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Culture, Religion, EU-Turkey and Cyprus: Dilemma



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Cultural differences have become, in the eyes of some, an impediment to Turkish accession to the EU. French sociologist Amaury de Riencourt makes a clear distinction between culture and civilization. From his perspective, “..Culture and Civilisation are two expressions that have been used more or less indiscriminately and interchangeably in the past. The distinction between them is of organic succession. They do not coincide in time but follow each other during the life span of a particular society: each Culture engenders its own Civilisation...”

He says, “Civilization represents the crystallization on a gigantic scale of the preceding culture’s deepest and greatest thoughts and style. Civilization aims at the gradual standardization of increasingly large masses of men within a rigidly mechanical framework.”¹ If this logic is correct, the world is increasingly becoming one civilization. Indeed, the author states that “the 20th century is the dramatic watershed separating the culture behind us from the civilization that lies ahead.”

The Turkish people throughout history have met different cultures, have been influenced by them and have accumulated various customs and mores in their journey. Nations, in time, adapt to influences in differing ways.

Today many in Europe consider that Turks come from a different culture and focus on issues such as “honour killings” and violence against

1. Amaury de Riencourt, *The Coming Ceasers* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958) pp.10-11.

women. It is true that there are cultural differences. But I submit that such unfortunate issues are not peculiar to Turks. "Crime de passion" is not alien to the Mediterranean nations; nor is violence against women as witnessed by Spain trying to grapple with this problem. Turkey should indeed eradicate such practices.

Differences in the European Union exist even within nations; and there are of course differences between city dwellers and the rural folk. The differences between the northern and the southern parts of a country are notable. The differences between Nordic culture and the Mediterranean outlook are not minimal.

Nations' behaviour and attitudes depend on and change in relation to their environment and events. During the 1990's when Turkey was fighting against terror groups on its soil, European partners were admonishing Turkey for some of the more stringent laws. Yet, after 9/11 and when Europe faced terrorism, some EU members had to take similar stringent measures. When it comes to Turkey, to use the words of an American poet and lecturer, Ralph Emerson, "people only see what they are prepared to see."

When one looks at the issue from afar, I would venture to say that differences between an average American and an average European are quite wide, perhaps wider than those with Turks. Certainly, there are religious underpinnings in every society. As the European Union's motto is integrating diversity, then religious difference should not be an insurmountable obstacle. French sociologist, Edgar Morin put it aptly. According to him Europe is "a complex whose attribute is to bring together the greatest diversities without confusion, and to associate opposites in a non-separable manner... there is nothing that was hers from the beginning, and nothing which is exclusively hers today... That which underlies the unity of European culture is not the Judeo-Graeco-Roman synthesis, but the not only complementary but also the competitive and antagonistic interplay between these separate traditions, each of which has its own logic."² In this context, it is worth mentioning an article by British historian Eric Hobsbawm in *Le Monde* on September 25, 2008 called *l'Europe; mythe, histoire, réalité*. One paragraph illustrates the complexities of Europe :...The values which dominated Europe in the 20th century-nationalisms, fascisms, marxist-leninisms are also purely European make as much as liberalism and *laissez-faire*.

2. Edgar Morin, *Penser l'Europe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987)

In contrast, other civilisations have practiced some of these values said “european” before Europe. The Chinese and Ottoman Empires practiced religious tolerance in favor of Jews expelled by Spain. It is only at the end of the 20th century that the institutions and values in question have spread, at least theoretically, in all of Europe. The “European values” have gained currency in the second half of the 20th century. That the institutions and values in question have spread, at least theoretically, in all of Europe. The “European values “ have gained currency in the 2nd half of the 20th century..” Turkey has long been preached to by our partners that cultural diversity is richness. If this is true in a country; it should also be true continent-wide and Europe should not deprive itself by refusing Turkey on the basis of religious and cultural differences!

Some in the European Union believe that the EU should become a “Fortress Europe.” I think this is a short sighted view: There are no fortresses any more. It is not possible to insulate one self. We live in a globalized world.

Turkey’s rejection by many circles in the EU on the basis of religion, culture and “non-Europeanness” is offending not only to Turks but to many other Muslims as well. The very fact that the membership “test” for Turkey would be more difficult and rigorous has been noted by a number of Arab journalists. Turkey’s membership or rejection is being monitored by many around the world. Needless to say, the Muslim population of over 10 million living in EU countries is also watching. As such, Turkey’s membership issue will have consequences that go beyond EU-Turkey relations and actually have an impact on the bridging of civilizations.

If indeed, religion becomes a criterium for Turkish membership, this will certainly undermine the democratic and universal values which the EU claims to uphold.

Many in the Islamic world look to the west as the “infidel.” Many in the Christian world consider Muslims “inferior” barbarians. Both perceptions are wrong and dangerous and could have a lasting effect of global scale. This vicious circle must somehow be broken. Turkey is the only country with predominantly Muslim population that is democratic and secular and has been a partner of Europe for a very long time. Let us remember that Turkey was once called the “sick man of Europe” and not of Asia, as Bernard Lewis noted.

Turkey's rather negative image in Europe stems from two considerations. The first is the fact that the Ottoman Empire was the "enemy." Therefore there are prejudices that have continued from history. Interestingly and conversely, the Crusades have not had such an impact on Turks. The second consideration is the Turkish migrant workers living in Europe. Mistakes were made on this matter by all sides. These first generation migrants came from the lowest circles of society in Turkey. The host countries did not, at that time, care about their level of education but rather focused on the "muscles" of the worker. Until recently, host countries did not have a policy on integration, as migrant workers were considered temporary. The sender, namely Turkey, did not have any experience of dealing with their countrymen living abroad. When one looks at the second and third generation of Turks in the EU countries, one can see a big difference between the grandfather and the grandson, though problems still prevail with the younger generation. Unfortunately, the first generation of workers left a lasting negative impression.

Sharing of universal values brings with it the question of what universal values are. In the world universal values is a term on which there is no general agreement. The saying that "cultural diversity is richness" remains somewhat hollow. When EU speaks of cultural diversity it mainly thinks of European culture in general. Many in the EU seem to make a distinction between cultural diversity and life styles. There is widespread belief in Europe that EU is an institution where shared lifestyles exist. More than cultural diversity there is in Europe a tendency towards cultural assimilation rather than integration. The migrant workers have been seen as a microcosm of some parts of Turkish society. EU peoples tend to see them as a foreign element injected into the body.

"Religion is the substance of culture and culture the form of religion" Paul Tillich says.

Many arguments have been advanced against Turkish membership in the European Union. Some have said that Turkey and its capital geographically are not in Europe. Some have said Turkey is big. These are not tenable arguments; they are flimsy. Turkey's geography has not changed since the 1963 Treaty binding the then Common Market and Turkey. Turkey is and was big then.

What is not openly said as the main obstacle to Turkish membership is perhaps, according to many, religion. Many Turks also believe that EU will keep Turkey outside because of Islam. This seems to be too simple. Certainly, there is an important element of truth in it. But it is deeper than that.

Many writers and academicians have stressed the role of religion in a given society in the shaping of culture. Islam, in general, has not gone through a process of Reformation as was the case in Christianity. What is said in the Quran seems irrelevant or misinterpreted among many practitioners. In other words, the letter and spirit of the Quran many a time have been ignored by many practitioners and in some Islamic societies. This is all the more true in the case of treatment of women and in fine arts in Islamic societies; even in Turkey, which under Kemal Atatürk many steps had been taken to redress women's situation. Yet, the situation needs much more progress. The society is far from gender equality.

Another issue of controversy is headscarves. Some in Turkey consider wearing of headscarves a personal choice or freedom. Some see it as a modernization of women; a way out for women to join the mainstream. Yet, many consider it as mainly a man's problem; namely as a man's order (husband or father) to women to wear the headscarf. In other words man's hegemony over woman. This trend in Turkey has coincided with the growing ban on display of religious signs in Europe. Many high-level bureaucrats in Turkey complain that they cannot advance in their career unless their wives wear headscarves.

In Turkey many radical elements exist in the society. The fabric of the society has changed in recent years. It has become much more conservative and religious. This is a dangerous trend. But this is also true for Christian societies.

Turkey's geographic location, its borders with the Middle Eastern countries, its large population can be considered as negative elements for Turkish membership. But they are merely secondary. Turkey's former Chief of Staff General Başbuğ, giving full support for Turkey's integration with the Union, referred to the fact that most of the time Turkey's geo-strategic location is discussed as to "where Turkey is." He went on to say that "what Turkey is" is as important as the former: "democratic, secular and strong Turkey in this region". The overriding factor seems to be cultural difference for an EU of "citizens

I will try to demonstrate the difficulties and differences that affect the EU-Turkey negotiations and relations, based not only on EU documents but also on personal experiences and information, some of which I believe have not yet been published. However, it is not my intention to delve into the background of these relations. My main point of reference is the Helsinki EU Council decision of 11-12 December 1999 where Turkey was formally declared “ a candidate destined to become a member.”

The first information Turkey received that its candidacy would be declared at the EU Helsinki Council in 1999 came from Norway’s then Foreign Minister Knut Vollabeck. As Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE he had come to İstanbul to review the OSCE summit preparations. At a meeting with Turkey’s Foreign Minister İsmail Cem on August 22, 1999 he shared the information which was given to him he said by Israel’s Shimon Peres! (It is to be noted that Israeli statesmen have usually supported Turkey’s membership.)

At the Helsinki Summit para 4 of the decision asks Turkey in effect to accept to go to the International Court of Justice for settling its differences with Greece if bilateral negotiations fail. This was no problem for Turkey since Prime Minister Yılmaz had earlier stated that Turkey could accept third party jurisdiction on March 26,1996. The 9(b) para of the Council’s decision on Cyprus is somewhat ambivalent. The Council said a political settlement would facilitate Cypriot accession but that it was not a precondition.

Turkey asked whether a solution in Cyprus was a precondition for Turkish membership. The Finnish Presidency responded in writing by saying that it was not. Given the fact that Cyprus would become a member before Turkey, I cannot consider EU Presidency’s statement as genuine.

The 12-13 December 2002 Copenhagen EU Council meeting and its decisions are extremely significant. Cyprus was accepted as a member effective 1 May 2004 with nine other countries. In para 19 of its decision, the Council encourages Turkey to pursue energetically its reform process.” If the European Council in December 2004 on the basis

of a report and a recommendation from the Commission , decides that Turkey fulfills the Copenhagen political criteria, the European Council will open accession negotiations with Turkey without delay.”. As for

Cyprus, when the Greek Cypriots rejected the Annan Plan on April 24, 2004 Gunther Verheugen, then EU Commissioner for enlargement would admit that Cypriot accession was a mistake:

From my perspective, this is a deeply distressing situation for two reasons. Firstly, we changed our strategy on Cyprus in 1999 and, at the urgent request of the Cypriot Government, pledged to the Greek Cypriot Government that the solution to the Cyprus conflict would not be the precondition for the island's accession to the European Union, this was based on the clear understanding that we would do everything possible to facilitate Cyprus' accession, and, by the same token, the Government of the Republic of Cyprus would do everything in its power to achieve a settlement, and that under no circumstances would a settlement fail as a result of Greek Cypriot opposition... ...I feel personally cheated by the Government of the Republic of Cyprus...

Another significant document, adopted at Copenhagen, reportedly at French initiative, is the EU declaration on **One Europe** which claimed enlargement process was irreversible and that there would be no dividing lines in Europe. Indeed, the Council in its decisions in para 21 speaks of "annexing the Declaration to the final act of the Accession Treaty." thus making it a primary law. Today it is extremely difficult to get hold of this document. EU circles would rather forget it.

The period leading up to 2004 must have stunned many in the Union. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) with religious underpinnings undertook vast reforms to conform to Copenhagen political criteria. On October 6, 2004 the Commission produced its report on Turkey where it stated in para 7 (3) that "Turkey sufficiently fulfills the political criteria and recommends that accession negotiations be opened."

Commission's recommendation to start negotiations with Turkey must have put some EU circles in a dilemma. Many in EU circles did not expect Turkey to undertake vast reforms. A President of EU country is reported to have told the Turkish Ambassador that when AKP took over in 2002 many were relieved that a party with religious background would put an end to EU-Turkey relations. The President has gone on to say "However, wrong people started to do the right things!" More than anything else this shows the mindset of many in Europe.

December 16-17 2004 Brussels EU summit was devoted almost completely to the Turkish issue and opening negotiations with Turkey. The

issue of extending the Ankara Agreement and the Customs Union to Cyprus became an issue of contention between the Union and Turkey. Turkey promised in writing that it would comply with this demand once it was assured that such extension did not amount to recognition of the Greek Cypriot Government. The EU Council decided at the Brussels summit to open negotiations with Turkey on October 3, 2005. Let me just quote the last para of the framework:

The shared objective of the negotiations is accession. These negotiations are an open-ended process, the outcome of which cannot be guaranteed beforehand. While taking account of all Copenhagen criteria, if the candidate State is not in a position to assume in full all the obligations of membership it must be ensured that the candidate State concerned is fully anchored in the European structures through the strongest possible bond.

The last paragraph of the framework shows utter arrogance. It does not bother to ask the “unsuccessful” candidate country whether **it wants to be fully anchored in the European structures through the strongest possible bond!**

There is no doubt that the new guidelines for general framework are harder compared to past texts. The concept of absorption capacity which existed as an EU norm was brought to the fore when Turkey’s membership became an issue. Indeed, the Commission in its press release of 29 June 2005 announced that “Commission presents a rigorous draft framework for accession negotiations with Turkey.” What the press release intends to say in blunt words is; don’t worry , we will see to it that Turkey can’t succeed !

Let us now examine whether Turkey is treated like any other candidate as EU circles and documents often claim. I will try to do it first based on EU texts and then on statements by EU member states. Let us turn to Seeking Kant in the EU’s Relations with Turkey:

“This attitude was finally reflected in a clear fashion in the negotiating framework with Turkey. While the EU finally opened accession negotiations with Turkey on the same day as Croatia, the negotiating framework drafted for the two countries displayed significant differences, revealing the EU’s unequal treatment of the two candidates. Whereas the negotiating framework for Croatia states that ‘by their very nature’, the negotiations are an open-ended process whose outcome cannot be guaranteed beforehand’, the same sentence is repeated for Turkey without

the disclaimer, suggesting that this is beyond a mere matter of rhetoric for the case of Turkey. (i.e. the words by their very nature do not exist in the text for Turkey) In a similar vein, only the framework document on Turkey contains the following section: '...while having full regard to all Copenhagen criteria, including the absorption capacity of the Union, if Turkey is not in a position to assume in full all the obligations of membership it must be ensured that Turkey is fully anchored in the European structures through the strongest possible bond.'

This phrase, which invites reflection on alternative outcomes such as a 'privileged partnership' and highlights 'absorption capacity' as a Copenhagen criteria, is non-existent in the text on Croatia. The concept of 'absorption capacity' only figures once in the text on Croatia as 'an important consideration in the general interest of both the Union and Croatia'. In the case of Turkey, the Commission is deemed responsible to 'monitor this capacity during negotiations, encompassing the whole range of issues set out in its October 2004 paper on issues arising from Turkey's membership perspective in order to inform an assessment by the Council as to whether this condition of membership has been met'; no such measure is proposed for negotiations with Croatia."³

I personally know how hard the Turkish delegation insisted that the phrase "by their very nature" be also inserted into the Turkish text on the open ended negotiations and how hard the EU came against it. So much for double standards.

"The concept of 'absorption capacity' resurfaced during 2005 in the debate on Turkey's accession and in the rejection of the proposed Constitutional Treaty by voters in France and The Netherlands, which the political elite in both countries saw as a measure of popular dissatisfaction with the functioning of the European project. The debate focused upon Turkey's size, its population (70 million), its culture, and its unpopularity with EU citizens. Commentators said the EU would have severe difficulty in 'absorbing' a country like Turkey and 'absorption' was incorporated into Turkey's framework of negotiations with measures like permanent safeguards and alternatives to membership ..."⁴

There is no doubt that such a fluid concept can be a tool for countries like France to block Turkish membership. "In Seeking Kant in the EU's Relations with Turkey", the authors correctly point out the following:

3. Seeking Kant in the EU's relations with Turkey.,p 7
4. ibid, p 8

"France has played a pivotal role in driving the debate in Europe about whether the EU can absorb Turkey. While the absorption capacity problem for France seems to apply both to Turkey and the Western Balkan states, the emphasis, especially in the aftermath of France's failed referendum, has been on Turkey.. In fact, President Jacques Chirac backed the modification of France's Constitution, which made it compulsory to hold a referendum on the future EU enlargement. What was striking about this decision was the way in which the wording of the Article indirectly left Croatia unaffected when both Croatia and Turkey were starting the EU talks at the same time... It was again President Chirac who initiated the 'absorption capacity' debate during the June 2006 Summit, when he stressed that EU enlargement 'should only continue in a process that is controlled and better understood'. He said that the 'absorption capacity' of the EU has institutional, financial, and political components and that the political component should take into account the views of the people of the member states and allow them the opportunity 'to say if they accept or not'. The governing party UMP has consistently argued that the EU cannot absorb Turkey for cultural, geographic, budgetary and institutional reasons, signaling the end of the federalist ideals. Many in the French centre-right have gone so far as to argue that further EU enlargement, particularly to Turkey, was a major factor behind the rejection of the referendum by the French public ..."⁵

The discrimination against Turkey based on EU texts is evident. Let us now take a look at the discrimination at political levels. The TESEV publication mentioned above quotes BBC News Europe of 19 June 2006:

"..The European Commission was also not immune from this contaminated discourse on essential cultural and religious identities. Despite the Commission's strategy to keep internal debate over Turkish accession silent until the publication of its report and recommendation in October 2004, Franz Fischler, the Commissioner for Agriculture, wrote a letter to Enlargement Commissioner Verheugen stating that Turkey is a 'sui generis society, far more oriental than European' and a country that can weaken the EU's 'common identity'. According to him, the credentials of the Caucasus countries as well as Russia and Ukraine are more 'European' than Turkey's in terms of culture, religion and history. Similar views were expressed by Fritz Bolkestein, the EU Commissioner for the Single Market and a former leader of the Dutch liberals, who warned that Europe's Christian civilisation risked being overrun by Islam if 70 million Muslims were allowed to join the EU. He also added that this would be forgetting 1683, when the Ottoman army was defeated at the gates of

5. Ibid, page 8

Vienna. Hence, historical memory alongside cultural, religious, and geographic differences also began to be explicitly utilised to construct insurmountable differences between the two entities..."⁶

Let us remember that the Commission is the most friendly section towards Turkey in the EU. Leaving aside Austria which seems not to have overcome the Ottoman Vienna siege of 1683, France and Germany are the most fervent opposers of Turkish membership. The German Chancellor Angela Merkel wants to give Turkey privileged partnership but says that in line with *pacta sunt servanda* she will abide by the commitment of the previous German Government. The French attitude is worse. After setting a date for negotiations the then French President Jacques Chirac announced that new memberships (read it as Turkish membership) would be subject to referendum in France. Under Sarkozy the referendum has taken a new form, but the possibility for referendum still exists. I find it immoral since the country subject to referendum is not able to campaign in a foreign country. It is a unique application of, what is normally, a democratic tool... The French President has vetoed the opening of five chapters to be discussed on the EU acquis saying that those chapters relate to full integration with Turkey. He is at pains to find pretexts against Turkey. One of them is that Turkey's capital is not in Europe and in fact Turkey is not in Europe! His remarks contradict de Gaulle who considered Turkey to be in Europe and signed the 1963 Ankara agreement. Since 1963 Turkey physically has not moved; she is where she was. One may ask whether Cyprus is in Europe since its geography is more to the east of Turkey.

Let us now turn to the Turkish side. AKP took over the Government in December 2002 facing three important foreign policy issues: what to do in the face of US pressure on military campaign to Iraq, the Annan plan on Cyprus and EU and Turkey. The Government did a lot of footwork on EU so that Copenhagen 2002 Summit would take a positive decision regarding Turkey. Indeed, the AKP Government between 2002 and 2004 undertook important reforms demanded by EU. The Government was to a large degree helped by the main opposition party CHP. Some intellectuals said that AKP's fervent EU position was largely motivated by its desire to be recognized and legitimized by the outside world. This helped AKP to get a large degree of help from

6. Ibid. page 10

the intellectual segment in Turkey, as the reform movement took pace. Hence “legitimation” by some liberals in Turkey. The pace of reforms also stunned EU circles who heaped praise on the Turkish Government which soon became “enfant chéri” of EU. The Turkish Government’s position to seek a solution through the Annan plan in Cyprus also endeared the Government to EU circles. In Brussels in December 2004 the EU Council decided to start membership negotiations with Turkey. As of that date the pace of reforms slowed and indeed at one point stopped. It seemed that the whole aim of the Government was to get a date and that process of negotiations was more important than the ultimate aim of membership. This led many intellectuals to believe that AKP’s aim through reforms was to minimize the role of the army and not membership and that EU was being used by the Government to mask its “hidden agenda”, namely to gradually Islamize Turkey. One can understand these concerns as AKP’s position on secularism gradually changed. Prime Minister Erdoğan’s sudden bursts also led to additional concerns. One of those statements is “We have imitated West’s immoral practices not the good parts.”

There is no doubt that the EU Commission, ‘Turkey’s best friend’ wants democracy to deepen. The Commission has insisted on the enlargement of freedom of expression and the return of immovable property to the Christian minorities. Certainly both should be done. However, democracy is not limited to two items. The Commission in its reports makes cursory references to liberalizing political parties (leaders have a total grip on their respective parties), financing of parties, changing the law which gives full immunity to parliamentarians (there can be no immunity from corruption or rape!) or the 10 percent country-wide threshold to enter into the Parliament. These are important elements to deepen democracy. The fact that the Commission did not bring these to the forefront is seen as bias for the Government in Turkey since AKP has usually come out against at some of these changes. EU’s stance towards Turkey has been and continues to be ambivalent. In contrast to the EU’s ambivalent position, important think tanks by and large have tried to help Turkey. Centre for European Reform (CER) and the International Crisis Group publications have tried to convince EU public and the Governments on Turkish membership. Katinka Barysch in the CER publication “The economics of Turkish accession” tries to demonstrate that Turkish adaptation to EU will not be as difficult as one thinks and will not cost as much as many believe. The same

author in another CER publication "Deepening, widening and prospects for Turkish membership" presented on 25-26 May 2006 at a seminar demonstrates the positive sides of enlargement. Indeed, in order to save enlargement, Charles Grant the Director of CER in its October/November 2005 Bulletin 44 put forward the following: Can variable geometry save EU enlargement. Variable geometry can make Turkey more acceptable. Grant says:..." More variable geometry could help enlargement. If the countries that aspire to a 'political union' were able to build avant-gardes in certain policy areas, and thus revive a sense of forward motion, they would be less likely to oppose further widening of the Union. EU Governments should also try to persuade EU applicants to accept long derogations or safeguards that would postpone their full participation in some EU policies. Again, that would make enlargement more palatable for some doubters."⁷ The British want a loose EU and therefore strongly advocate Turkish membership whereas the French still hope a federal Europe and oppose Turkey. In Chatham House publication EP BP 05/02 September 2005 issue Fadi Hakura forcefully argues in "Partnership is No Privilege" that "privileged partnership is not a legitimate alternative to membership." Ardent pro-Europeans such as Valerie Giscard d'Estaing who headed the Convention drawing up the EU Constitution opposed Turkish membership saying that if Turkey were to become a member it would spell the end of the federal European dream. In my view that dream ended already with British membership...

Customs Union is already some sort of privileged partnership, that has to lead to full integration by its very logic. Otherwise, it would be utterly stupid for Turkey, if it is not going to be a member of EU, to stay the course in Customs Union. Free Trade Area is much more to Turkey's benefit in that case since Turkey does not have to align itself on customs with the EU towards third countries. In this context, let me point out to those circles within the EU who claim that Turkey is not ready to share or transfer its sovereignty to the EU that Turkey has already done so on fixation of customs duties to third countries (non-EU). Taxation is an important part of sovereignty.

I feel the necessity now to briefly return to the Cypriot problem. In the negotiation framework there are 35 chapters dealing with *acquis communautaire*. Five chapters have been blocked as I noted above by the

7. Charles Grant , p2, Can Variable Geometry Save Enlargement. Oct./Nov 2005. Cer Bulletin issue 44

French since the French believe that those five chapters lead to full integration with the Union. Eight other chapters have also been blocked because of the Cypriot problem. In Brussels 2004 December summit Turkey had promised to extend the Ankara Agreement to ten new members including Cyprus through a protocol. Turkey signed the protocol for signature by the Commission in March 2005. However, the Turkish Government also annexed to the Protocol a declaration that it does not recognize the Greek Cypriot Government. I understand that if the Commission had accepted the whole document it would have meant that the EU would also be accepting the Turkish non-recognition of the Cypriot Government. EU rejected the Turkish approach. In my view the Turkish Government could have made its declaration separately. The EU Council on 21 September 2005 issued a counter declaration rejecting the Turkish declaration and asked Turkey to normalize its relations with Cyprus as soon as possible. (para 5 of the declaration.) Moreover, in para 3 of the declaration the Council stressed that "...the opening of negotiations on the relevant chapters depends on Turkey's implementation of its contractual obligations to all Member States. Failure to implement its obligations in full will affect the overall progress in the negotiations..." This meant extending the Customs Union protocol to Cyprus as well which meant opening its ports and airports to Cypriot vessels. Later, after some haggling among EU members eight chapters were embargoed.

Until 1997 Greek Cypriot vessels were calling on Turkish ports and there was no question that this did not mean recognition. In 1997 after Turkey's candidacy was rejected by the EU Luxembourg Summit Turkey closed its ports. Even today many Cypriot ships carrying Maltese and other flags call on Turkish ports. Prime Minister Erdoğan has said that Turkey will open its ports once the Council meets its obligation of lifting the embargo on Turkish Cypriots as the EU Council had promised to do so on 26 April 2004 after the Greek Cypriots rejected the Annan Plan on 24 April 2004.

The September 21, 2005 EU declaration does something else: "The Council will ensure a follow-up on the progress made on all these measures.."

As a result, Turkey, despite the positive atmosphere created by a yes vote to the Annan plan on September 24, 2004 by the Turkish Cypriots finds itself today in a much more difficult position vis-a-vis the Union. It

is not unusual given the bias; at an NGO meeting in Bratislava the former Slovak Foreign Minister confided to me that “we always thought that Greek Cypriots were good guys and the Turkish Cypriots bad !”

All this does not mean that Turkey and Turkish Cypriots did not have their share of mistakes in the Cypriot problem since 1974 and especially since 1990's. The biggest mistake was the failure to demonstrate the intransigence of the successive Greek Cypriot leadership to the world. Far from it, Turkish Cypriot leadership gave the impression that it was against a solution and for the continuation of the *status quo*.

I feel that Turkish public will not support a solution for Cyprus if perspective of membership in the Union does not exist. Even ardent EU supporters in Turkey will ask the question why Turkey should help find a solution to the Cypriot problem...In particular after the Kosovo example...

Can Turkey eventually be a member of the Union ? Firstly, this will depend on how Turkey can do its reform program and live up to its commitments. This will require also public support. The Government has not done well in explaining those reforms. The cliché explanation has been “ we are doing it because our people deserve it .” Not convincing because people ask whether they had not deserved it before negotiations with the EU ! The Government has to say that these are absolutely essential reforms that have to be done irrespective of EU membership. And of course the Government has to convince the opposition that it has no “hidden agenda” not by words but also by deeds. One key is Turkish performance. EU project is a peace, modernisation and to a large degree urbanisation project. AKP's voters are mainly rural people and poor suburbs and AKP supports EU reforms. Turkey's main opposition party CHP gets its votes from intellectuals and urban people and seemed until recently opposed to EU reforms. This was the irony.

In any case, Turkey has to continue reforms. First and foremost; enlargement of freedom of expression, independence of judiciary, gender equality. Throughout history, in the Ottoman Empire, later since the establishment of the Republic , Turkey's rulers have been at odds with the country's intellectuals and most recently the Government has harassed journalists and artists. This is in total contradiction with the EU project.

On the other hand, Turkey must solve the Kurdish problem. The Government alone cannot and should not shoulder it. Turkey's Parliament is the right place. A country which is not at peace at home cannot contribute to the EU project. The Turkish Republic must remain equidistant to all ethnic origins, to religions and sects. In sum, the Turkish Government is particular; the society in general must tolerate pluralism.

In this globalized world, the EU needs to compete with China, Russia, India and even the USA. How can one compete by insulating oneself? Turkish membership in the EU will make the EU more global. A Turkish addition will be an asset from geographic and economic angles, as well as others. Organizations, like companies, need to compete if they are to survive. This is the logical consequence of globalization. Therefore, the Union has to "clean" its house and decide what to do with itself. Can "variable geometry" be helpful to the Union in reaching an agreement for the future? My sense is yes it may. Indeed, we have seen some glimpses of it already as the Brits and some others decide to opt out on some issues. Turkey's membership is not in the very near future. In the meantime, the EU must clean its own house.

Some in the EU now seek from Turkey assets; crudely put, seek some sort of "dowry". Turkish efforts to become an energy corridor can be such an asset for EU countries which are now over dependent on Russia.

The EU, Turkey and Cyprus should seek a solution keeping in mind Turkey's membership perspective. Greek Cypriots should understand that blocking Turkey is solidifying division of the Island.

One absolutely necessary condition is , for some in the EU, to get over religious bigotry.

Turkey's rejection by many circles in the EU on the basis of religion/culture will have consequences that go beyond EU-Turkey relations and actually have an impact on the bridging of civilizations. The term Alliance of Civilisations used by the United Nations is a misnomer. The whole aim is conflict prevention.

The late Ismail Cem, once Turkey's Foreign Minister addressed on 13 September 1999 (before the EU Summit declared Turkey formally as a candidate) the EU General Affairs Council and I think it is useful to quote from his statement :

"...The historical development of Turkey, its cosmopolitan characteristics, its civilisation which comprises western as well as eastern values, a multitude of beliefs and ethnicities bestowed upon Turkey a unique identity. We consider ourselves both European and Asian and view this plurality to be an asset. Therefore, we are disturbed when the European dimension in our identity is questioned. If being European is a "historical" or "geographical" definition, we live and have lived 700 years of our history in Europe, and as a European power. Our history was moulded as much in İstanbul, Edirne, Tetova, Kosovo and Sarajevo as it was in Bursa, Kayseri, Diyarbakır and Damascus. If being European is a "cultural" definition, things get a little bit more complicated. If "European" is defined by religious criteria, then the setting might not be appropriate. But if "European Culture" is defined, as it is by the EU, that is mainly by factors such as "democracy", "human rights", "rule of law", "gender equality" and "secularism", then, in spite of the need for further progress on some points, we have shared and contributed to this contemporary "European culture" for 75 years..."

Turkey's relations with Europe can be considered Islam's approach to the West. The Turkish mentality, way of life and state structure are based on European modes. In a way, this has been the most important experiment of bridging the gulf between the West and the East; Christianity and Islam. Turks have not been able to explain this process. Turkey is little known and less understood. The fault lies with both Turkish and European Governments.

Educating Europeans about Turkey and Turks about EU and changing the current negative image of its citizens is a move in the right direction.

Turkey's race to EU looks like an uphill marathon race. It has been made so in particular by the European Union. No candidate country has been discouraged so much by so many EU circles and has been treated as such. That is why "Seeking Kant in the EU's Relations with Turkey is Needed" was written by some European statesmen. Nothing of that sort has ever occurred for other candidate countries. Some point out that Britain was vetoed in the past. I submit that the British case is much different. A little bit morality is truly needed in the case of Turkey...



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

YALIM ERALP was born in 1939 in İstanbul. In 1958 he graduated from Forest Hills High School, New York City. In 1962 he graduated from Faculty of Political Sciences, Ankara. Between 1962 and 1983 he served as a diplomat at New York, Greece, Rome NATO Defense College from where he graduated. Later was Counsellor at the Turkish Delegation at NATO Brussels and then in Washington D.C. as Deputy Chief of Mission.

Having served as Spokesman of the Ministry for four years, he became Ambassador to India in 1987. Between 1991 and 1996 he served as Principal Advisor to Prime Ministers Yılmaz and Çiller as he was also Director of NATO Affairs at the Ministry. In 1996 he became Ambassador to Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna.

In 2000 he decided to retire. He is currently a diplomatic commentator at CNNTURK and teaches at Kültür University. Between 2000 and 2006 Eralp wrote articles in daily newspapers Milliyet, Habertürk and Tercüman. He served as advisor to Economic and Social Affairs Foundation. He is currently on the advisory board of Global Political Trends Centre of Kültür University where he also writes Policy Briefs. Mr. Eralp is, also at the present, the President of Daphne, Turkish-Greek Foundation.

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