

TURKEY AND THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Fifty years after the Treaty of Rome, signed on the 25th March 1957, the European project is following an uncertain road. In this difficult context, what are the consequences of Turkey's accession for the future of the Union?

1. Probably the most critical feature of the current European Union (EU) is the uncertainty about the course of the European project. What is the ultimate goal of integration? A large market with a single currency, or a political and military world power? A federal Europe, or a confederation of sovereign States? There is another relevant feature, not so obvious, but nowadays lacking the stable and implicit compromise of the first decades of European integration. Until now/Traditionally, the EU has worked based on a political and financial balance between "large" and "small/medium" countries, between net givers and net takers to the European budget. This balance functions more or less like this: the large countries (the obvious cases being Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Italy) have great influence over political decisions - which can be seen this in the qualified majorities in the Council (related directly, since the Treaty of Nice, to the population of each country,). On the other hand, a significant portion of the small/medium countries are the traditional beneficiaries of the Structural Funds (e.g. Greece, Portugal, etc. and after the enlargements of 2004 and 2007 almost all of the twelve new Member-States). Putting it in another way and in the crude language of *realpolitik*: he who pays (the benefits of the others) has the (political) power to decide.

2. It was in this context, characterized by a major enlargement of the EU, the greatest in its history, and by a world in turmoil after the 11th September and Iraq war, that the issue of Turkish accession appeared. Many arguments have been used to point out the benefits of Turkey's accession to the EU: i) the strategic advantages of a large country placed in an important geopolitical region; ii) issues of energy supply (oil and natural gas); iii) access to a market of more than 70 million consumers; iv) a cheap and abundant young workforce; v) the means to avoid a possible "conflict of civilizations". Let's analyse these arguments. First, the strategic advantages. What is undeniable is the geopolitical relevance of Turkey. Of course, this relevance has been the fundamental reason behind Turkish membership of NATO since the 50s. But the question now is: what strategic gain does its EU membership bring? A more credible Common Foreign and Security Policy? Yet, can we believe that the EU, with near 30 members, may obtain the necessary consensus in order to implement this policy when in the past, with a relatively small and homogeneous composition, this was not possible? Further, unless there are very positive developments in Middle East affairs, the foreseeable "gains" include a number of new neighbours; one a country with nuclear ambitions (Iran), another a country raged by sectarian violence (Iraq) and a third country (Syria) which has been trying to destabilize Lebanon. Secondly, regarding the argument of the advantages related with the supply of oil and natural gas. Here it is important to remember that Turkey is not a major producer or supplier of energy. Thus, if the argument is to have members with significant energy resources the logical solution would be the accession of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan or Russia... If the problem is the movement of energy supplies (pipelines from the Caspian

Sea cross Turkish territory to the shores of the Mediterranean sea), we must remember that the country is already connected by an integration agreement, in the form of a customs union, with the EU. Moreover, Turkey is also militarily connected with NATO, whose members include a great number of EU countries. It is not clear why neither solutions work anymore. Concerning the third argument, a market with more than 70 million consumers, it does not consider the impact of the customs union agreement which was implemented in the middle 90s. This agreement has already opened the doors of the Turkish market to European enterprises and vice versa. Now the fourth argument related to the need for a workforce for the European economy. If what is needed is a qualified workforce, countries like Ukraine or Russia have people with better qualifications, and if there is indeed the need for a cheap workforce, then everyday there are people from the Maghreb or North African countries trying to come into the EU. Why not let them come in and work? Lastly, the argument of the advantages that Turkish membership would bring to avoid a “conflict of civilizations”. I must say that this idea is based on an essentialist vision of civilizations and is a simplistic one. Islam is complex and heterogeneous – the Sunnis and Shias are only one facet of this reality – and its marked by important religious divisions (between orthodox Islam and the “heretical sects”, Druzes, Alevis, Alawis, etc.) ethnic ones (Arabs, Persians, Kurds, etc.). It’s naive to think that Turkey’s accession to the EU will appease the Muslim World. Furthermore, there is a real risk of the importation of Turkish rivalries. An example of this problem: neither Shia countries like Iran, nor Sunni Arab countries like Saudi Arabia will accept Turkish primacy.

3. The common arguments, apparently convincing, that are heard in a small country on the edge of Europe like Portugal are fragile. We must remember that Turkey is already integrated in a Euro-Atlantic framework (the customs union and NATO). In fact, whatever advantages there may be are mitigated with strategic risks. Moreover, Turkish integration into Europe is seen by countries like France, Germany, the Netherlands or Austria as unfavourable in terms of political decision-making, and in the financial cost to the support and in future of the European project. All this goes beyond the problem of Cypriot access to Turkish ports and airports denied by Turkey (and the reunification of Cyprus) discussed at the end of 2006. We are seeing the first round of a long diplomatic game. The strategy of both sides is to blame the other side for the break up of negotiations. On the Turkish side the strategy is also to profit from the divisions in Europe and to play with the Europeans' guilty feelings. Ultimately, there is an unavoidable question of *realpolitik*: nobody can see the EU working well in a model where the countries who support the burden of the European budget (Germany, France and others) lose political power in the decision-making process, to the most important beneficiary of financial aid (Turkey).

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