

Moving in from the Margins? Turkey in Europe

Cağlar Keyder

I. Cultural identity

Turkey's historical intimacy with Europe has always spelled ambivalence between inclusion and exclusion. Religious difference was an issue from the start, but this did not stop the Ottomans from recruiting Byzantine princes and Venetian grandees to serve their new state. The sultans in those early centuries claimed the Byzantine mantle and saw their realm as the New Rome, a universal empire in the making. Indeed, European attitudes betrayed an acceptance of these claims as well; it was only after the 16th century, and especially with the Reformation, that the Ottomans emerged as an irrecoverable other.

It gradually entered European consciousness that the Ottomans held under yoke Christian populations who had to be liberated. Thereafter, the relationship could only be one of segregation and insulation, even if expediency required temporary accommodation. Although the 19th century witnessed a more 'realistic' adaptation by the Great Powers to its reality, exclusion and a more-or-less permanent war footing constituted the principal tenor of the European imaginary toward Turkey. This was not a problem for the insular world of the Empire until the reformist bureaucracy embarked on a modernization project in the mid-19th century. It was at that time that the encounter with Europe, as emblematic of modernity, assumed its problematical visage. The Turkish elite felt the need to prove themselves under Europe's scrutiny – an endeavour which continued unabated during the Republic. Despite continuous reminders to the populace that their glorious heritage was just as good as Europe's, the elite's ill-disguised sentiments of insufficiency were communicated to the masses, and came to be shared by them. In this environment, Europe's judgment on things Turkish took on a disproportionate significance. Not only statesmen, but even ordinary travelers and starlets were canvassed for positive opinions. Each football match became a test of national worth, and every slight an occasion for

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retrenchment. Turkey's identity problems became inextricably intertwined with this constant examination by the 'European jury'.

It was only as the hold of the elite on the national psyche weakened that a contemporary Turkish persona began to evolve, bringing together ingredients such as ethnic diversity and religious sentiment as authentic components of a modern identity. Instead of seeing themselves through the European lens, Turks slowly gained a confidence in their own history and reality. As the suppressed dimensions of this recovered identity surfaced, the moral need for European approval subsided. Yet, a different kind of requirement came onto the agenda. With the collapse of developmentalism during the 1970s, Turkey had entered a long period of directionless meandering. Economic transformation stalled; political reform remained a distant goal; corruption deepened. Politicians proved inept; a series of naïve attempts at forming alliances – with the Middle East, with its Black Sea neighbors, with the Turkic world – ended in disappointment. There was no leadership to propose a direction: petty politicking was the rule, with the same names in tired clientelistic parties forming coalition governments in various combinations. In this environment the prospect of European Union membership emerged as the only credible project with majority support. This is why the relationship with Europe once again became a sensitive issue.

For most of the population, the EU represented a pragmatic move with expected gains at the material or the ideal level. The road to membership would bring political and economic reforms, eliminate corruption, rehabilitate law and impart some predictability to everyday life. These sentiments once again required that ordinary Turks tune in to developments in Europe regarding the prospects of candidacy, and to European attitudes toward the boundaries of the Union. It was in this regard that disappointment was in store. With the end of the Cold War, Europe's boundaries had shifted from congruence with the line tracing the 'iron curtain' to one of civilizational divide – defined as religious difference. Western Europe rushed to embrace its long-estranged eastern half, and the borders of Europe could now be drawn according to presumed cultural affinity, rather than political expediency. 'Where does Europe end?' once again became a relevant question, bringing back onto the agenda the uncertainty of Turkey's inclusion – an uncertainty leaving Turks to feel like scorned suitors.

Neither membership of NATO nor association with the Common Market had implied cultural kinship between Europe and Turkey. Rather, these decisions had been based on interest; they were admirably 'liberal' in the sense of denying voice to passions. With the EU, however, there is an indeterminacy.

Although cultural uniformity is not a declared component of its conception, the normative definition of the Union is not clearly spelled out, nor is it a fixed target. As the Union evolves, its self-conception moves along the spectrum between the establishment of a super-state in need of prior grounding based on shared identity, and a constitutionally guaranteed association signaling the genesis of a new-model political unit – distinct from the nation-state yet different from the narrow association of an economic arena. While the debate on the nature of the EU has obvious implications for the attitude toward Turkey's membership, the discussion on Turkey's membership has also become a proxy for the debate on the nature of the

EU. When they express opinions on Turkey's fitness, protagonists are at the same time arguing for their vision of the EU. The EU's enlargement project, if it extends to the eastern Mediterranean beyond the boundaries of Europe's cultural sphere by incorporating a 'torn' country, to use Huntington's (1996) vocabulary, will provide a world-historical reproof to the claim that the world is divided into 'civilizations' based on the primacy of unchangeable cultures. In effect, the EU will have redefined itself as a civilizational project, targeting an association on the basis of constitutional allegiance.

On the other side of the equation, even if the EU does not define itself culturally, the nature of the Union requires a yielding of sovereignty and substantive harmonization in matters of political and legal norms, and therefore in the institutional framing of identities. For Turkey, the impending transformation of the state-society relationship resulting from such harmonization will imply an intense scrutiny of the national project and a very different space within which a 'national' identity can be negotiated. It is not clear for Turks that what they consider their national identity can be sacrificed for a Europeanness that most of the population do not understand (Gunes-Ayata, 2003). Even within the terms of their local history, overtures in the form of well-intended attempts at inclusion leave the Turkish public opinion puzzled and ultimately defensive.

One such revealing case was when President Chirac, at the end of 2004, during the heat of the debate in Europe, declared that Turkey and Europe were 'all children of the Byzantine Empire'. This was an interesting statement in favor of Turkey's inclusion on the basis of shared historical lineage. Earlier, Romano Prodi had defended Turkey's bid on the basis of a very different understanding when he declared that the EU's task should be the reconstruction of the Roman Empire. As against an empire with no pretence at cultural homogenization, Chirac was evoking a more difficult project of rewriting received history for purposes of assimilating Turkey into the common cultural heritage of Europe. Prodi's comment had not been culturalist, and did not even bother to identify Europe with the Roman Empire, but instead pointed toward a new aspiration for the EU's geography.

While pleased with the French president's support, Turkish commentators were obviously not comfortable in accepting the identification. Turkish national identity has been constructed precisely by deliberately ignoring the evident heritage implied by geographical space. Schoolchildren are taught that they are the descendants of Central Asian warriors who conquered the Christian empire. Anatolians are upset when genetic historians show that they are Anatolians whose heritage reaches far beyond the 11th century, to the Byzantines, the Romans, the Greeks and the Hittites. Nationalist and Kemalist discourse made sure that the population understood how Turkey's independence was won in a struggle against the great powers of Europe.

Schoolchildren and citizens alike were never allowed to forget the intrepid hostility of the West as it tried to expand its own colonial empires by dismantling Turkey's. Turkey was, after all, the designated 'other' in the definition of Europe's historical uniqueness, and orientalist condescension was barely disguised in most European attitudes. This gave way to more overt distrust when *gastarbeiters* from Anatolian villages were received with a lack of civility verging on disdain in Germany and elsewhere. It was not until the 1980s, with the gradual integration of

the Turkish population into Europe, greater contact of the populations, especially through tourism and football, and links generated through candidacy for the EU, that the rift was gradually repaired, and the face of Europe became somewhat less stern.

II. Statism

This situation of longing and resentment is obviously fraught with contradiction. On the one hand there is an intense desire to be part of 'contemporary civilization' as Atatürk exhorted the population; on the other hand there is a need to deny a commonality and to define an otherness. Among peripheral societies that committed to projects of modernization through nation-state construction, the Turkish example was extreme in its unequivocal equation of modernization with westernization. The elite assumed the responsibility to undertake the modernization of the society; in this task they propagated a statist nationalism and a militant effort to relegate religion as well as all particularisms (defined as cultures distinct from the state-approved) to the private sphere (for a discussion of the formation of Turkish nationalism, see Keyder, 2005). They looked upon autonomous dynamics originating in the society with suspicion; economic and political liberalism, as well as expressions of allegiance to alternative identities, were regarded as threats to the fundamental project of westernization. This project became problematic after the end of the Cold War. Together with the new wave of democracy and human rights, growing globalization of law and the consecration of economic liberalism as the required policy dictated by various supranational commitments, the state could no longer defend its tutelary position vis-a-vis the society (Keyder, 1997; Brewin, 2003).

The model underlying the Republican mission had been one of social solidarity underwritten by an organic state. This disposition may be better understood when it is remembered that the Turkish state model learned from and shared many features with Southern Europe, and that it attained its mature form during the inter-war period. In the countries of Southern Europe as well, the course of modernization has been characterized by a complex negotiation between attraction and resistance to what was considered the northern version of modernity. In Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece, statesmen were wary of emulating northern models of social order based on individual autonomy. In fact, in the late 1960s, when the foundation was being laid for the European Community, only Italy among the Southern European countries had been 'liberated' from the tutelage of a communitarian state – and that by an external power. The end of the statist regimes in Spain and Portugal, which had been incepted during the inter-war period, coincided with the expansion of the 'northern' economy. Thus, by the time their inclusion in the European Community was being debated, there already had developed a credible social force, in the form of a Europe-oriented bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, to constitute the internal support for such an expansion (Poulantzas, 1975). Greece, after seven years of unflinching anti-liberalism under the colonels, represented a more precarious case in the sense of the strength of the 'liberal' faction within the business interests and the intelligentsia: statist forces within the political and religious establishment were still vigorous. Nonetheless,

ideal interests originating in a particular culturalist reading of European heritage and the anxiety associated with being left out of 'Europe' overrode all qualms. The boundaries of Europe expanded to the Mediterranean.

The question suggested by this implicit comparison with Southern Europe is why, in Turkey, was it not possible to defeat the forces associated with statism and characterized by an antipathy toward liberalism? In fact, it may have been justifiable during the 1980s to think that Turkey was replicating the path taken by the other Southern European countries: that social forces in favor of closer association with Europe were becoming stronger. This was a period when the state relaxed its stronghold on the economy, and the end of the military regime in 1983 was greeted with an exuberant flourishing of the civil society. There were new political parties declaring a commitment to economic and political liberalism, the media exploded after decades of confinement to state monopoly, civil society organizations of various interests and persuasion reclaimed the public debate. The gap in income levels between Turkey and (southern) Europe, was not as drastic as it is now. The developments of the global age were reflected in middle-class lifestyles in the larger cities, and the media became a transmitter and mirror of these changes. Liberalism became a contender among the ranks of those presumed to be the principal carriers of the official message. At first, however, despite the relaxation of statist control over economic resources, Turkey's bourgeoisie was not ready to chart an independent course, feeling that they would have to give up the cozy profits of a protected market and state subsidies in the event of membership. It was not until 1995, after much debate and dissembling, that they resigned themselves to the signing of a Customs Union agreement with the EC. Unlike Southern European countries prior to their accession, Turkish society during the 1980s had not yet generated social forces of sufficient scale to regard the EU as the preferable alternative to the political, economic or cultural dominance of the state model.

It was at this juncture that the threat posed by Islamic fundamentalism and Kurdish nationalism was brought onto the agenda, and came to be used by the state elite as a pretext for re-consolidating the authoritarian definition of national identity. The state became more insistent in requiring national unity; nationalist rhetoric was redoubled, the Kemalist mantra was repeated with vigilance (Jung and Piccoli, 2001). Against this backdrop of a coercive state apparatus, the European Union and Turkey's long-standing candidacy came to play a novel role in Turkey's politics. Opposition groups, now aware that they did not have the resources or the ability to mobilize social forces to defeat the state, came to see the candidacy process as the only way of leveraging greater democracy, rule of law and an expanded pluralism. By the late 1990s, the Islamic and the Kurdish movements, human rights activists, and more generally those groups who were working toward the strengthening of the civil society, were advocating rapid fulfillment of the conditions required by the EU for the attainment of candidacy status.

The left intelligentsia, who had been overwhelmingly third-worldist in the previous decade, also converted to a liberal, European-style social democracy and became fervently pro-European. Finally, the more established grand bourgeoisie, the industrialists of Istanbul as represented by the powerful industrialists' association, TUSIAD, started to lobby for political reform – as required for membership of the

EU. Their growing global links and their frustration with Ankara led them finally to take an independent stance on matters ranging from human rights to the excesses of official historiography in textbooks. It was a safer proposition for all parties to defend these positions under the cloak of advocacy for a rapid fulfillment of the conditions for EU candidacy. At this time, public opinion polls indicated a solid majority (exceeding two-thirds of the population) in support of EU membership, representing a strategic choice for reforming the Turkish state by anchoring the process to the momentum and the prestige of the European project.

What made these tactical positions possible was that the state elite and the politicians, despite what their concrete practice betrayed, continued to profess a commitment to the European ideal. Withdrawal of the application for candidacy was never entertained as an option. Rather, the state elite and the politicians seemed satisfied with the stand-off whereby Turkey would be seen as a perpetual supplicant for membership and the EU as a fickle and ultimately uninterested object of desire. In other words, Turkey's ambivalent status as neither in nor out of Europe suited the state elite in its preference for perpetuating a middle ground where political reforms could be left incomplete. The stalemate also gave them the opportunity to validate that part of the nationalist discourse which cast Europe as carrying an essentially Christian culturalist attitude, against a Turkey which would never be accepted no matter what it achieved. Unless their counterparts in the EU cooperated, however, this was a self-defeating attitude in the long run. Because of the state elite's declared and continuing commitment to the European project, appeal to 'European' norms invoking the requirements of EU candidacy remained a legitimate and forceful critique available to that segment of civil society advocating greater democracy, rule of law and human rights.

The unexpected development at this juncture was the change in the EU's attitude toward a more serious *démarche* toward Turkey's candidacy. By the mid-1990s the EU had acquired a major presence in Turkey. Euro-parliamentarians regularly visited areas of conflict, inspected prisons, and gave overt support to human rights organizations. The EU office in Ankara funded projects with the objective of strengthening civil society; contacts were established through NGO activities that ranged from working with homeless children to sponsoring environmental activists. Official visits served to remind the public that this special relationship continued on course. Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights were debated and became accepted as part of Turkish jurisprudence. Turkey's heretofore insular political scene had been penetrated by new, Europe-centered networks into which civil society, political parties and state agencies found themselves drawn. With such networks in place, the accounting began to favor inclusion; the cost of excluding Turkey became higher than the cost of including it (Öniş, 2003).

III. A new alignment

Given their reluctance to relinquish political power, the Turkish state elite had driven themselves into an impasse with regard to the EU, and it was a sudden awareness of this that mobilized them to reflect on the extent of Turkey's commit-

ment to the European project (Sofos, 2000). There was no longer room for hypocrisy or self-delusion, and the calculations based on perpetuating indecision were no longer relevant. Accordingly, opposition, especially from the military but also from within the ranks of the bureaucracy and the judiciary, was openly voiced for the first time. It was suddenly discovered that membership of the EU would entail a loss of sovereignty. Top generals opined that the EU, using the pretext of cultural rights, wanted to divide Turkey along ethnic lines, and the ultra-right was mobilized to defend the unitary national structure against European demands, religious fundamentalists and separatists. These 'national security' concerns were taken up by the government as well, at that time a motley coalition under Ecevit's premiership which remained in power until elections in November 2002. Against this backdrop of a reluctant state elite bolstered by a spineless political class, the EU option receded as state policy, kept alive only through the bureaucratic momentum launched after the 1999 Helsinki summit when Turkey's candidate status was ratified.

This new alignment represented a curious reversal. Since the beginning of the westernization adventure, the modernizing impulse had been integrally vested in the state elite, who regarded the masses with great suspicion. Now it was the masses who were pushing for a speedier timetable for the state to grant greater freedom to the society – in minority rights, in religious affairs, and in the public sphere. The new alignment was reinforced when Turkey was struck by a massive economic crisis in 2001, generally interpreted as the result of corrupt statism. The media and the Istanbul bourgeoisie now joined the democratic opposition to proclaim that Turkey was a relic of the old world, and that fundamental restructuring of the state-society relationship, which would render politicians and top bureaucrats accountable through legislative reform, was long overdue.

The pro-EU forces were finally delivered a breakthrough in November 2002 when the 'Islamic Democrat' Justice and Development Party won the elections. Not only had the party actually promised to work for membership, but it was the only political force not compromised by its relationship with the state elite. Instead, its leadership were outsiders who could reasonably be expected to follow through with their promise. In fact, even before they had formed the government, the party leader, Erdoğan, started making the rounds of European capitals in order to garner support for Turkey's accession negotiations to be scheduled during the summit of December 2004. This was the first time in more than a decade that a government was formed by a single party, and thus a party leader could in fact, with authority, promise to implement a program of reforms, without fearing (or hiding behind) the threat of sabotage by coalition partners.

It was as a response to this new determination on the part of Turkey that the culturalist opposition within the EU started a frontal and forthright attack against accommodating the supplicants. Until then it was always possible, indeed realistic, to expect the Turkish state elite to undermine itself, violate the human rights and political criteria, and perpetually postpone the time of reckoning. In fact, despite their protestations, the Turkish state elite would probably be happiest with a 'special status', as later proposed by the German Christian Democrats. The new government, however, was serious in asking for delivery on earlier promises. It was now up to the EU to show its hand. Brussels officials protested that they were not convinced that

the Justice and Development Party could actually control the military and the judiciary, but the government was successful in pushing through parliament a succession of democratization packages which lifted restrictions on freedom of speech, improved criminal procedures to protect against torture and maltreatment by the police, and granted language rights to the Kurdish minority. Most importantly, the military-dominated National Security Council was brought under civilian control.

Of course, it is not clear that civilians will actually succeed in their attempted control of the entrenched state elite, and especially the military. Since 17 December 2004, when accession negotiations were officially declared to be on the way, the opposition against the EU has stepped up the volume of nationalist rhetoric, charging that membership will imply the loss of national identity, of Islam and even of Turkish soil – as foreigners will buy all the land. Although it is easy enough to dismiss all this as pathological paranoia, it is clear that the drawn-out years of negotiation (expected to last at least until 2012) will not be easy. This is especially so since the identity concerns of Turks are mostly expressed at the national level, and there is as yet no imagined Europe to contend with the imagined national community (cf. Armbruster, Rollo and Meinhof, 2003). The EU's attitude to Turkey's candidacy will be crucial: ambivalence will strengthen the opposition, whereas sustained progress will help consolidate the public opinion behind the European project, just as it did in the Southern European cases.

IV. Constitution and culture

There have, of course, been different conceptions of the *telos* of European integration, ranging from the establishment of a free-trade area to the formation of a super-state. Stages in the evolution of the EU have traced a path excluding some of the options and redefining others. How Europe is imagined now differs substantially from the time when Turkey first applied for membership in 1987, due especially to the enlargement toward the former Soviet-bloc countries. Social Democrats and Greens are more committed than the center right to a constitutional Europe, and they believe more strongly in a version of Europe's 'civilizing mission'. In the debate leading up to the summit of December 2004, the Greens in the European Parliament were the staunchest allies of the pro-EU forces in Turkey. The political balances of the last few years, which brought an increasing presence of Southern Europeans to EU decision-making bodies, have also been favorable to Turkey's inclusion. Southern European politicians are inspired by a different map for Europe, oriented more toward the Mediterranean, and especially after the incorporation of Eastern European countries, Turkey's candidacy may have symbolized for them a different sort of enlargement to counterbalance northern expansion. Public opinion in the Southern European countries also evidences an appreciably greater support for Turkey's membership than it does in the North.

Turkey's candidacy was accompanied by much debate on the geographical and cultural bases of European identity. Cultural difference was frequently brought onto the agenda, mainly by out-of-office center-right politicians and prominently by

Giscard d'Estaing. What has eventually prevailed, however, is not a culturalist understanding of European identity, but Europe as a new civilizational project bringing together a political community defined by allegiance to a common set of ground-rules. While the debate on the nature of the EU has obvious implications for the attitude toward Turkey's membership, the discussion on Turkey's membership has also become a proxy for the debate on the nature and the boundaries of the EU (Sjursen, 2000). Those who favor Turkey's accession would like to see the EU's enlargement project extend beyond the boundaries of Europe's cultural sphere. Such an extension would not only provide a world-historical rebuke to the claim that the world is divided into 'civilizations' based on the primacy of unchangeable cultures (cf. Huntington, 1996), but would also establish the EU as a viable alternative to the world order being aggressively promoted from the other side of the Atlantic.

The EU's change of heart toward Turkey was not occasioned by a shift in public opinion. It was more the result of new thinking at the level of the Council and the Commission, where the post-Cold War geography forced the elite to admit that the EU was an expanding entity: not a deepening super-state but something closer to a differentiated empire. Long-discussed formulae such as variable geometry and two or three speeds in harmonization now had more concrete meaning. There is nothing in the EU's charter that excludes the option of unbounded expansion; rather the constraint comes from within. The Convention, held supposedly to clarify the nature of the entity, has so far perpetuated the ambivalence. In fact, there were two real options: the EU as a federation based on culturalist precepts of a homogenizing nation-state versus an EU as civic and constitutional entity with differentiated units and considerable subsidiarity (Delanty, 1998; Tully, 2002).

The first option would require greater unification and deepening around a core of shared heritage and history, with an implicit Christian consciousness. This would be a fortress Europe, trying to preserve its uniqueness and its privileges. However, this option would offer no hope nor any alternative design for the world to peoples left outside, since a cultural Europe would be closed and would be occupied with deepening rather than with expansion.

The second option is that of a new sort of polity constituted not through conquest but by the willing allegiance of member-states to the law of the Union. When law is the principal source of attraction and legitimation, schoolchildren do not have to learn about 'our Christian heritage' or even 'our ancestors the Romans'. Europe could be composed of a cool, dispassionate, carefully assessed membership, the result of deliberation and choice, based on interest and calculation. This calculation would include as a factor the moral ideal represented by a 'European' order of social democracy, where cultural values are expressed in terms of secular notions relating to legal, political and economic processes, and to the desired goals.

The world conjuncture certainly plays a role in these calculations. At the time of writing, there seems to be much concern that the US is condemning itself to irrelevance and eventual isolation. In the face of such a possibility EU officials may well be genuinely inclined to pursue the option that was raised in the argument about Turkey's candidacy, namely the political overture and the leverage with respect to the Islamic world an EU with Turkey as a member-state would gain. If, in fact, there is a project within the EU to situate Europe as an alternative to US unilateralism, then

expansion toward a key region in the world makes eminent sense. An optimistic scenario for the near future is that all of the EU states will gravitate around old Europe's implicit strategy to establish a civilizational alternative – a scenario that would have to bring in those waiting outside the fortress, in the 'faux bourgs', if it is to attain inclusive credibility. Indeed, from the geopolitical point of view, but more importantly because of the perspective of incorporating a substantially Muslim nation, Turkey would seem to be a necessary component of such a scenario – if only because it was the first, among those other candidates still as yet located outside the boundaries, to apply for membership.

Caglar Keyder

*Department of Sociology, Bogazici University
and Department of Sociology, State University of New York, Binghamton*

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