web of power projects may one day take oil and gas from the Caspian basin and central Asia to Turkey and thence to the rest of Europe.

At home Turkey has become an attractive market for international retailers, even for familiar names from the British high street. Marks & Spencer, for example, recently opened their third store in Turkey. The Turkish market for consumer goods and products, described in the 1980s by one senior Istanbul industrialist as a market of two million people, is now many times that size and larger than those of several EU members. It is still growing rapidly.

This growth has occurred despite the lack of an effective political commitment to structural reform. Turkey's economic policy-making sprinted for a while under Turgut Özal in the 1980s, reacting to the crisis of the 1970s under which a mismanaged economy ground temporarily to a halt. As a result of the Özal reforms, Turkey had a modern financial system and product markets well before any of the former Comecon countries. But during the 1990s reform has been painfully slow.

Not everyone views this as an entirely bad. "I think in a way the weak governments of the 1990s have allowed the private sector to operate much more freely than it ever did before, and this could be one of the factors behind its success," says one Turkish Treasury official.

But the downside of the delay in reforming the economy is clear. Turkey's state economic enterprises have embraced privatisation more slowly than their equivalents in Eastern Europe. The prices of their products and services are still largely set by the government rather than by the markets. The Central Bank still does not have full control of its balance sheet. The tax system remains very inequitable. The main state pension schemes are plagued by shortages of funds to pay for the growing proportion of the population that is of pensionable age. Efficient ways of raising health and education standards need to be found. And the government has to find methods of bringing down the number of employees in the state sector

and spurring the private sector to absorb them. It must also find ways of eliminating regional disparities, so central and eastern Anatolia catch up with the prosperity of the west of the country.

These changes cannot be easily achieved in a country where governments are almost always weak coalitions and the civil service is underpaid, overstaffed and afflicted by intense party-political clientelism. A few ministries have benefited from internationally-sponsored projects, notably the Ministries of Finance and Education. There is little doubt that closer association with European institutions and projects, and contact with internationally accepted administrative standards, would stimulate improved economic management and the general quality of government.

With better management and access to large volumes of international investment, it is reasonable to assume that the strong incremental growth of Turkish manufacturing industry in recent years would become even more spectacular. The prospect of closing the gap between Turkey's levels of prosperity and those of Europe would become a realistic medium to long-term aim.

## 4. Politics

To judge from the western press, the news from Turkey always seems to be bad: inconclusive elections, weak coalitions, a hopelessly debilitated administrative system compete to grab the headlines. One would scarcely guess that behind the constant moaning, Turkey in the 1990s is a vibrant colourful, dynamic, increasingly hi-tech society, rapidly expanding and enjoying its first ever wave of real prosperity in the metropolitan consumer mass market.

The sombre picture given by the press serves as backdrop to a strikingly unfriendly and unproductive dialogue between Turkey and European institutions. It also ratchets up regional tensions. Turkey's ethnic opponents in neighbouring countries, tending to believe only the gloom, assume the country is weak and stagnant. The country's critics often diagnose Turkey's internal political life wrongly, and assume that they are dealing with a disguised dictatorship. They too often ignore the force of Turkish public opinion, the evidence provided by general elections, the deeply rooted nature of the party system, and the ever-shrinking following for left-wing and radical opposition groups.

Others tend to be exasperated by the obvious weaknesses of the administrative system. From close up, Turkey often looks less like an authoritarian society than a society where there is not enough co-ordinated administrative authority to implement policies. The inability of the system to react swiftly to events, and its slowness in taking decisions; the total lack of detailed day-to-day planning; and the strange combination of rigorous procedures and tough laws with a certain aimlessness in practice all attract attention. No one complains more of the difficulty of dealing with bureaucracy than the ordinary Turkish citizen whose complaints in this area are notorious.

These shortcomings have bedevilled every Turkish government and reduced its capacity to make changes. "Turkey is a country where the state may be strong, but the government is always weak," says one former US



ambassador to Ankara.

The general lineaments of Turkey's political problem—a weak but rigid prefectorial administrative system, combined with political clientelism and a fractured parliamentary scene—have been seen in other Mediterranean societies. In Turkey the problem is compounded by enormous demographic and economic changes and the speed at which they are taking place, together with a certain psychological isolationism. Against this background, forging satisfactory political and administrative relations with external partners such as the European Union would not have been easy, even without the disputes of the eastern Mediterranean. On the other hand, Mediterranean countries such as Spain and Greece have, at comparable points in their transition from agrarian to industrial societies, had to contend with equally acute problems.

When it set up its Association Agreement with Turkey, the EU set up Joint Councils of officials and parliamentarians to administer the agreement. The atmosphere of Joint Parliamentary meetings over the last two decades seems often to have been that of the amphitheatre rather than that of a club of friends. Turkish parliamentarians sometimes found it hard to win allies because of concerns over their country's human rights and ethnic problems.

For their part, the Turks have tended to find their parliamentary friends from outside the mainstream of European politics, among unrepresentative ultraconservative figures with little influence on society at large. They have become accustomed to dealing mainly with politicians and diplomats interested in strategic and defence issues. In the last resort, when strong advocates for Turkey are needed and favours are being sought, this role has always been assumed by the Americans, for example in the concluding stages of the bargaining over the customs union early in 1995. Few politicians and officials in Turkey appreciate that this visible reliance on the US is not the way to win friends in continental Europe.

## 5. Islamists versus secularists

While Turkish politicians and officials have been pressing their case for full membership, changes have been taking place in Turkey which in some European eyes call into question the long-term direction of the country.

During the 1990s Turkey's Islamists emerged for the first time as candidates for power. Several factors propelled them from the permanent fringes of politics to centre stage. One was the chronic fragmentation and division of the centre-right and centre-left, where party decay was evident. A second change, stretching all the way back to the 1950s, was the self-accelerating Islamisation of parts of the school system, especially in rural society, followed by systematic targeting by Islamists of parts of the civil service, notably provincial administrations, educational administration and the Ministry of the Interior. Another important factor was perceived non-acceptance of Turkey by the western world: this prompted voters in rural and provincial society to look away from culturally pro-Western liberal and social democratic parties of the centre, towards the Islamic and nationalist right.

A social and cultural revolution began in the less well-off provinces, with religious groups and the clergy assuming a central place in many eastern and central Anatolian communities. Demands for Islamic law — virtually unknown in the 1970s and 1980s—began to be widely articulated.

A successful Islamic revival in Turkey would clearly have a powerful bearing on Turkey's relations with the EU. Its long term impact on Europe itself might be greater than generally realised, via Muslim populations in the Balkans and Turkish migrant communities in Europe. Islamists in Turkey often say in private that the re-Islamisation of Turkey would be the first step towards the Islamisation of Europe.

There is a notable lack of agreement among western commentators on Turkish Islam. A surprising number of well-disposed commentators

including academics look on it benignly. Western diplomats have reported that they found officials of the Welfare Party—known as *Refah*—efficient and easy to work with. Some academics argue that *Refah* should be seen as a moderate force. According to them, the Islamic movement has absorbed democratic values and represents a variant on the Christian Democratic movement.

<sup>6</sup>See for example  
Henri J Barkey  
Reluctant  
Neighbour:  
Turkey's Role  
in the Middle  
East;  
Washington  
1996 pp. 215-9.

Awareness that a section of western public opinion sympathises with *Refah* and the Islamic movement has added a new twist to the tensions between the pro-westernisers in Turkey and the West itself. Among some Turks the suspicion is widespread that the western world looks indulgently at the Islamic revival as a way of solving its problems with Turkey and perhaps that it even dreams of using Turkey as a way of 'taming' the Islamic world.<sup>6</sup>

For the EU, the 14 months of *Refah* rule, during which the party voluntarily submitted to enormous restrictions on its freedom to introduce Islamic policies, nonetheless left some clear indications about the direction that a stronger Islamist government would follow.

- ★ **Foreign Policy:** The Welfare Government appeared to believe that its friends were in Islamic states such as Iran, Libya, Sudan, Syria and Malaysia. In the rest of the Islamic world, *Refah*'s coming to power in Turkey was seen as a reconquest of land lost to the west.
- ★ **The legal system:** Welfare controlled the Ministry of Justice but was prevented from making sweeping changes — which promised to start the Islamisation of the legal system—within that ministry.
- ★ **Education:** Welfare did not infiltrate the Ministry of Education but made it clear that its long-term aim was to phase out the 'secular' educational system in Turkey, and replace it at all levels by a religiously-oriented one.
- ★ **Finance:** Left to itself Welfare would have tried to 'Islamise' the economy, for example by moving away from lending based on rates of interest.

In 1997, the middle classes and the military moved against *Refah*. The

military signalled at the end of February 1997 that it wanted to make major changes to the educational system, in order to restore its secular direction, and to reverse the social and cultural changes described above. This was followed three months later by the collapse of the Erbakan coalition government, after a stream of defections from its junior partner. The press and much of the middle class encouraged and applauded this event. Turkey's critics saw it as a 'soft coup' or — as the Islamists themselves described it—as 'a post-modernist coup.' But there is no evidence of any military involvement in the haemorrhage of parliamentary support which brought down the Erbakan government.

However, the power and visibility of the armed forces in Turkish society has grown appreciably in the mid-1990s, in reaction to the double challenge from the PKK and the Islamists. This has added to the severe hesitations already entertained by many European observers over Turkey's readiness for EU membership. During the 1980s the late President Özal argued, *sotto voce*, that the need to diminish the military's role was a good argument for Turkish accession to the Community, just as it had been for Greece and Spain. It is possible to argue that the entire contest in the 1990s between the Islamists, on the one hand, and the secularists and the army on the other, might never have become so strong if the EU had begun to absorb Turkey during the previous decade. So long as Turkey perceives itself as standing alone in a turbulent and unfriendly region, the feeling that the armed forces are the ultimate guarantors of national survival will remain very strong with the man in the street.

There are, however, some indicators which point to a lasting consolidation of civilian institutions in Turkey. Martial law has not been felt necessary anywhere in Turkey in the 1990s, even in the south east where emergency regulations are in force. This is the first decade for half a century in which Istanbul and Ankara have not been put at any point under martial law. Despite the continued existence of state security courts, this change is much more than cosmetic. It points to the emergence of an underlying political stability.

That stability would be more widely hailed if a dramatic trial of strength was not looming between the secularists and the Islamists. Many Turks on both sides of this division see this crisis as systemic and thus as potentially very dangerous. So far the Islamists have resolutely refused to

become involved in any form of violence. An Algerian scenario is not a prospect in Turkey. Nor has the Islamist movement been driven underground. The closure of the *Refah* party has been followed by the immediate establishment of a successor, the *Fazilet* party.

But the conflict is of a depth and seriousness not visible in any other long-established European democracy at present. Both sides see it as a contest for the soul and future identity of the country — and both have mutually exclusive conceptions of the forms these should take. The *Refah/Fazilet* politicians, moreover, believe not only that they are the largest single political grouping in the country, but also that their support is growing above the 21 per cent of the votes they won in 1995. Opinion polls, however, do not seem to bear them out.

Much therefore depends on when the next general elections are held. Most of the partners in the coalition government would prefer to see elections later rather than sooner. Even if there are no parliamentary general elections in 1998, municipal elections must be held in 1999. They will be almost as good a test of opinion. The Islamist movement is well-entrenched in many local communities in the *bidonvilles* of the metropolitan cities, as well as in central and eastern Anatolia. It strongly resents the closure of the Welfare Party and hopes to hit back through the ballot box. But even if its support continues to grow substantially in the next elections, it will nevertheless find it very difficult to return to power.

One of the EU's concerns is whether or not a country which suppresses a large political party can be considered democratic. The former Welfare Party leadership has commented that they received more support from Europe than they did from the Arab and Islamic worlds. The secularists' response to European critics is that the law and the constitution have to be upheld, and that *Refah* was clearly in breach of the spirit and letter of these. They argue that, though some EU countries have had to defend their democracies against powerful parties opposed to the system, none do at the moment; thus Turkey's Islamist problem is entirely outside the ambit of European experience.

Regardless of its outcome, the contest between political Islam and the secular state raises some awkward long-term issues for Europe. What if the Islamists won after Turkey had joined the EU? Graham Leicester, for

example, writes that the *Sheriat* (Islamic Law) and European Community Law are incompatible.<sup>7</sup> If Turkey moves in this direction after joining the Community, it might therefore be required to leave — a process for which there is no machinery. Other scholars in continental Europe fear that there might be attempts to seek incorporation of elements of Islamic law in to the European legal system. Either way a re-Islamised Turkey would be a very difficult partner.

<sup>7</sup>Graham  
Leicester;  
Turkey and  
the European  
Union: The  
Case for a  
Special  
Relationship  
University of  
Reading 1995

Turks who believe that mosque and politics should remain separate — and they are fairly clearly a majority of the population — reply that the above arguments prove both the need for secularism in Turkey and for Turkey's integration into Europe. In point of fact, accession to the EU has generally been followed by a decline in the hold of institutional religion on society, for example in Ireland (Greece, however, is an exception).

To some extent the issue of religion and secularism in Turkey is already an internal European one. Countries like Germany, which have had to deal with militant Muslim Turkish exiles, are well aware of this.

An isolationist Islamist Turkey might, to some West Europeans, seem a more convenient short-term prospect than one that was fit to join the EU. But in the longer term that prospect would mean a dizzying shift in the geopolitics of the region, against the interests of the western world, with consequences that would be hard to calculate.

This, however, may not be perceived clearly in Europe. As with Algeria, Turkey's fundamentalist movement is financed by and operates largely out of Western Europe. It may become a *de facto* part of the coalition against Turkey, lobbying politicians against alleged repression in Turkey and enlisting the public support of churchmen and liberal opinion-formers.

## 6. The PKK and the Kurds

Similar processes are at work among Kurdish radical groups. The violence in the mountains of south eastern Turkey has been of a scale which dwarfs the struggles in the Basque lands or Northern Ireland. Estimates of those killed over 14 years range from 15,000 to over 37,000. Turkey's response to the PKK has always been totally uncompromising and there is no indication that this attitude could ever change in any foreseeable circumstances. One American writer refers to the degree to which Turkey has mortgaged its relations with its allies and its neighbours on the Kurdish problem.<sup>6</sup>

The question of the rights of the Kurdish-speaking population in Turkey has begun to take an ever higher place on the agenda of differences that have to be resolved before Turkey can become eligible for EU membership. Kurdish groups in exile forged close links with liberal and left-wing politicians and writers in Western Europe and North America during the 1980s and 1990s. Increasingly these groups are driving international public opinion in a direction ever more opposed to Turkey.

Much of European opinion now thinks that it would be impractical to admit Turkey to the EU before progress has been made on resolving the Kurdish problem, not least because of the scale of violence involved. The European Parliament, with its focus on human rights, is particularly concerned with the issue of Kurdish rights and it of course has the power to block accession. To many European Parliamentarians, the examples of the Basque and Northern Irish conflicts suggest that the granting of minority rights and regional autonomy can undermine support for terrorism. In fact the Kurdish question was mentioned as a hurdle to Turkish accession by Jacques Poos, Luxembourg's foreign minister, in Ankara in September 1997, and a few months later by Chancellor Helmut Kohl at the time of the Luxembourg summit.

From Turkey the perspective looks very different. The expansion of local municipal powers is under consideration as a partial solution for south

eastern Turkey's problems, but there is total resistance to any departure from a unitary state. Turks assume that this would be a stepping stone to outright secession. Secession itself is regarded as tantamount to treason and few people in Turkey appreciate that democracies like Britain and France not only permit secessionist parties, but did so a hundred years ago. It is against this background that the problem has to be assessed.

Between 8 and 12 million of Turkey's 62 million people probably regard themselves as Kurdish in some sense, for example speakers (or descendants of speakers) of a group of Indo-European languages closely related to Farsi. Powerful memories of the bloodshed and disintegration that stemmed from ethnic and religious centrifugal forces at the end of the Ottoman period have pushed Republican Turkey to pursue strongly assimilationist policies towards its whole population, as part of a conscious process of 'nation building'. Under both the Empire and the Republic, the Kurds were part of the ruling Muslim stratum of the Ottoman Empire in a community segmented along religious rather than linguistic lines. Just under 4 million of the total are concentrated in the provinces north of the Iraqi and Syria frontiers; the remainder are widely scattered across the rest of the country.

Though foreign journalists are incorrect in saying that Kurds are referred to as 'mountain Turks', the topic was certainly taboo until it was forced onto the national agenda after 1984 by the violence of the PKK (Partiya Karkara Kurdistan, the Kurdistan Workers Party), the strongest and most brutal of the revolutionary Marxist movements to emerge in the 1970s and the only one to seek an ethnic base for itself. The PKK has been actively assisted by Syria and, despite official denials, by Greece. In 1994, for example, the Turkish government presented foreign diplomats in Ankara with evidence collected from PKK infiltrators; they had returned from Greece where they had received training for missions inside Turkey.

Two categories of Kurds will probably determine the outcome of the problem. The 4 to 8 million Turkish ethnic Kurds in western or central Turkey will almost certainly favour any option that does not involve conflict, from which they would lose heavily. But the organised radical emigrant Kurdish communities in western Europe may continue to press for armed struggle, both in Germany—where they have launched attacks on Turkish company offices and even families in the last few years—and



inside Turkey. While the cycle of violence continues, the mind-set of the Turkish establishment, indeed of public opinion as a whole, will be implacably opposed to cultural or linguistic concessions.

Europe plays an even more important part in the Kurdish dispute than it does in the conflict between the Islamists and the secularists. The PKK's main base for recruitment and organisation is the 500,000-strong ethnic Kurdish Turkish community in western Europe, who perceive it as a classical nationalist movement struggling for independence. The linkages between Kurdish groups and sympathisers have given it something no previous radical movement has ever enjoyed: its own satellite television station. MED-TV, a compendium of radical news, Marxist panel discussion programmes, nationalist singing and folklore, as well as regular reporting of debates in the European Parliament, is beamed from western Europe across the continent and into Turkey for 16 hours every day. Transmissions begin and end with the playing of a 'Kurdish National Anthem', using political symbols which (ironically) are clearly modelled on those of Turkey itself.

The suspicion that western leaders privately share the activists' agenda for an independent Kurdistan increasingly poisons Turkish-EU relations. The next generation of schoolchildren in Europe may grow up believing that the Kurds of Turkey are a distinct nationality with the right of self-determination. Yet by EU standards, Turkey's refusal to permit any education in Kurdish languages and its unwillingness to recognise any form of public identity as such to individual Kurds prominent in national life looks an anachronism.

This refusal certainly obscures the fact that what is at issue is not racial or communal discrimination. For no one in Turkey is excluded from any position because they are Kurdish. As Muslims, the Kurds have always belonged to the dominant political community in Turkey and it is easy to roll out a list of senior figures in the country who are of (as the official parlance puts it) 'Kurdish ethnic origin.' These include several presidents of the Republic in the past, the President and deputy president of the Grand National Assembly, senior politicians, bureaucrats and religious officials. The only difficulty is that they do not openly identify themselves in the way that Welshmen, Scotsmen or Irishmen do in the UK, or that Bretons or Alsatians do in France. But they are to be found in large

numbers in every field of national life, including the armed forces.

If Turkey's best-known national politicians (there have been many in every cabinet) and other leaders of Kurdish background were to address European opinion directly, the claim of the PKK to represent the Turkish ethnic Kurdish population would be gravely, perhaps fatally, undermined.

<sup>8</sup>*Bernard Lewis The Future of the Middle East London 1998 p.33*

One message from these highly-placed Kurds would surely be that in the Middle East, the Turks are logically the best friends that the Kurds can find. As Professor Bernard Lewis writes: "Hemmed in between Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, some Kurds are becoming aware that their access to the outside world can only be through one or other of these countries. Of the three, Turkey—democratic and westward looking—offers by far the most attractive possibility."<sup>8</sup> The Kurdish Democratic Party, the largest faction in northern Iraq, has drawn precisely this lesson from its experiences and allied itself with Ankara.

There seem to be two ways forward. If Europe's leaders emerge as the champions of Kurdish separatists, there will never be good relations between Turkey and the EU in the foreseeable future. It is most unlikely that any kind of 'political solution' will be achieved within Turkey; European countries will have slipped into the paradoxical situation of seeming to be trying to dismember an ally.

Alternatively, Europe may adopt a less confrontational approach. If Turkey is absorbed into the mainstream and enjoys the greater security that comes with EU membership, attitudes may evolve. Turkish politics will become steadily more permissive and relaxed on the issue. Meanwhile the attractiveness of secession will fade as an option for radical Kurds.

But in the mean time, if the EU makes progress on the Kurdish problem an obstacle to Turkey's accession, as it has with the lack of a settlement with Greece, Turks will think it guilty of a conscious attempt to raise insurmountably high political hurdles in the way of full membership. Many in the EU—who are exposed only to the arguments of the separatists—will find it equally incomprehensible that an issue which has cost so many lives is not discussed in the way that the Basque or Northern Irish problems are discussed in Spain or Britain.

## 7. Germany

The Luxembourg summit has left Turkish-German bilateral relations in disarray. They have been getting worse for over a decade, despite the close links between the two countries. Chancellor Kohl is now seen as one of the main foes of Turkey's opening towards Europe, while Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz has attacked Germany in public in stinging terms on several occasions. The two countries are likely to be on bad terms for a good while yet.

Can Turkey hope to make progress towards accession while relations with Germany are in this state? On the face of it, Turkey and Germany should be natural partners. Germany is Turkey's traditional ally in Europe, its largest EU trading partner, as well as being the home to around 2 million *Gastarbeiter*. The history of co-operation between the two stretches back to the last century.

A root cause of the conflict between the two countries is German society's failure to assimilate the Turkish migrant community successfully (even though two members of the *Bundestag* are of Turkish extraction). Instead of helping drive the Turkish accession forward, as Greece's diaspora did, the Turkish diaspora serves as a negative reference group.

German society as a whole has deeply unfavourable image of Turkey and the Turks. On the fringes of that society, dislike sometimes turns to violence when German right-wingers and pro-PKK radicals attack and even kill members of the Turkish immigrant community. At the official and diplomatic level, a spirit of bitter confrontation pervades much Turkish-German dialogue. The quite large Turkish professional middle class in Germany has no mediating role in the political relationship.

To foster better mutual understanding, a number of bilateral forums have been set up between Turkey and Germany. Despite these efforts, however, the impression remains of a clash of cultures and mentalities and an aura of mutual disapproval, even if — as some officials privately believe —

Chancellor Kohl is less implacably opposed to the idea of Turkish EU membership than most commentators in the European press assume.

Without a better bilateral relationship with Germany, Turkey's chances of completing the accession process and of defusing Greece's political blockade of Turkey inside the EU look slim. Diplomatic relations may yet brighten. There is an example in Turkey's own recent history, when relations with France quickly improved at the end of the 1980s after a decade of fierce disagreement. But it is difficult not to feel that the rift with Germany goes deeper.

German attitudes to Turkey could be transformed if it became clear that Turkish membership of the EU would not necessarily lead to further mass immigration. In fact the propensity to emigrate from the western, more developed areas of Turkey does seem to have fallen sharply in recent years. EU officials point out that the accession of other southern Mediterranean countries did not trigger a flood of migrants. They suggest that if Turkey were integrated into the EU, enjoying the economic benefits of membership, it would be less likely to be a substantial exporter of labour than an excluded Turkey. An excluded Turkey would be permanently trapped in a relationship to Europe that is roughly equivalent to Mexico's with the USA.

Meanwhile Germany's coolness towards Turkey is partly offset by warmer diplomatic relations with France, Britain, and Spain, all of which work hard to keep the Turkish-EU relationship alive. None of these countries however is prepared to take its support for Turkey to the point where they would confront either Greece or Germany on major issues in public. One reason for this reluctance is undoubtedly Turkey's chequered record on human rights, though this is probably not appreciated in Turkey itself.

## 8. Greece

The surliness of Turkish-German relations pale into insignificance beside Greece's disputes with Turkey. They are above all a clash of nationalisms. From the Greek point of view, Turkey represents a breach in the continuity of a culture which stretches back nearly 3,000 years. It is also a much larger and more powerful neighbour: Turkey's population is more than six times that of Greece.

Yet the fact of the matter is that in modern times, it is Greece which has been the expansionist state. Twice this century Greece has invaded Turkey with the aim of taking territory from it. Turks can never forget that the Turkish Republic was born amid the attempted partition of Ottoman Anatolia by Greece and the western powers. Despite this, the two countries co-existed as friends and allies for half a century. Close working relations only gave way to confrontation after 1954, as each country championed the cause of ethnic communities in Cyprus which have proved unable to reach a durable agreement to coexist.

Because the word 'Hellenism' has such powerful cultural overtones in the western world, Greek nationalism is seldom perceived in Europe as a disruptive political force. Yet it remains a very powerful force in Greece, with a strong irredentist component, at the imaginative level at least. That has led to tensions with neighbours other than Turkey. However it is largely out of the struggle against Turkey that the modern Greek identity has been forged. Many places and objects in Turkey have a strong resonance for Greek nationalist irredentists, making Turkey's territory part of their psychological inscape.

Not uncommonly Greeks use language about Turkey which would be considered unacceptably offensive and racist in a different context. No lesser person than the Foreign Minister of Greece, Theodore Pangalos, referred to the Turks in September 1997 as "Thieves, murderers, rapists, with whom we cannot negotiate." The current Simitis government has tried to modernise in many areas of policy, and its courageous economic

reforms have won praise in the Turkish press. But its willingness to depart from the precedents created by the late Andreas Papandreou has not yet gone so far as to attempt to create a genuine *détente* in Greek-Turkish relations. Given the attitudes of most other parties in the Greek Parliament, it is hard to see how the Simitis government could safely do so.

Nationalism is of course also a strong and uncompromising force in Turkey. But there are differences. For a start, there is little or no sense that history has dealt the nation a profound geographical slight needing correction. The deepest vein of concern in Turkey tends to be for vulnerable ‘outside populations’ such as the Turks of Cyprus or the Muslims in Bosnia. This is not surprising, given that up to 5.5 million European Muslim Ottomans—mostly, though not all, ethnic Turks—died violent deaths in south eastern Europe between 1821 and 1923, as emergent Balkan nationalisms drove back the Empire.<sup>9</sup> And there is no generalised dislike of Greeks or their culture. Greek music for example has always been popular in Turkey. *Rembetika* is better known in Turkey than in Britain. It is not uncommon for Turkey’s hit parade to have songs in Greek.

<sup>9</sup> *Justin McCarthy* *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims 1821-1923*. Princeton 1995

Greek-Turkish tension has been especially strong since 1981, when PASOK, the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Union and the late Andreas Papandreou, first came to power. PASOK consciously dismantled all the safety mechanisms which then existed between Greece and Turkey, for example six monthly routine meetings of high officials. They pruned back contacts with the Turks to the occasional high-profile ministerial meeting every few years. The Greeks used every European and North American forum and gathering as an opportunity to put the case against Turkey. The EU itself became Greece’s main instrument against Turkey.

<sup>10</sup> *It is striking that when Jacques de Santer addressed a Greek audience in April 1998, his remarks were entirely confined to technical policy issues. See Santer’s Message to Greece: Good work, Keep going. Athens News electronic edition*

PASOK’s policy must be accounted a success in its own terms. It contrasts strikingly with the failure of the more conventional Karamanlis New Democracy administrations before 1981 to gain diplomatic and political ground against Turkey. So far as can be seen, no prominent EU figure has ever attempted to confront or criticise Greece squarely on the issue of Turkey.<sup>10</sup>

Instead, because of the EU's need to work to unanimity at all decision-taking meetings that involve finance and external affairs, Greece has managed to insert its views into every relevant community text. And that is how it got the commitment to open accession negotiations with Cyprus. On an optimistic interpretation, this is simply tactical pressure which will some day be relaxed if there is ever a settlement on Cyprus. But it may be more likely that mainland Greek attitudes will in a few years be reinforced by even more strident Greek Cypriot delegations.

Greece's interest in Turkey has produced some strange distortions in Turkey-EU relations. By 1997, for instance, the Greek contingent in the EU-Turkey Parliamentary Joint Association Council was 4 out of 15. The Community also seems to have shown little interest when Greek officials gravitated to areas within the Commission where Greece had special interests such as the Law of the Sea.

In order to outflank Greek influence on EU-Turkish relations, there were attempts in 1993-1995 to arrange regular bilateral meetings between Turkey and Britain, France, and Germany. So far this route has not proved very productive, perhaps because the Turks have not been very eager to use these as alternatives to EU membership. Increasingly the Turkish view is that the Europeans created problems by admitting Greece and that it is now up to them to resolve them.

In the meantime both countries, supposedly NATO allies, forge ahead with one of the world's most spectacular arms build-ups. A glance at the map should suggest that with the possible exception of Cyprus, a war would be unlikely to offer either any worthwhile prizes. But the risk of a punch-up on a grand scale remains. The aims of an armed conflict would be symbolic and political. The risk of a combustible combination of Greek Turcophobia and Turkish anger at the success with which Greece seems to have excluded Turkey from Europe cannot be underestimated. Greece might well calculate that whatever the practical outcome of the fighting, Turkey would lose the peace that followed, just as it lost the peace in Cyprus after 1974. This might complete the international isolation of Turkey and its estrangement from Europe: developments which some Greek ultra-nationalists would view with satisfaction.

As the Kardak/Imia crisis showed, the EU simply does not seem to be up

to the task of managing this dangerous situation. For the foreseeable future the work of forestalling a Greek-Turkish War is likely to be left to the United States. The emergence of a strong consensus against Greece on Turkish issues among other EU members is unlikely, given their disapproval of much Turkish policy.

Conceivably, if there is no conflict between the two countries, the day may come when Turkey's significance in Europe has grown to the point that it is no longer productive for Greece to pursue its ostracising policies. But that point is still distant, while the accession of Cyprus is presumably close. If one assumes that a comprehensive peace settlement in Cyprus is unlikely to be reached, the best means of improving relations between Greece and Turkey would be for the larger EU members to promote a cocktail of gradualist measures that would calm tensions between the two countries. They might try to encourage trade and technical co-operation; exchanges of school children; the study of each country's culture and history; and measures to discourage irredentist or racist words and symbols. For the time being, however, fierce opposition from the Greek government and public would make it hard to achieve any of these measures. And Greece would be able to exploit the fact that Turkey has not yet proven able to satisfy many of its international critics on human rights.



## 9. Human rights

One of the most stubborn obstacles to improved relations between Turkey and the EU is the former's inability to meet the latter's standards on human rights. Though Mr Juncker's remarks at Luxembourg were excessive and offensive, the fact remains that prosecutions of writers and political dissenters, allegations of torture and even the death of a Marxist journalist in police custody do not pose comparable problems for other applicant countries, with the possible exception of Slovakia.

The situation in today's Turkey has improved compared with a decade ago, when martial law was in force and journalists of the centre, rather than just the radical fringes, were often in trouble with the law. Police methods then were—as far as can be judged by a foreign resident—much harsher in the main cities than they are today.

Most Turks—outside the metropolitan educated middle classes who aspire to enjoy the full range of western political rights and freedoms—do not think they live in a repressive society. They often suspect that, behind European criticisms of their country's human rights record, lie crude racial stereotypes—some of them inherited from the emergent Balkan nationalisms in the 19th century.<sup>11</sup>

Several factors have shaped Turkey's human rights problems in the 1990s. One of the most important, which needs to be far better understood outside the country, is the combination of simple administrative weakness and what has been, until recently, a relatively backward rural society.

Second, a strong sense of insecurity underlies Turkish perceptions of the issue. Turkey's isolation and its front-line geopolitical situation leave a sense of vulnerability that West European societies have not known in recent decades. Sedition is widely regarded as a systemic threat—whether from Communists, fundamentalists, separatists, or dissenters. Few Turks realise that legislation against sedition has long been scrapped or rendered

<sup>11</sup> See for instance David Kushner: Self-Perception and Identity in contemporary Turkey; *Journal of Contemporary History*, April 1997

inactive in other European countries.

Furthermore, in the eyes of many right-of-centre Turkish politicians, Turkey's experience of terrorism and street fighting in the 1970s justifies summary methods such as special tribunals and legal restrictions on extremism. Western embassies in Ankara generally applauded rather than criticised the new legal and constitutional order that was erected in the 1980s. The European Commission's representative office was almost the only significant exception, a fact which sometimes brought it into confrontation with the embassies of member states.

In 1989 Turgut.Özal removed some of the most obviously repressive legislation (for example, the clauses in the Penal Code banning Communist and fundamentalist organisations) from the statute book. His reforms might have heralded a complete dismantling of anti-sedition legislation—especially as they coincided with the collapse of Communism and the fading of radical left-wing politics in Turkey—if the PKK had not then stepped up a violent campaign which threatened the Turkish nation-state.

Special State Security Courts were created in the early 1980s to deal with sedition and a range of serious offences such as drug trafficking. Metropolitan middle class Turks and the liberal press tended to dislike their operations, and the methods of the police, but put up little significant political opposition to either. The centre left and the social democrats were conspicuously restrained in their willingness to espouse human rights causes in a way that they had not been in the 1960s and 1970s. Turkey's Human Rights Association, the main international source of information on alleged human rights violations during the 1980s and 1990s, is not the mainstream non-partisan organisation its name implies. Some think it an offshoot of radical Kurdish movements.

Thus the linkages between Turkish leftists and liberals and their counterparts in Europe on human rights issues, having been strong in the 1970s, faded in the 1980s. This proved unfortunate. For no one in Turkey in the 1980s seems to have realised that the application for EU membership would bring much closer attention to Turkey's performance in many domains. Countries which were prepared to turn a blind eye to human rights violations in another member of the Council of Europe would not do so for an EU applicant. Western diplomats in Ankara,

perhaps because they had supported some of the authoritarian measures of the early 1980s, failed to convey this message to Turkey's government or public opinion.

European opinion began to scrutinise Turkey's eligibility for EU membership at precisely the time when the growth of PKK terrorism, and the government's uncompromising response, were leading to unprecedented tensions in south eastern Turkey. Arguments over human rights became entangled with ethnic disputes. International critics of Turkey's shortcomings on human rights have too often been people committed to the radical Kurdish cause or those with strong Greek or Armenian sympathies. There seems to be a Greek on almost every committee for human rights in Turkey.

None of this justifies Turkey's failure to make faster progress towards changing outmoded laws, introducing tougher standards of disciplining officials who commit violations, or modernising the methods used by the police to handle public order at demonstrations and similar occasions. "Of the 16 constitutional amendments passed in 1995 before the Customs Union, enabling legislation [ie to bring the law into line with the changed articles] has been introduced in only four cases," says one EU diplomat. But some changes are undoubtedly coming, as Turkish society evolves and as a domestic consensus in favour of modernisation. Teaching in Turkey's police academies is now increasingly in the hands of instructors with international academic qualifications in areas such as forensic sciences and human rights. A limited international police co-operation programme is now under way.

As Prime Minister, Mr. Yilmaz has made a personal priority of improving human rights and made it clear where his sympathies lie. He expressed concern at the trial of Ya ar Kemal, insisted that policemen charged with murdering a detained journalist attend their trial and issuing a list of tight procedures to be followed for detainees. These items show, however, that one big problem is the limited ability of the central administration to apply effective controls further down the bureaucracy.

The Commission's 'operational proposals', published in March 1998, include measure on human rights. The Commission says that it is contemplating measures to help train Interior Ministry officials and police

forces, but its approach seems to place more emphasis on co-operation with non-governmental organisations, some of which are identified in Turkey with ethnic radicalism. To stand any chance of success, the EU's focus must surely be on changing thinking among officials.

## 10. Cyprus

‘Squaring the circle’, ‘the quest for the Holy Grail’, ‘the search for the Northwest Passage’: metaphors and similes abound for elusive formula on which a settlement of the Cyprus problem could be built. Six years hence the Greek-Turkish dispute over Cyprus will have been troubling the life of the eastern Mediterranean for 50 years. Without Cyprus, Greece and Turkey might, conceivably, have become close regional partners and friends. Can a solution ever be found?

From the Greek perspective Cyprus is simply an outlying part of Hellas. The Turkish Cypriots are thus essentially rebels assisting a foreign invader. But Turks see the Turkish Cypriots as a co-equal community, whose rights to a degree of autonomy and distinct sovereignty are enshrined in the treaties establishing an independent Cyprus. To some outside observers, the island’s mini-states look like autonomous provinces of their respective mainlands.

Neither community seems to have very much desire to reunite with the other. The Turkish Cypriots plainly relish the statehood they acquired after 1974, even if it is internationally unrecognised. The Greek Cypriots aspire to regain the whole of the island through a ‘long struggle.’ They enjoy international recognition and one of the risks of a settlement is that this recognition might be put at risk during the process of devolving sovereignty and power to a new entity. Meanwhile the principal of not recognising the Greek Cypriots even temporarily as the island’s legitimate government is central to the Turks’ position.

It is because of this that the Greek Cypriot application to join the EU has provoked such a strong reaction in the Turkish north of the island. For it implies to the Turkish Cypriots that the Greek Cypriots are internationally recognised as their rulers and representatives—a technical point, but a crucial one to the Turkish Cypriots.

The idea that the Greek part of Cyprus could accede to the EU, claiming

to represent the whole island, against the wishes of the Turkish Cypriots, was not widely accepted in EU circles until the 1990s. This represents a triumph for Greek diplomacy—even if, in private, many senior West European politicians still say that the negotiations with Cyprus over EU membership cannot in practice be concluded without a resolution of Cyprus problem.

From a distance, the European decision to negotiate the entry of Cyprus to the EU has all the hallmarks of a historical blunder. If the EU admitted Cyprus it would be putting the wishes of a micro-state of 650,000 people, of little strategic value, above those of a crucial strategic and trading partner with a population a hundred times larger. The benefits of this move are hardly going to be proportionate to its costs and it is a moral issue only if perceived from a Greek nationalist standpoint.

As with Greece's disputes with Turkey in the Aegean, Cypriot accession would seem to increase rather than diminish the risk of conflict in the region. In a war between two of its members and a third country, the EU would find it difficult to remain fully neutral. Not all Greeks believe that it would wish to. At least some well-placed Greek Cypriots say privately that they believe the inner core of EU leaders is less alarmed by the prospect of a Greek-Turkish war than by the prospect of Turkish accession.

Given that the two sides in Cyprus have been engaged in an arms race since the mid-1990s, a clash is alarmingly easy to foresee. The Greek Cypriots have established a mutual defence pact with Greece, and have built a large air base near Paphos that can take fighter planes from the Greek mainland. They have also ordered Russian S-300 missiles, which can be used to shoot down aircraft or missiles. Turkey has said that, if Cyprus installs the missiles, it will strike them. Even though Turkey's fears about the ability of S-300s to hit targets on its mainland are misplaced, and even though its air and ground superiority remains overwhelming, the familiar risks, tensions, and uncertainties of an arms race are poisoning relations between the island's two communities.

With attitudes hardening on both sides, the prospect for successful negotiations now looks even more unrealistic than it has done at any point in the previous three decades. Turkish Cypriots believe that, in a

conflict, they face a serious risk of expulsion and ethnic cleansing. The widespread tendency to assume that only the personal intransigence of President Rauf Denktaş, the Turkish Cypriot leader, is preventing a settlement is almost certainly wrong.

If the chances of a settlement are fading, it may be logical to suppose that in the end the two sections of the island will become permanently separated, one inside the EU, the other outside. But an informal partition would not necessarily produce peace or a reduction of tension. The Greek Cypriot population, almost certainly refusing to accept partition, would continue to resent the loss of territory in the north. Without a formal agreement on partition—including the island's demilitarisation or at least an accord on stabilising military forces—Cyprus would become, even more than it is today, the focus of an arms build up and perhaps the flashpoint for a future Greek-Turkish War.

The most likely outcome at the time of writing appears to be that the division of the island will continue; that (Greek) Cyprus will ultimately accede to the EU; and that the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey would then become more internationally isolated. Under these circumstances the EU's 'Big Three' (France, Germany, Britain) would have their work cut out to maintain even the present unsatisfactory state of affairs on the island. If Turkey's isolation deepens, so will its unwillingness to compromise. This will be especially true if the European Union gradually moves towards a formal position that Turkey is an occupying power and the Turkish Cypriots are rebels.

Perhaps, instead of trying to chase political solutions, the EU should accept that the only way forward is a long term strategy of trying to remould public opinion in both Cypriot Communities, as well as their respective mainlands. The EU should promote cross-frontier contacts especially among the young at the grass-roots level. And it should actively discouraging ultra-nationalistic political rhetoric in the same way that racism is discouraged in western Europe.

Meanwhile the EU will have to choose between accepting the Greek portion of the island as the representative of the whole, or finding some way of blocking its accession until there is a political settlement. Greece has already made it clear that if Cyprus's accession is blocked, it will block

the entry of the East European countries and perhaps other EU business. That is why it seems most likely that, despite many hesitations, the EU will eventually admit the Greek Cypriots, thereby importing the Cyprus dispute into its own body.



## 11. Turkey and the European Security Mechanism

Turkey and the western world are a loggerheads over several intractable issues, including Kurdish separatism, Cyprus and human rights. But there are still many areas in which the Western world needs a working partnership with Turkey. For example in Bosnia Turkey has made a useful contribution to the NATO-led peacekeeping force. For 50 years Turkey has been a key strategic partner for the United States and Western Europe. If it stayed outside the EU or even became seriously estranged from it, what would be the strategic consequences?

Most western analysts conclude that Turkey has no real alternative to its alliance with the West, since its only other option would be a retreat into an isolationist armed neutrality. But in the Near East, currently, isolation is not in fashion. Turkey has forged a new partnership with Israel and there are signs of potential linkups among its main opponents in the region.

However, rather than looking at where else Turkey might turn, the West should consider the cost of poor relations with Turkey. The risk of a clash between Turks and Greeks would grow. Turkey's readiness to make logistical and strategic support available for its western allies would diminish. Turkey's willingness to extend facilities to the US has varied over the years. On the face of it, the restraining factor is Turkey's apprehension about the reaction of neighbouring Arab states. But is this really the case? Turkish public opinion's perception of the western world has surely counted for more. Anxieties about Arab reactions have not stopped Turkey striking up its defence partnership with Israel. At times when Turkey has seen itself as being fully a part of the western world—in the 1950s and arguably in 1990-91 under the late Turgut Özal—there have been few limits on its willingness to assist the West. American apprehension that European insensitivity towards Turkey will make that country a less co-operative military ally is easy to understand.

Conversely, integrating Turkey into Europe could give the West benefits in defence co-operation, together with strategic advantages in the Middle East and the Gulf. A sense of this opportunity probably lies behind the frequent messages from the US that the EU should open its doors wider to Turkey. In any case, there are areas such as the Balkans where the European powers will find Turkey a useful and indeed essential partner; Muslim groups in the Balkans will always look to Turkey as a key regional friend and potential protector.

Similar considerations apply even more strongly to the small countries which lie to Turkey's east. Its influence is felt at several levels in conflicts such as that in Chechnya and the war between the Armenians of Nagorno Karabagh and Azerbaijan. As the EU moves eastwards it will find itself facing intractable problems whose gravity is disproportionate to the size of the territories involved. Cyprus may be only the first of these conundrums.

The EU's relations with Turkey are likely to worsen unless it is brought into the Europeans' institutional framework. One way forward would be to bring Turkey into the Western European Union. Turkey has been pressing for that option ever since the decision in 1984-85 to revive the WEU, as the EU's defence wing. Turkey is an associate member of the Western European Union, while Greece is a full member. Taking Turkey into the WEU would be a lot easier than giving it early membership of the EU. The EU governments have always applied a policy of allowing only EU members to join the WEU. But they should perhaps make an exception for a NATO member of such crucial strategic importance. Indeed, such a move would indicate that the assurances given in Luxembourg in December 1997 were sincere.

## Conclusion

The European Union does not have the option which some observers assume it sought to exercise in Luxembourg. It cannot draw a neat border on its south-eastern flank that excludes Turkey and then forget about that country. Suppose that a crisis in Turkey led to the severing of ties with Europe: the result would not be a more manageable regional situation, but a more dangerous one—especially if hostilities with Greece had triggered the crisis.

In any case Turkey's visibility and impact on Europe are rising steadily. A generation ago Turkey mattered because of its military and strategic importance. Today Turkey touches Europe in virtually every domain. There are countless ministries and government agencies in EU countries which need to be engaged in dialogue with their Turkish counterparts to operate effectively.

There is no other East European or Near Eastern country (with the possible exception of Israel) whose internal problems are so likely to spill out in ways harmful to western interests. Thus the EU's ties to Turkey should be as close as possible and that it should be firmly integrated into the life of Europe.

But how to do that? The difficulty in answering that question is that there are two distinct levels to Turkey's relations with the EU. At one level, Turkish-EU relations are the story of the very large agrarian country which embarked upon an Association Agreement with the EU that turned out much better than might have been expected. Even though further progress is needed, economically Turkey is today a credible candidate for full membership.

At a different level, however, the EU is now embroiled in a messy set of diplomatic, strategic and political rivalries in south eastern Europe, driven by fierce ultra-nationalist currents. Turkey is the largest and strongest country in the region but appears to some of its neighbours as an

unpopular former imperial ruler. These currents have assumed their present importance, in part, because the main EU countries have allowed them to grow. But at the same time the ultra-defensive response to these pressures in Turkey, including a continuing crackdown on 'sedition', has weakened liberal democratic institutions, fuelled the arguments of Turkey's foreign critics and driven apart Turkey and the EU.

This creates an impossible contradiction. Europe's economic and strategic interests, together with legal commitments, dictate a trend towards integration with Turkey. Yet the political side of the relationship has become steadily more unmanageable — except when the Americans are involved—to the extent that some Europeans wonder in private if an isolationist Islamic Turkey would not be more convenient than a westernising liberal democratic republic.

The groups hostile to the Turkish government will remain a formidable presence on the European scene for the foreseeable future: Greeks, radical Kurdish groups, Islamists and Marxists. They will continue to tap powerful nationalistic currents and help to shape western European perceptions of Turkey as an alien or even hostile country. Cyprus's accession to the EU, if it happens, will intensify all the existing problems, effectively giving Greece two votes. Even if the risk of war can be avoided (and this is less certain than it ought to be) Greek policy may well succeed in creating a permanent polarisation between Turkey and Europe. This process will be intensified, and perhaps become irrevocable, if significant numbers of European politicians align with the movement for a separate Kurdish state.

Meanwhile Turkey has to demonstrate that it will continue to be a country in which religion and politics are kept apart. It has to show that the Islamist political and social movement in Anatolia is simply a phase. As long as Turkey's economic expansion continues, the odds are on the secularists prevailing. However the methods they use to do could add to the list of problems between Turkey and Europe. Europe as a whole has a vital interest in seeing the continued success of Turkey's experiment in secular democracy.

What can be done to relieve this bleak picture? The Commission's proposals of March 1998 suggest deepening and strengthening the

customs union, and extending it to agriculture, in preparation for full membership. But the proposals sidestep political issues other than human rights.

Turkey needs measures which will assure it that it is included in the process of European integration, and also encourage the process of political and administrative reform inside Turkey to accelerate. The EU might pursue these twin goals in several areas:

- ★ Giving a clear message to public opinion across Europe that Turkey is a European country and that it will be a full member of the Union within the lifetime of most of its inhabitants.
- ★ Redefining and upgrading Turkey's defence relationship with Europe, to prevent the emergence (or perceived emergence) of an anti-Turkish European defence and intelligence community.
- ★ The EU could lend its political backing to Turkish foreign policy initiatives, such as Black Sea Economic Co-operation and the Economic Co-operation Organisation, and work in tandem with Turkish diplomats in areas such as central Asia where there are opportunities for partnership.
- ★ On training, work is needed to encourage the growth of higher administrative and professional standards in Turkey. There is scope for training schemes and joint projects aimed at creating a more western culture.
- ★ Academic and professional standards should be harmonised more fully. Ways should be found to increase the flow of Turkish students into European universities and training institutions, on terms closer to those available for EU nationals.
- ★ Human rights and freedom of expression must remain firmly on the agenda, but as far as possible should be kept politically neutral. Wherever possible, European groups should encourage collaboration and joint projects with groups in the mainstream of Turkish democracy, such as lawyers, the judiciary, police instructors, the media, and of course politicians.

- ★ More resources need to be devoted to the study of Turkey and its language, arts, history, and culture. Turkish studies are at present an academic backwater, with fewer practitioners than the much less relevant field of Byzantine studies.
- ★ More translators of higher quality are needed, especially in Turkey itself, where translation standards are unacceptably low, particularly in the public sector.<sup>12</sup>
- ★ Ways to permit *bona fide* Turkish citizens to travel freely in Europe could be identified.

<sup>12</sup> See Turkey and the Community by Dankwart Rustow and Trevor Penrose, *Sussex European Papers No. 10* 1981. *If anything Penrose understates the problem.*

These suggestions are all long-term measures by which the EU could help to create the pre-conditions for political convergence and substantive progress on the core issues discussed in this paper. Europe needs to face up to the fact that its distaste for Turkey is unacceptable and ultimately not in its own interests. A change of approach is necessary, above all to prevent a disastrous and unnecessary collision between Greeks and Turks in the eastern Mediterranean.

The Turks, too, must understand that they must actively woo the EU: the 'easy' conditions in Turkish-European relations before the 1987 EU application, when many Europeans turned a blind eye to the situation in Turkey because they were not interested, will never return. But this change is essentially a benign one. It means that Turkey has come of age. Instead of being an agrarian country with limited resources, it has the chance, within a generation — if it plays its hand wisely—to enjoy the prosperity and liberties available in western Europe. But it will not achieve this if its dialogue with Europe is based on resentment and obvious evasion. It can afford to be quite frank, as previous applicants have been, about some of its shortcomings, for example in administration and management, and even political stability. These are *bona fide* reasons for wanting to join the Community. Given Turkey's economic dynamism and the social advances which are resulting, it may not be too optimistic to hope that many of its problems could begin to melt over the next decade.

In the spring of 1998, however, the risk that Turkey and the EU will continue to drift apart look greater than ever. Without political resolution

and more openness on both sides, the security situation in the eastern Mediterranean looks likely to worsen. Europe still has the chance to create a prosperous and politically stable south eastern corner. But the window of opportunity is closing.

