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Turkey and Europe: The Role of Migration

PIETER EMMER

Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen, Institute for History, Postbus 9515, NL-2300 RA Leiden, the Netherlands. Email: p.c.emmer@hum.leidenuniv.nl.

In spite of the fact that negotiations have been going on for years, the chances that Turkey will eventually become a full member of the European Union are slim. At present, a political majority among the EU-member states headed by Germany seems to oppose Turkey entering the EU. In the Netherlands, however, most political parties are still in favour of Turkey's membership. That difference coincides with the difference in the position of Turkish immigrants in German and Dutch societies.

Introduction

Turkey is not like any other non-European country. In fact, it was the only country able to threaten Europe's very existence in both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By occupying most of South-East Europe, Turkey became an important European power. Even after the 'Turkish threat' had disappeared, the country remained the most important political entity in the non-colonized world outside Europe. During the nineteenth century, Turkey had become 'the sick man of Europe', but was allowed to prolong its presence in Europe in order to curb the expansionist policies of Russia. When Turkey was an important power in Europe, its Moslem religion was an advantage rather than an obstacle as the country remained outside the religious strife between Protestants and Roman and Orthodox Catholics. Turkey could be regarded as an ally of either side. In fact, the religious policies of the Ottoman rulers were tolerant in comparison to those of the big powers in Western Europe at the time. Turkey became a haven for virtually every religious minority.

Turkey's role as an important player in European politics came to an end during the Balkan Wars and the First World War. After 1918, Turkey had suddenly become a far-away part of the Third World. It remained neutral during the Second World War, but was incorporated into the European orbit again during the Cold War as Europe's South Eastern bulwark against the Soviet Union. Without any opposition to speak of, Turkey became an important member of NATO and, in due time, further integration into Europe seemed a natural development. However, after the end of the Cold War, London and Washington continued to press for the entry of Turkey into the EU, but many continental European politicians started viewing Turkey, in particular those from countries with

Table 1. The growth of the Turkish communities in Germany and the Netherlands

	1973	1984	1995	2003
Germany	615,827	1,552,328	1,965,577	2,653,600
Netherlands	30,091	154,201	252,450	299,909

Sources: SOPEMI, 1995; *Beauftragte der Bundesregierung fur die Belange der Auslander*, 1995; *Annual Report*, Turkish Ministry of Employment and Social Security, 1984, 1992, 1993; 2003 Statistics on Turkish Migrant: Online

sizeable Turkish communities, as a non-Western nation again.[1] Yet there is a striking disparity between the two countries that are host to the two largest Turkish communities in Europe: Germany and the Netherlands. (Table 1)

A parliamentary majority in Germany is opposed to the entry of Turkey in the EU, stating that geographically speaking Turkey is not situated in Europe, that its culture is not European and that these two obstacles make membership impossible. The present German chancellor could see a future in which Turkey is allowed to become an affiliated but not a full member.[2] In contrast, the majority of the members of the Dutch parliament are not opposed to Turkish membership in spite of stressing the fact that Turkey, like any future member, needs to submit itself to a long list of administrative changes and legal innovations before it could be allowed to join the European Union.[3]

The opposing positions vis-à-vis Turkish membership between the parliamentary majorities in Germany and the Netherlands could well be the result of the differences between the integration of Turkish migrants in these two countries.

Turkish Migration to the EU

That so many politicians view Turkey as an outsider to Europe relates to the fact that so many Turks have become European insiders. While the presence of Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Irish labour migrants in other European countries did not affect or influence the chances of their countries of origin to become EU members, the immigrants from Turkey as well as from North Africa seem to have achieved the opposite effect. Yet all migrants – whether from within or from outside Europe – moved because of a strong demand for temporary labour in the rapidly growing parts of Western Europe, and because of low wages and high unemployment in their home countries.

The outcome is well-known: the labour migrants from southern Europe did indeed move back home because the economic opportunities, salaries and social security benefits of their temporary countries of residence and of their home countries started to converge. That is not to say that the conditions on the labour market became similar, but the difference was not sufficient any more to generate migration. The exceptions were Turkey and North Africa, where the conditions in the labour market during the 1960s and 1970s deviated so much from those in Western Europe that the labour migrants from these regions, even without a job but with unemployment benefits, continued to enjoy

more buying power and more educational facilities for their children than after returning to Turkey or North Africa.[4]

Suddenly, within a couple of years, the temporary 'guest workers' from Turkey and North Africa had become permanent immigrants in spite of the fact that their qualifications necessary for this change had not improved. Many were illiterate, had no training or skills, and could only find employment in the rapidly disappearing branches of industry, such as the coal mines and the steel and textile works. Added to this was the fact that, on average, immigrant Turks and North Africans did not earn more than around the minimum wage, had larger families, and more marriage partners without a job of their own than was common in the host societies. Owing to the increased solidarity of the modern welfare state, people with minimum incomes receive far more subsidies than they pay in taxes, and in spite of the fact that the majority of the net receivers of subsidies in Western Europe consisted of locals, the non-Western immigrants became the object of a growing anti-immigration sentiment in Western Europe. The recruitment of additional migrant workers from Turkey and North-Africa was abruptly halted and the sudden introduction of a visa requirement induced many Turkish and North African migrants residing in Western Europe to stay put and to invite their families to join them as quickly as possible as the immigration policy of their host country seem to become more restrictive by the day.[5]

These changes in European migration policies explain why the relatively modest number of mainly male labour migrants resulted in very sizeable Turkish communities with a much more balanced sex ratio.

In total there are now nearly 5 million people of Turkish origin living in Europe and that has an impact on how Turkey is viewed in Europe. When the suggestion that Turkey would become a member of the EU was first discussed, the employment rates, the average income as well as the crime rates of the Turkish immigration communities in Europe still deviated negatively from that of the average host population. That is why the arguments used to oppose a future Turkish entry into the EU mainly centred on the dangers of a massive, uncontrolled exodus of poor, unskilled Turkish migrants to the EU that would only increase the problems of integrating Turks already living in Europe.

Over time, these fears have abated. Recent statistics of EU countries with a sizeable ex-Turkish population show that the yearly number of new immigrants from Turkey has dwindled, and in recent years the net migration balance was close to zero.[6] In addition, the integration of ex-Turkish groups in the host countries has progressed and statistics concerning employment, education, crime and income levels still deviate negatively, but far less so than before. Furthermore, statistical surveys show that the performance of other non-Western immigrant groups in the Netherlands is less successful than that of the Turks. At the same time, the arguments against Turkey's entry into the EU shifted from the fears for a '*tsunami*' of Turkish migrants to obstacles such as the Turkish recognition of an Armenian holocaust during and after the First World War, the recognition of Cyprus as one state, as well as the removal of press censorship.

There are a great many similarities between the Turkish communities in Germany and the Netherlands, suggesting that both countries would view the pros and cons of a Turkish entry into the EU in a similar way. Yet, the official attitude in Germany is more

negative than it is in the Netherlands. There is good reason to suppose that – possibly in addition to other factors – the different levels of integration of the Turkish immigrant communities into these two host societies have influenced the debate regarding Turkey's EU membership. That seems to indicate that the integration process of the German and Dutch Turks differed in the past and that these differences will help us understand why Germany and the Netherlands disagree about Turkey's future role in Europe.

At first sight, there are striking similarities rather than differences between the positive and negative results of Turkish immigration in Germany and the Netherlands. In both countries the participation of the respective Turkish communities in the labour market has been rising over the years, but it is still lower than that of the native Dutch and Germans. In both countries the number of students from Turkish communities who leave school without a diploma is far higher than among German and Dutch students. In both countries the Turks earn less than average, their crime as well as their unemployment rates are higher, while the fertility rates of Turks in both countries now hardly deviates from the average.[7]

However, in spite of all these similarities, there are indeed various differences. More Turkish students in the Netherlands than in Germany succeed in obtaining a diploma from those secondary schools that prepare their students for university. In Germany, that number is lower and this might result from the fact that vocational schooling in Germany is regarded as more prestigious than it is in the Netherlands. Entry into the construction and production industries sector might be better organized in Germany; it is easier for Turks to participate in politics, in local, provincial and national governments and to obtain higher administrative posts in the Netherlands.[8]

In addition to these differences, the Turkish community in the Netherlands has more standing in society than in Germany because of its position relative to other immigrant minority groups. In Germany, the Turks are the immigrant group with the lowest status, while in the Netherlands the Moroccan community as well as migrants from the Dutch Antilles have less status than the Turks. Statistical evidence confirms that Moroccans and the Caribbean Dutch have lower incomes, lower employment rates, higher crime rates, and – most strikingly – a far lower number of entrepreneurs than the members of the Turkish community in the Netherlands. The Turks in the Netherlands might still have a statistical profile that negatively deviates from that of the autochthonous population, but the Turks are not at the bottom end as they are in Germany.[9]

Conclusion

That the image of Turkey abroad is in part influenced by its migrants is not unique. During the nineteenth century, China might have been an extremely weak military power, but it was seen as dangerous because of the rapidly growing number of overseas Chinese who could prepare the ground for a Chinese takeover. Chinese emigrants were seen as a symbol of the 'yellow peril'. As a result, immigration laws were tightened with the express aim of keeping the Chinese out. Some even argued that the Chinese were the new Mongols, who had once swept through the civilized world destroying everything in its wake. In a similar fashion, some politicians advocate that the North African and Turkish

migrants in Europe are the scouts of an ever-expanding Muslim world trying to dominate the rest of the world, destroying Western civil society with its hard-fought achievements such as freedom of religion, free speech, the separation of the legislature, judiciary and the executive political powers, the protection of minorities, and the recognition of homosexuals as equals to heterosexuals. Populist politicians point out that Muslim states show that the Muslim religion by its very nature is unable to accommodate the civil liberties of present-day Europe. This view seems to be confirmed by those radicals among the Muslim communities, who are born and raised in Western Europe and have committed acts of terrorism, such as those against the public transport system in London in 2005, and the murder of a Dutch film maker in 2004. It is further confirmed by the fact that politicians and journalists who have criticized or ridiculed Mohammed or Mohammedanism are in need of permanent police protection. Those are clear signs to some that the Muslim world will not respect western norms and values and in future will take over Europe.

The best antidote to these sentiments is offered by the flourishing Turkish communities in Europe, as their position in the Netherlands seems to indicate. In fact, when the present crises has abated and the declining populations in Europe are creating shortages in the EU labour market, Turkey might be asked again to provide migrants in order to fill these shortages. Without the migration of the past half century, economic growth in the EU would have been slower. In view of the predicted demographic decline, there is good reason to assume that the EU will be faced again with the choice between increasing labour migration and downsizing its economy. No wonder then that the CEO of *Randstad*, the second largest staffing firm in the world with its head office in Amsterdam, strongly supports Turkish membership 'as we simply need the people'. Populist politics in Europe will have to go looking for other scapegoats.

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About the Author

Pieter C. Emmer was professor in the history of European expansion at the University of Leiden, The Netherlands until 2010. In English he published *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy, 1580-1880* and *The Dutch Slave Trade, 1500-1850.* He is one of the editors of *The Encyclopedia of Migration and Minorities in Europe from the 17th Century to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2011). He chairs the Archaeology and History Section of the Academia Europaea.