

The Image of Turkey in Europe Today

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The relations between different countries and continents have always been important politically and scientifically. This applies in particular to relations between Turkey and Europe. Through centuries, the Ottoman Empire was seen as the main enemy of ‘Christian Europe’. In this paper, three topics are discussed: (1) European, and in particular Austrian and German, attitudes towards Turkey’s membership in the European Union. It is argued that the dominantly negative attitudes in this regard do not indicate a generally negative attitude towards Turkey. (2) Some of the reasons for the negative view of Turkish EU-membership in many EU countries are discussed. (3) In conclusion, three issues are taken up: the relevance of Turkish EU-membership; the reasons and persistence of national and ethnic stereotypes; the relevance of the time factor in international relations.

1. Introduction

The relations between different countries and continents have always been important political issues, relevant scientific topics and interesting themes for everyday-conversation. This applies in particular to relations between Turkey and Europe. Through centuries, the Ottoman Empire was seen – particularly from the Austrian perspective – as the main enemy of ‘Christian Europe’. In my analysis of the relations between Europe and Turkey, I will proceed in three steps. First, I will discuss Austrian and German attitudes towards Turkey’s potential membership of the European Union. These dominantly negative attitudes do not indicate, as I will argue, a generally negative attitude towards Turkey. Then I will try to identify the reasons for the negative outlook on Turkish EU-membership. Finally I will add some general remarks.

2. The image of Turkey in present-day Europe

There are not many empirical studies on the perception of Turkey and the Turks in Europe. One obvious indicator in this regard is the attitudes of European Union citizens toward Turkey’s membership of the EU. Here, two main empirical indicators shall be discussed: (a) the general image of Turkey in Europe, and the attitudes toward an EU-membership of Turkey, and (b) the view of immigration from Turkey as well as the experiences with and attitudes toward these immigrants.

2.1. Turkish membership in the EU: citizens attitudes and political strategies

Three facts stand out in regard to the admission of Turkey as an EU Member: (1) in the EU today, a large majority – 70% – is against Turkish EU-membership; (2) this proportion has increased significantly since the mid-1990s, for example from 58% in 1996 to 70% in 2007;¹ (3) there exist large differences among EU member states in their acceptance or refusal of Turkish EU-membership; 78% of Romanians and 58% of Bulgarians, but only about 6% of Austrians and 17% of Germans support it.² How can these astonishing findings be explained?

The first important fact in this regard is that rejection of Turkish EU-membership does not imply a negative attitude toward Turkey in general. I found relevant data in this regard from the US *Pew Research Center*, based in Washington, DC. In Spring 2011, the opinion regarding Turkey in several countries was surveyed. It turned out that the image of Turkey is definitely positive in Britain and France, as well as throughout Eastern Europe. Only in Germany is there a majority with a negative view of Turkey; in Spain, a sizable percentage has a negative image. Comparing the image of Turkey with the attitudes toward Turkey's accession to the EU, however, even in Germany, the balance is negative. Turkey as a country is more favourably regarded than Turkey as an EU member. These two attitudes are kept apart in pretty much the same way as they are in the rest of Europe. Regarding the more negative attitude of Germans compared with the English or French, it should be noted that there are far more Turks living in Germany than there are in the other countries.

Second, there is clear majority of EU citizens today who are against Turkish EU-membership and this proportion has increased significantly in recent years. Why did this happen? Generally, we can say that attitudes toward Turkish membership include three different elements: perceptions and attitudes toward Turkish people in and outside Turkey, attitudes toward the Turkish state and society, and attitudes toward the European Union itself.

Far-reaching changes have been going on in the last 20 years within the European Union: the full implementation of the Common Market after the Treaty of Maastricht 1992; the adoption of the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 with the aim of developing a common internal and foreign policy, and judicial cooperation; the enlargement of the EU in 2004 by ten new central East European member states; the elaboration of the 'Constitution for Europe' and its rejection by clear majorities of the French and Dutch citizens in 2005; and, despite this rejection, their factual implementation in the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007. One can say that the European Union in this period has made decisive steps toward a deepening of its integration, and toward assuming the character of a political community. All these changes were connected with lively public debates in many member countries, in which problematic and negative aspects of integration were highlighted. It is obvious that the accession of new countries – particularly of such a large one as Turkey – is much more of an issue today than it was at an earlier period, when merely the abolishment of customs and the establishment of the Common Market were the main topics.³

The second element – images of the development of the Turkish state and society – may be the most important one in the political decision about the access of Turkey to the EU, but I think it has not been very important among the general population. Since AKP

(the Party of Justice and Development) under Erdogan's leadership gained majorities in the parliament in 2002, significant reforms have been enacted. However, there were also aspects in which this government rescinded former anti-Islamic legislation, and the EU has reported every year that Turkey shows deficits in terms of press freedom, democratic and human rights, respect of ethnic minorities and the like. On the positive side, one could mention the dynamic economic development of Turkey – an aspect that plays a big role in the support of Turkish EU-membership among industrialists in the EU. A highly controversial evaluation exists, however, concerning the high population growth in Turkey – a positive evaluation is given by those who consider immigration of young people as salutary for the aging populations in Europe, but a negative one by those who consider large immigration as a threat to European identity. In fact, Turkey in 2002, had 72 million inhabitants, and the prediction for 2050 – especially of young and thus fertile Turks/Muslims – is 97 million; Germany, at this time will have less than 70 million.⁴⁻⁶

Another aspect in this regard has been elaborated by two German sociologists, Jens Alber and Jürgen Gerhards. They compared the values of the Turkish people with those of people living in the European Union. Their main findings are that in some regards Turkish people are characterized by a stronger adherence to traditional values (particularly in relation to marriage and family), but the overall difference is not very large; in fact, in some member states of the EU, such as Bulgaria and Romania, the same or even more pronounced traditional and authoritarian values exist than in Turkey.^{7,8} However, there exist in fact 'two Turkeys': one is the traditional, poor Central-East Anatolia, the other the modern, very 'European', urban Turkey, as represented by Istanbul and Ankara.^{6,9} I think, however, that the public at large are not very well informed about these facts, although some of the facts – like population growth – as well as some spectacular events – like blatant violations of human rights – might be reported in the influential 'boulevard' press and thus influence public views and contribute to the formation of prejudices.³ The question of whether Turkey can be seen as a candidate for the EU, however, cannot be answered today only at the level of popular attitudes and behaviour. An answer must also consider the behaviour of political elites and the development of institutions. In this regard, one must note that the rise of the AKP to political power not only furthered many reforms making Turkey more 'European', but also led to some aspects of re-Islamization.^{10,11}

The most important component in the changing attitudes toward Turkish EU-membership, in my opinion, was the third aspect, the presence of Turkish immigrants in West European societies. In the last decades, immigration from Turkey has been rather strong and we can see a clear connection between the volumes of this immigration and the popular attitudes toward Turkish EU-membership. There exist extreme differences in this regard; the countries whose populations have the most negative attitudes (less than 20% in favour of Turkish EU-membership) are all located in central Europe: Austria, Germany, Luxembourg and France; on the positive side, we find Romania and Bulgaria, but also Sweden, Spain and Portugal where about half or even more support Turkey's EU-membership. I think there is a straightforward explanation for these facts, namely, the presence and size of the Turkish or Muslim populations in a country. In all countries where the opposition is very strong, there are large communities of Turkish origin; the

higher the proportion of immigrants the more negative the attitudes. Thus, the attitudes are most negative in Austria, Germany and Luxembourg, which have the highest numbers and proportions of Turks; the attitudes are quite moderate in most East Central, formerly state-socialist, European countries and on the Iberian Peninsula; all of them have rather low or even negligible numbers of resident Turks. Let us look at some specific cases.¹²

Germany is the country with the largest Turkish community (about 1.7 million) in Western Europe. Critical attitudes toward immigration from non-German speaking countries to Germany have deep historical roots; the granting of citizenship was connected traditionally with German ancestry; that is, based on the bio-social concept of ethnicity. Germany did not define itself as an 'immigration society' until the Immigration Act of 2005 when the decisive politics of immigration and integration was initiated. Leading political parties, such as the CDU and CSU, are very critical of immigration from Muslim countries. In the election campaign of 2005, Chancellor Angela Merkel proposed that Turkey should not be admitted as a full EU-member but rather should enter into a 'privileged partnership' with the EU.

The other country with a large community of Muslim immigrants is France. Here, most immigrants come from North Africa, the former French colonies, not from Turkey. Detailed studies show that there is no strong opposition against Turkey as such, but that the negative attitude against the immigration of Muslims is strong and may be extended to Turks. In addition, leading French politicians, such as former presidents Giscard d'Estaing, Jacques Chirac and Nicholas Sarkozy, argued against Turkey's EU-membership. From time to time, too, heavy forms of political unrest emerged in France, both from the side of immigrants and from nationalist French groups. We should remember here the violent riots in October/November 2005, when thousands of youths with a migration background destroyed cars and buildings and fought battles with the police. The pictures from these events will have made a deep imprint on the public in France and beyond. Thus, a statement such as the following by a British Policy Centre is hardly tenable:

... any negative positioning by a French government on Turkish entry as distinct from other accession candidates is a result of personal prejudices from the political leaders espousing such views. (Quoted in Ref. 12, p. 24)

Rather, we must admit that these and other political leaders do nothing else than react to these riots and popular opinion.

The United Kingdom is an exception compared with most other countries insofar as it has a large Turkish minority but the attitudes to its integration are not that negative. The explanation is very simple: nearly 300,000 of the half-million Turks in Britain came from Cyprus, the former British crown colony; they speak good English and are well integrated into British society, particularly compared with immigrants from poorer regions of the world, such as from Pakistan. This is also due to the fact that most of them immigrated in the 1950s and 1960s when the British economy was thriving.

2.2. Austria – the most anti-Turkish country in Europe?

Let us now also look more closely at the case of Austria, whose population most strongly rejects Turkish EU-membership. The enmity between Austria and Turkey was one of the

constants of European history from the Early Modern age until the First World War. In a paper by Christian Matzka,¹³ this fact is outlined in a concise way:

From the 14th to the 19th centuries ... Austrian-Turkish (Ottoman) relations were dominated by war and mutual prejudices which were transported from generation to generation. Two dates are very well known even today in Austria: the sieges of Vienna in 1529 and 1683 ... The Viennese felt like defenders of Europe and thought that without their courage Europe would have become an Islamic region ... Since the victory against the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 18th century the memories of the Austrian-Turkish wars have been kept alive in many places and regions. Place names and monuments show us the collective remembrance of this era.

This sounds all quite plausible, but in fact I think it is untenable. Such argumentation confounds two kinds of historical memories: one is the concrete remembrance of people of past events, transmitted through oral narratives; the other is the remembrance of the past as it is constructed by historians, social scientists and politicians. To argue that the first kind of memory still exists in Vienna today would be absurd. It is impossible that historical events are recalled over 500 to 600 years, or 17 to 20 generations. In a study on Austrian national identity, we found that Austrians have scarcely a clear remembrance even of the Habsburg monarchy, which existed until 1918.¹⁴ In addition, both present-day Austria and Turkey are very different from their historical predecessors, which were large multinational and aggressive empires that often overwhelmed small neighbour states by military force. The present-day memory of the Austrian–Turkish wars is a result of historical and political reconstruction of the past; as such, it also serves the interests of present-day politics. This applies particularly to the view that Austria defended Europe from becoming Islamic. France and other European countries often, in fact, were openly or secretly allies of the Ottoman Empire in its fights against Austria. Yet, would the conquest of Vienna by Kara Mustapha in 1683 have meant that the way to the domination of all Europe was open to the Ottoman Empire? I think this is highly improbable, given the fact that this was the excursion of an isolated army into a very distant, highly developed and densely populated enemy territory.

There are other sides of the relations between present-day Austria and Turkey that afford a very different view – in fact, a much more positive one. Two important kinds of relations between countries are economic exchanges and tourism. Both of them presuppose that people perceive each other in a positive way; they trust that the partners will fulfil their obligations, they like its landscapes and climate and are safe when they travel to the other country, and they are satisfied with the services they get there. From the sociological perspective, it is probable that many of those who repeatedly travel to the other country begin to feel sympathetically towards its people. The level of economic exchanges between Austria and Turkey shows an astonishing fact:¹⁵ Austria today is the most important foreign investor in Turkey: €1.7 billion were invested by Austrian entrepreneurs, 28% of all foreign investments, three times as much as the sums invested by countries such as Germany or France. Also, in terms of trade, the volume is large: goods worth about €2 billion are traded annually between Austria and Turkey; since 1990, this volume has been quintupled. Turkey also plays a pivotal role as a tourist destination for Austrians: after Italy and Croatia, it was the third most popular destination

in 2011; all in all this involved about 900,000 journeys.¹⁶ This means that probably more than half a million Austrians travel to Turkey per year.

3. Reasons for the image of Turkey in Europe today

Two factors will be discussed here: (1) integration problems of the Turkish immigrants and (2) public actors who contribute to the development of negative stereotypes and prejudices.

3.1. Integration problems of the Turkish immigrants as a source for negative stereotypes and xenophobic attitudes

It is well known that Turkish immigrants have more difficulties than the other large immigration groups in Austria and Germany. In Austria, Turkish immigrants are the third largest group after those from the former Yugoslavia and Germany. All in all, there were about 1,493,000 people with a migration background living in Austria at the beginning of 2012.¹⁷ Sixty-seven percent of those with a migration background from Turkey had not more than elementary education, but only 37% of those from former Yugoslavia; those of western EU-origin had a slightly higher level than the Austrians themselves. In her re-analysis of a large Microcensus survey, Barbara Bauer¹⁸ found a disproportionately worse level of integration of the Turkish immigrants. This was true even in the second generation when the differences between Austrians and persons from Ex-Yugoslavia had disappeared. Unemployment figures show that the situation of the Turks is comparable only to that of immigrants from the Near East and Africa; Turkish immigrants also have the smallest housing space. The Viennese sociologist Hilde Weiss¹⁹ has analysed many of the flagrant problems of social integration of the second generation of foreign youths.

However, there are two important caveats to be made concerning the integration problems of the Turkish immigrants. First, their integration into the labour market is quite high, and also the second-generation Turks have their chances. About two-thirds of all Turks in Austria are employed; in the second-generation 22% of the Turks – the same percentage as among the ex-Yugoslavs – attain an intermediate or higher school education, and 27% to 42% of them are working as private or public employees. Thus, there is no reason to dramatise the emergence of Turkish ghettos as the German author Thilo Sarrazin did.²⁰ The large majority – 87% of the immigrants – consider themselves well integrated in Austria (Ref. 17, p. 91). Two-thirds of the immigrants identify themselves more with Austria than with their country of origin; even among Turkish immigrants, this proportion is 44%. The error that many social scientists and politicians make when they paint a gloomy picture of the situation of the immigrants is that they generalize from the relative to a general deprivation.

The second remark concerns the fact that the high employment rate is also regarded as a result of the rather restrictive Austrian immigration laws. The Dutch social scientist Ruud Koopmans²¹ has shown that immigrants in Austria are better integrated into the labour market than in countries that practise a more liberal immigration policy, such as the Netherlands or Sweden.

However, people living side by side with Turkish immigrants may feel negatively affected in several regards: in the workplace, they are in competition with the Turkish

immigrants; in the residential areas, the quality of houses and infrastructure services may decline; in schools, a high proportion of children with little knowledge of German may cause a lowering of standards; and incidences of violence by Turkish youths may exist and be exaggerated. It is mainly Austrians from lower social strata who are affected by such experiences; they also often work in unskilled manual and service jobs and live in poorer city quarters. It is not surprising, therefore, that social status is the most significant predictor of negative and xenophobic attitudes toward foreigners.^{19,22–24}

3.2. Actors in the public arena who contribute to negative attitudes toward Turkey and Turkish immigrants

There is one further aspect that is very important when investigating how negative stereotypes and prejudices come about. This is the influence of writers and publishers, of mass media and populist right-wing politicians who use the worries and fears of the population in order to gain customers and votes. The influence of large ‘boulevard’, sensational newspapers in this regard can hardly be overestimated. This is particularly so in Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom where tabloids such as *Kronenzeitung*, *Bildzeitung*, *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Mirror* are extremely influential.

Right-wing political parties also arouse ethnic stereotypes and xenophobic attitudes. Again, it is no accident that such parties have emerged and gained considerable proportions of the votes in general elections, particularly in countries with high proportions of foreigners, such as in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands. One reason for their emergence and success is that political parties of the centre and moderate left avoid open discussion regarding the problems connected with immigration, fearing that this could impair their chances of gaining votes in elections. Here, problematic statements of politicians both within the EU and in Turkey should also be mentioned.

4. Conclusions

I would like to conclude with three short, general remarks concerning the identity and image of Turkey and the stereotypes and prejudices in this regard.

First, one could ask why it is so important for Turkey to become a member of the European Union? Two aspects are relevant here. On one hand, a Pew survey showed that the Turks do not identify strongly with any other country or macro-region in the world. On the other hand, it is well known that there is pressure for countries in the neighbourhood of successful macro-regional associations to join that association, even if only for the reason not to fall behind. (This was the main motivation for the UK to join the EU.) Thus, it is easy to understand that the EU is a main anchor for Turkish aspirations to become a highly developed, civilized and democratic nation. It is also understandable that the abrupt attitude change among EU-leaders concerning Turkey’s EU-membership constituted a serious offence for such a large and self-conscious country as Turkey.

Second, I would argue that social science has often not seen clearly enough that negative attitudes are based on real problems faced by both citizens and immigrants. However, such stereotypes and attitudes will disappear rather soon if politics looks decisively for solutions to problems that also affect EU citizens in a negative way and if

the situation of immigrants from Turkey improves significantly. As noted earlier, there is no reason to assume that this will not happen in the future.

Third, as far as the relations between the EU and Turkey are concerned, two further aspects are very important. One relates to time: far-reaching political decisions and processes can often be solved much more easily, if enough time is provided for. The case of the breakdown and war in Yugoslavia is a clear example: If Slovenes and Croats could have waited a few years, they could have obtained their independence in a peaceful way. The access of Turkey to the EU may well be possible, but not in the present time.¹⁰ The other aspect concerns the current treatment of Turkey as a non-member. One can say that most EU-member states, including Austria, deal with Turkey in the same unfriendly way as they do with Asian and African nation states; Turkish citizens need a visa to enter these countries and the requirements for obtaining it – even for businessmen – are often baffling.

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