TURKEY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

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IS EUROPE'S DOOR HALF CLOSED

OR HALF OPEN?

CATHERINE MACMILLAN

Yeditepe University

Istanbul, Turkey

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Catherine MacMillan *)

Introduction

Turkey's EU accession process has been compared to the myth of Sisyphus, condemned to endlessly push a boulder up a hill only to watch it roll back down again.(1) Although, having made its first application for membership in 1959, accession negotiations eventually opened between Turkey and the EU in 2005, only one of the 35 chapters has so far been successfully completed and 13 are currently under negotiation, the others having been frozen or suspended as a consequence of Turkey's refusal to recognise Cyprus. Despite this, since 2012 there has been an attempt to strengthen the relations between Turkey and the EU in the framework of the 'positive agenda'.(2) However, it is argued here that the obstacles to Turkish accession go deeper, and can be found in a fundamental division in opinion regarding eventual Turkish full membership among EU political actors, as well as the EU public.

An examination of different political actors within the EU, including the Commission, the European Parliament (EP) and national political actors reveals that opinions on Turkish EU accession are split. On the one hand, there are those who conditionally support eventual Turkish accession. These are generally found on the left of the political spectrum and in the more 'peripheral' Member States such as those in Southern Europe, the UK, Central and Eastern Europe and Scandinavia. On the other hand, there is a tendency, rising on the right of the political spectrum and in the 'core' Member States, to reject Turkish full membership of the EU in favour of a more limited 'privileged partnership'.(3) It can be argued that such

opposition has resulted in tougher accession conditions for Turkey when compared with those of the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs), including, most notably, the open-ended nature of the negotiations.

One way to shed light on different actors' attitudes to Turkish accession is by trying to understand how they perceive the EU. Thus, the arguments that actors use when discussing Turkish accession reveal how they ideally conceive the EU: as a problem-solving entity with a primarily pragmatic *raison d'etre*, a rights-based postnational union based upon 'universal' rights such as justice, democracy and the rule of law, or a value-based community founded upon a common identity, history and traditions. These conceptions are not necessarily mutually exclusive; in discussions concerning enlargement, for instance, an actor may invoke both pragmatic and rights-based arguments.

The EU as a Problem Solving Entity

According to this view, the EU is conceived primarily in pragmatic terms, particularly regarding economic and security issues: policies are thus supported or opposed according to a means-end calculation. Enlargement is, then, supported or opposed on the basis of the advantages or disadvantages the candidate country is perceived to bring to the EU, particularly in the areas of economics and security. In this vision the EU is optimally without borders as enlargement is seen as a question of efficiency and utility, and often linked to arguments about extending the free market or reinforcing security.(4) Thus, following this logic, a candidate country may be rejected for full membership even if it fufills the formal membership criteria if this is seen as going against the interests of the EU or of some of the Member States in question.(5)

Pragmatic arguments have been prominent in the discourse of supporters of Turkey's EU membership, both among national and European level elites. As Nugent points out,(6) the perceived benefits of Turkey's EU accesion are based around five key Turkish characteristics. Economic arguments include the size of Turkey's market, which is projected to reach 100 million by around 2020, as well as its fast rate of economic growth. Turkey's young and fast-growing labour force, it is often argued, could help to balance the demographic ageing of the EU population. Moreover, its key geo-political position between the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia, which would help the EU to gain

leverage in security and energy terms in these areas, is often emphasised. In addition, as a Muslim-majority country; it could potentially contribute to extending the EU's 'soft' influence in Islamic countries, while encouraging moderate Islamism. Finally, Turkey's considerable military capacity, which could contribute significantly to the development of the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI), is also often cited as an advantage of Turkish EU accession.

The Commission, for instance, has often stressed the strategic and economic benefits that the EU would reap from Turkey's accession. As Commission President Durão-Barroso argued in a 2008 speech, for example,

> The EU and Turkey cooperate to make the world more safe and secure.Turkey is a key partner for Europe on foreign and security policy. Its responsibilities can only increase in the future, to address the challenges of our common neighbourhood … Turkey is a major partner for energy supplies to Europe from Central Asia and the Middle East. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline is a major step towards increasing security In the light of the challenges that the European Union faces, regarding diversification and security of energy supplies, Turkey-EU co-operation is certainly set to grow further in the coming years.(7)

Such arguments are also frequently used in EP discourse. As EP deputy Ria Oomen Ruijen argued in a recent EP debate, for example, "Turkey is a key country for the security and the prosperity of the EU. Turkey has enormous potential for economic growth and it has a strategic role as a corridor for the EU's energy."(8) Pragmatic arguments have also been widely used by supporters of Turkish accession in the Member States, especially on the political left. There has been an important pragmatic element, for instance, in British discourse in favour of Turkish accession, according to which Turkey's entry into the EU would be beneficial for both Britain's and the EU's strategic, political and economic interests. Pragmatic arguments including those referring to Turkey's geostrategic value have also frequently been used in support of Turkish accession in Spanish political discourse (9). As former Prime Minister Zapatero succinctly argued in 2009, for instance, "Turkey's entrance is good both for Turkey and for the EU."(10) Similar arguments have been used by other supporters of Turkey's accession. Former Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini, for

instance, declared that "the EU and Turkey need each other."(11) In addition, Turkey itself has often cited the benefits that it could bring to a 'comatose', 'stagnant' and 'near geriatric' Europe.(12)

The EU as a Post-National, Rights Based Union

These arguments are normative, in that they are based on norms and values rather than pragmatic or utility based arguments. In this view, however, the norms in question are not cultural but 'universal'; the legitimacy of a community is based on a set of legally entrenched fundamental rights and democratic procedures. In this context, particular solutions or policies are preferred if they are considered to fulfill universal criteria of being just or right. In the context of enlargement, a candidate country should be allowed to accede to the EU if it is considered to fulfill conditions based on 'universal' liberal democratic norms such as respect for human and minority rights, democracy and the rule of law.(13)

Indeed, the conception of the EU put forward in the Treaties is close to a rights based post national union. Article 2(1a) of the TEU affirms that "the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities." Similarly, the political Copenhagen criteria for accession demand that the candidate countries exhibit "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities,"(14) before proceeding with accession negotiations. In this view, then "whether the candidate country is Turkey, Norway or Switzerland it should not make much difference,"(15) as there is no cultural criterion for EU accession beyond these broad criteria.

Thus, according to this vision, regardless of its religion and culture or even of its potential benefit to the EU, Turkey should be offered membership on condition that it fulfills the political criteria. Such arguments, together with pragmatic ones, have often been used by other actors who (conditionally) support Turkish accession, as well as by Turkey itself. In this context, a strong argument in favour of Turkish accession has been that EU membership will lead to greater democracy and human rights protection and strengthen the rule of law in Turkey.(16) Moreover, it is argued that a Turkey firmly anchored within the EU and which fully respects the 'universal values' on which it is constructed will be an example to other

Muslim societies and will contribute to the avoidance of a 'clash of civilisations' as former Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn, for instance, notes,

> In my view, we are not doomed to an eternal conflict between the West and the Muslim world ... we should today show resolve against Islamic fundamentalism and firmly contain all kinds of terrorism, while continuing to build bridges with Islam and respect universal democratic values. Turkey plays a key role in this. (17)

The EU as a 'Value-Based Community'

This conception emphasises the borders or cultural values of a political community such as the EU. In this view the EU should be based on a sense of common identity, or 'we-feeling', rather than simply on common benefits(18). This 'we-feeling' may be based on a common history or religious tradition. Those who do not share this cultural background are doomed to remain outsiders. From this perspective, enlargement is encouraged only into spaces which are considered to have a similar cultural heritage: its aim is to bring together the 'European family'(19) and is justified by referring to duties and responsibilities emerging as the result of belonging to a particular community.(20)

Such arguments played an important part in the enlargement to the CEECs, in particular in the sense that, as members of the European family, the EU reiterated its 'sense of responsibility' to the CEECs.(21) In contrast, value-based arguments used by the EU in support of Turkish accession are far less evident. Thus, the arguments that Turkey is a natural part of the European family and that the EU consequently has a sense of responsibility towards it have generally been absent in EU discourse.(22)

Indeed, value-based arguments have often been used *against* Turkish accession. Especially since the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey, conservative politicians in France and Germany, among other Member States, have tended to emphasise cultural elements such as Europe's Christian heritage in addition to geography and universal values when defining European identity.(23) Therefore, from this point of view Turkish full membership of the EU is rejected as it is seen as 'non-European' in cultural terms and thus a potential threat to EU integration. In this view, similar to Huntington's thesis(24), values

such as democracy or the rule of law are seen as inextricably linked to a Western cultural tradition based on the heritage of ancient Greece and Rome and, perhaps above all, Christianity.

Speaking in 1997, for example, Helmut Kohl succcinctly pointed out that the EU was a 'civilisational project' in which 'Turkey has no place'.(25) President of the European Constitutional Convention Valéry Giscard d'Estaing expanded on this idea of how Turkey did not fit into 'European civilisation' as the European Convention attempted to define it,

> The European Convention sought a clearer definition of the foundations of this entity, which include the cultural contributions of ancient Greece and Rome, the religious heritage pervading European life, the creative enthusiasms of the Renaissance, the philosophy of the Age of the Enlightenment and the contributions of rational and scientific thought. Turkey shares none of these.(26)

Specifically, it is put forward that, due to its cultural and religious heritage, Turkey would be unable to fully live up to the 'universal values' which underscore the EU. As Herman van Rompuy argues, for instance, "The universal values which are in force in Europe, and which are also fundamental values of Chrisitianity, will lose vigour with the entry of a large Islamic country such as Turkey."(27) Similarly, Angela Merkel argues that "democracy is unthinkable without Christian values."(28).

In this context, then, Turkish accession to the EU has been 'securitised' as heralding the collapse of the EU itself. Giscard d'Estaing, for instance, famously argued in 2002 that Turkish accession would mean 'the end of the European Union'(29), while Dutch politician and former Commissioner Frits Bolkestein argued that the EU would 'implode' if Turkey became a member.(30) On the right, especially but not exclusively the extreme right, it is also often argued that Turkish accession would put Europe in danger of becoming a 'Eurabia', or an 'Islamicised' Europe in thrall to the Arab world. Bolkestein, for instance, argued that, with Turkish accession, the EU would become 'predominantly Islamic'.(31)

Much more rarely, value-based arguments have been used by supporters of Turkey's EU accession. These arguments usually stress that Turkey forms a cultural part of Europe because of the Islamic influence on European civilisation or because of the Ottoman Empire's Byzantine inheritence. Some members of the former British Labour Cabinet, for

instance, have stressed the long interaction and cultural links between the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, and the values shared between them.(32) Similarly, Polish president Kaczinski noted in 2007 that "for ages, the history of European nations and Turkey were intertwined."(33)

Conclusion

This analysis reveals a broad division among those who view the *raison d'etre* of the EU as based primarily on universal values and on the pragmatic benefits it can provide to its members on the one hand, and on those who see the EU as based on a common identity, history and traditions on the other. The former tend to see no obstacle to Turkish accession as long as the Copenhagen conditions are completely fulfilled. The other group, however, often views Turkey as fundamentally 'non-European' in identity terms, and therefore as incompatible with the EU's values, and its full membership as potentially threatening to the European integration project. What is clear is that the two groups are, effectively, speaking different discursive languages and, under these circumstances, it appears difficult to reach a consensus. From this point of view, value based arguments in favour of Turkish accession are perhaps more likely to persuade those who oppose it than pragmatic or rights-based arguments.

To conclude, then, despite efforts to reignite the accession process, it appears that Europe's door to Turkey is half closed rather than half open in 2013. This essay has suggested that a fundamental split in opinion in the EU not only on Turkish accession but on the fundamental nature of the EU itself is at the root of the problem. The resulting lack of enthusiasm for Turkish accession, coupled with the Eurozone crisis, has not only stalled Turkey's accession process but has made EU accession less and less attractive in the eyes of the Turkish electorate, and has discouraged the Turkish government in its accession reforms.

ENDNOTES

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(3)Further discussion of the issues raised in this essay can be found in C. MacMillan, *Discourse, Identity and the Question of Turkish Accession to the EU: Through the Looking Glass,* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).

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(5) Ibid. pp. 3-4

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(13) Sjursen, 2008: p. 3

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(17) O. Rehn, *Europe's Smart Power in its Region and the World,* 2008. Available at: www.europa.eu/SPEECH-08-222-EN[1].pdf [accessed: May 6, 2011].

(18) Sjursen, 2008: p. 3

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(22) ibid: p. 41

(23) H. Yılmaz, "Turkish Identity on the Road to the EU: Basic Elements of French and German Oppositional Discourses," *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 9(3), 2007, p. 296.

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*) Catherine MacMillan is author of *Discourse, Identity and the Question of Turkish Accession to the EU – Through the Looking Glass,* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).