

## **TURKEY: BRIDGE OR BRIDGEHEAD?**

*This article asks whether Turkey's accession to the EU would create a bridge of understanding between Western Europe and the Islamic world or would Turkey be a bridgehead from which large numbers of Muslims will "invade" western society? It analyzes the key non-economic issues and, in particular, examines the relevance of religion. The writer believes that all countries which qualify politically and economically for EU membership should be admitted but worries that the EU itself is not sufficiently prepared for any further enlargement. The article suggests the basis on which the European Council should open negotiations at the end of 2004 and insists that satisfying the political criteria is a prerequisite to entry and not to opening the negotiations.*

**Stanley Crossick\***

---

\* Stanley Crossick is founding Chairman of the European Policy Centre, Brussels.

This title is unapologetically provocative. Problems are not solved by burying them in the sand or by avoiding discussing them on the grounds of political incorrectness. Would Turkey's accession to the European Union create a bridge of understanding between Western Europe and the Islamic world or would Turkey be a bridgehead<sup>1</sup> from which large numbers of Muslims will "invade" western society? That is what I believe to be the question on many lips: it deserves addressing directly.

Many objections to Turkish membership of the Union are heard, some based on genuine and others on spurious concerns. Some objections are rational, others emotive. In a nutshell, as encapsulated by Giscard d'Estaing, many fear that the admission of a country of 70 million predominantly Muslim inhabitants, from a land space substantially in Asia, weakened by a long period of authoritarian governments, and with a substantially lower standard of living than the EU average, would drastically weaken European integration and its Christian foundations. Genuine concerns also center round the financial cost of absorbing such a large and poor country as well as the influence it might wield. Turkey's GDP is 27 percent of the EU average, with its economy 2 percent of EU GDP.

Assessing the risks and opportunities involved in Turkish membership is made particularly difficult because they will depend upon the circumstances prevailing both in the Union and in Turkey in the middle of the next decade. By that time, the EU will probably have been further enlarged by the accession of Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania. Hopefully, there will have been considerable further integration in the internal market (especially services), foreign and security policy, and justice and home affairs cooperation. Expenditure on agricultural price support and on regional funds should have drastically diminished.

### *A Personal View*

I believe that all countries which qualify politically and economically for membership of the European Union should be admitted. However, I am deeply concerned that the EU itself is not sufficiently prepared. The new Constitutional Treaty should have been adopted at least in 2000 and not delayed until 2004. Ratification by the 25 Member States is not guaranteed and, if the new Treaty does not come into force, the Union will not be able to operate efficiently with its existing 25 members, let alone with additional members. The new Treaty contains only the very minimum reforms necessary, and the fact that all future Treaty amendments will require unanimity and ratification suggests that no further improvements can be made.

This makes me very hesitant about the current scenario of admitting Bulgaria and Romania by 2007, followed by Croatia, Macedonia and no doubt other Balkan States. Above all, is the concerns raised by the Turkish application.

---

<sup>1</sup> A post held on the far side of a river or obstacle, facing the enemy's position. Une tête de pont. Ein Brückenkopf.

The EU's recognition of the ultimate aim of Turkish membership was acknowledged in the Association Agreement signed in 1963. The Union has continued to confirm its commitment, subject to the necessary qualifying criteria, and relying upon this, Turkey has made tremendous efforts to implement the necessary political, legal and economic reforms. It would therefore be immoral for the European Council in December to refuse to open negotiations if the Commission's Recommendation is favorable.

It might have been reasonable to argue that there should be no further accession until there has been sufficient EU consolidation. Phased accession via a European Economic Area-type arrangement would have made much more sense, but that solution is no longer politically acceptable.

Were we to break our promises to the Turkish government, we would be seriously letting it down and risking the destabilization of Turkey. Put bluntly, the problems inherent in Turkish entry are less than the problems that a rejection would be likely to trigger.

### ***Commission's Recommendation***

The report and recommendation concerning Turkey could be one of the most important decisions the Commission has ever taken. The accession of Turkey would have greater geopolitical, institutional, financial, economic, social and cultural impact than any previous enlargement. The decision will fall to the present Commission in October 2004, during the last month of its mandate.

This article focuses on the geopolitical, social and cultural impact of Turkish accession. The institutional, financial and economic aspects should not be underestimated; but the Commission is well qualified to address these.

The European Council in Copenhagen in 1993 stated that:

Accession will take place as soon as an associated country is able to assume the obligations of membership by satisfying the economic and political conditions required.

Membership requires that the candidate country must have achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. Membership presupposes the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic & monetary union.

These criteria must be fulfilled, according to the Copenhagen Council decision, by the *date of accession*. However, successive European Council meetings (the last being in Brussels in June 2004) confirmed that, in Turkey's case, the Copenhagen political criteria must be met *before* accession negotiations are opened. This is somewhat surprising and does not appear to have provoked any comment. If not all the Copenhagen criteria have been satisfied, but sufficient progress appears to have been made to accept that within the approximately 10 year negotiating period the criteria will be satisfied, then negotiations

should be opened. This does not commit the Union to admit Turkey unless the political criteria are met at the time of entry. However, this is not what the European Council apparently decided.

Reference to the US State Department's 2003 report on human rights practices in Turkey reveals many ongoing problems: particularly unlawful killing and torture and other human rights abuses, and discrimination against women. Thus, it would be critical, for example, that non-Muslim minorities in Turkey enjoy full rights before negotiations are opened; not just that serious progress has been made and the government knows that these minorities have to be given equal treatment before EU accession.

Michael Emerson, a strong advocate of Turkish accession, acknowledged, in a CEPS Policy Brief of April 2004, that Turkey needed to take at least 20 drastic actions if the European Council is to decide in December to open negotiations.

It is to be hoped that the Commission will express a clear view that political tests should be preconditions to actual accession, and not to opening negotiations, and that Turkey should not be treated differently from other candidate countries.

### ***Social Integration***

There are two aspects of the Turkish social environment which need addressing. First, gender equality. In the southern and eastern regions, a substantial proportion of girls do not go to school. Perhaps less than half of Turkish women work, compared with the EU. Other forms of sexual inequality exist, including 'honor killings,' forced marriages and dress restrictions.

In the employment field, there is no 'social dialogue' and employer-employee relations are more akin in nature to Turkey's geographical location, which is mostly outside Europe.

The Union prides itself on its diversity but seeks "unity through diversity." A broadly defined common identity is relevant and European integration has always been underpinned by solidarity. An extra effort will be required, given the huge societal differences between the EU 25 and Turkey, and indeed the huge societal differences within the country.

### ***Relevance of Religion***

Strictly speaking, religion qua religion is irrelevant to Turkey's accession. Everyone in the EU has the right to freedom of religion (codified in Article II-10 of the Constitutional Treaty). However, the issue of religion cannot be dismissed out of hand for two reasons. First, it is linked to culture. Second, although Turkey is a secular state with legal freedom of religion, in practice Islam has a dominant influence on its society and religious minorities encounter difficulties.

The Islamic world is not in any way monolithic, but composed of a range of beliefs: Sunni, Shi'ite, Wahabi... Talk about a 'Muslim Community' is wide of the mark. Moslems share some fundamental faith but there are numerous combinations of sect, country, race, culture and language.

The gulf of understanding between Europeans and those who live in the Greater Middle East region is widening. In particular, we Europeans are struggling to comprehend the nature, relevance and context of Islamic fundamentalism today. An examination of the historic growth of fundamentalism is a necessary starting point. Karen Armstrong<sup>2</sup> painstakingly explains the roots and growth of religious fundamentalism, exploding the myth that it is peculiarly Moslem.

Some of us in the West have a tendency to move simplistically along the path: Islamism-fundamentalism-terrorism. This is an absurd but nevertheless dangerous perception which must be eliminated. Fundamentalism did not begin in the Islamic world: it is a comparatively recent phenomenon, manifesting itself first in the American South, then in the Jewish Diaspora and only then in the Islamic world. At least two wars are being fought in the Middle East. One is the Arab-Israeli conflict; the other is a war within such individual countries as Israel and Egypt, between secularists and religious. This battle is not, however, confined to the Middle East.

There is an assumption that Islam and the West are incompatible, their ideas utterly opposed and that Islam is at odds with everything that the West stands for. Karen Armstrong rejects this thesis. Under the impetus of their own spirituality Muslims arrived at many ideas and values that are similar to our own modern notions. They had evolved an appreciation of the wisdom of separating religion and politics and a vision of the intellectual freedom of the individual, and seen the necessity for the cultivation of rational thought. The Koranic passion for justice and equity is equally sacred in the modern Western ethos.

### ***Religion Versus Secularism***

The battle between religion and secularism was increasing at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by which time there were Jews, Christians, and Muslims who believed that their faith was in danger of being obliterated. US religious conservatism grew substantially during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There had been no need for southerners to become fundamentalists as they were much more conservative, but they were worried about the teaching of evolution in the public schools. Around the same time, Jewish traditionalists began to realize that the thrust of secular modernity was diametrically opposed to the rhythms of conservative pre-modern religion, and that it threatened essential views.

---

<sup>2</sup> This work is heavily relied upon for the historical elements of this paper. See Karen Armstrong, *The Battle For God 2000: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. (Harper Collins, 2000).

Later Muslims saw secularism – and western modernity - as an attempt to destroy Islam. When later Muslim fundamentalists claimed that secularization meant the destruction of Islam, they would often point to the example of Atatürk.

### ***Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism***

Muslims had, up to 1960, produced no fundamentalist movement because their modernization process was not yet sufficiently advanced. However, due to their experiences in Egypt, Palestine, Iran and elsewhere, there was a religious revival throughout the Middle East, and a significant number of Muslims became convinced that religious people and secularists could not live at peace in the same society.

Parallel with these developments, a new form of Jewish fundamentalism in Israel had already started to translate myth into hard political fact and there was a similar readiness among Protestant fundamentalists in the United States.

Fundamentalist fury reminds us that our modern culture imposes extremely difficult demands on human beings. Frequently, society has become divided into two nations: the secularists and religious living in the same country cannot speak one another's language or see things from the same point of view. Suppression and coercion are clearly not the answer. They invariably lead to a backlash and encourage extremism. And yet, attempting to exploit fundamentalism for secular, pragmatic ends is also counter-productive.

It is important to recognize that these theologies and ideologies are rooted in fear. These movements are not necessarily an archaic throwback to the past; they can be modern, innovative and modernizing. Religion has often helped people to adjust to modernity.

If fundamentalists must evolve a more compassionate assessment of their enemies in order to be true to their religious traditions, secularists must also be more faithful to the benevolence, tolerance, and respect for humanity which characterizes modern cultures at their best, and address themselves more empathetically to the fears, anxieties and needs which so many of their fundamentalist neighbors experience and which no society can safely ignore. Above all, we must distinguish between the teachings of religion itself and those religious leaders who through their teachings distort religion and manipulate its adherents.

An understanding of the nature, relevance and context of Islamic fundamentalism today – through looking at the historical growth of religious fundamentalism in general – is necessary in defining and applying European policy both towards the Middle East and international terrorism. It will at the very least increase our sensitivity in addressing the Middle East, and hopefully dissuade us from thoughtlessly moving automatically down the path from Islamism to fundamentalism to terrorism.

So we have seen that the divide between religion and secularism exists within – rather than between – societies dominated by the three main monotheistic religions. This battle

is being played out currently in several European countries, particularly in France and Turkey.

### *The Clash of Civilizations*

The question must now be addressed as to whether mainstream Islam can cohabit comfortably with Christianity (and indeed Judaism) inside the European Union. This brings us to Huntington's thesis of ten years or so ago, according to which the west won the world, not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion (to which few members of other civilizations were converted), but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence.

Modernization does not necessarily mean westernization. Non-western societies can modernize and have modernized without abandoning their own cultures and adopting wholesale western values, institutions, and practices. Like other manifestations of the global religious revival, the Islamic resurgence is both a product of and an effort to come to grips with modernization. Non-westerners also do not hesitate to point to the gaps between western principle and western action. Hypocrisy and double standards are the price of universalist pretensions. Democracy is promoted but not if it brings Islamic fundamentalists to power, such as in Algeria; non-proliferation is preached for North Korea and Iran but not for Israel; free trade is the elixir of economic growth but not for agriculture; human rights are an issue with China but only recently with Saudi Arabia; aggression against oil-owning Kuwaitis is massively repulsed but not against non-oil-owning Bosnians.

Muslim leaders stress the differences between their civilization and western civilization, the superiority of their culture, and the need to maintain the integrity of that culture against western onslaught. Muslims fear and resent western power and the threat which this poses to their society and beliefs. They see western (secularist) culture as materialistic, arrogant, corrupt, decadent, irreligious and immoral. These images of the west are held not only by fundamentalist imams but also by those whom many in the west would consider their natural allies and supporters.

The underlying problem for the west is not Islamic fundamentalism but whether a good part of the Islamic world believes Islam to be a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power. What the west sees as a victory for the free world, Muslims see as a victory for Islam. The first Gulf War became a civilization war because the west intervened militarily in a Muslim conflict, westerners overwhelmingly supported that intervention, and Muslims throughout the world came to see that intervention as a war against them and rallied against what they saw as one more instance of western imperialism. And much more so with the second Gulf War.

The global mono-culturalists want to make the world like America. The domestic multiculturalists want to make America like the world. In a multi-civilization world, the

constructive course is to renounce universalism, accept diversity, and seek commonalities.

Behind all this agonizing is the possible awareness that Muslims represent about 20 percent of the world's population, rising to about 30 percent by 2005 and passing the number of Christians.

Europeans claim that cultural diversity is central to their civilization and they espouse international multilateralism. Religious diversity is now accepted, albeit comparatively recently in practice and subject to exceptions. Islam as a minority religion in a community is not a western religion; and it governs - or to westerners, intrudes on - everyday life to a much greater extent than Christianity or Judaism (except as practiced by the ultra-religious). However, these are not grounds for rejecting Turkish membership.

### ***Immigration***

EU citizens understandably fear heavy immigration by Turks into the Union after enlargement. This concern has preceded previous enlargements, but it is particularly strong in the case of Turkey because of the size of its population and its poorness. A long transition period is likely by which time the economic gap should be less and the demography of existing Member States might lead to Turkish, rather than North African or Asian immigrants being more welcome.

However, EU public opinion fears the possibility of such immigration because of the problems immigration are causing individual Member States, including the threat (or perceived threat) to employment and often the high incidence of crime associated with immigration. This wrongly confuses the question of Turkey's admission into the Union with the failed immigration policies of the Member States.

Historically, the United States has been much more successful in integrating its immigrants (of varying backgrounds). A Pole living in Chicago is both comfortable with his own ethnic background and comfortable waving the 'Star-spangled Banner' as a sign of a patriotic American. On the whole, little similar reconciliation of interests has taken place in Europe.

The problem is particularly acute with the European Union's Muslim population, variously estimated between nine and 15 million. As has already been stated, there is no unified Muslim society in Europe, but at the same time there is also no common European understanding and policy towards Europe's Muslim citizens. Muslim immigrants appear to be far less successful in Europe than non-Muslims, particularly Chinese and Indians. 80 percent of British Muslims live in households with incomes below the national average compared to 25 percent of non-Muslim households.

Islam tends also to be seen as a threat and this is not only since 9/11. Muslims are so often perceived as terrorists. Muslims have, since the 1978-9 Iranian Revolution and the oil crisis, been viewed with suspicion. The 'clash of civilizations' is becoming a self-

fulfilling prophecy, fuelled by Islamic fury over Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses, western disgust with the resulting fatwa and other such incidents. And, of course, Islam is the third largest faith practiced in Europe and the fastest growing religion in the world, both through birth and conversion.

Finally, there is a fundamental disagreement between the majority of Europeans who do not accept that Muslims share their basic modern, democratic values, and western Muslims, who believe that these are prejudices depriving them of their rights.

This treatment of Muslims as a threat has clearly contributed to the increase in hostile stability of attitudes towards Muslims, particularly since 9/11. This is also fuelling the anti-immigration sentiments to be found in many parts of the Union.

### ***Bridge or Bridgehead?***

Against this disturbing background, we have to determine whether Turkey's accession to the European Union will create a bridge of understanding between Western Europe and the Islamic world or a bridgehead from which large numbers of Muslims will "invade" Western society.

As previously indicated, there are today well over 10 million Muslims residing in EU countries. There are nearly four million Turks living in the Union. Turkish migration goes back for more than 40 years and a considerable degree of integration has been achieved. Over 80.000 Turks run their own businesses employing over 290.000 people and they have contributed more than EUR 17 million to the EU's economy.<sup>3</sup> The Turkish population in EU has an economic power 16 times that of Malta, 10 times that of Estonia and eight times that of Lithuania. The economic power of the Turks living in Europe is greater than that of eight of the newest members.

According to European Commissioner, Günter Verheugen, "*Turkey could be a model for the region and Islamic countries. It could regulate the relations between the EU and the Islamic world. It could carry the supremacy of laws and universal values to those regions.*"

Prime Minister Erdoğan said that "*We do not consider the EU a Christian club. On the contrary, we describe it as a whole of political values in which civilizations meet each other.*"

Turkey's geopolitical position is critically important, linking Europe with the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Asia. Turkey therefore sits at the crossroads of important energy, transportation and community networks.

### ***Conclusion***

---

<sup>3</sup> *Center for Turkish Studies in Essen.*

The Commission may well conclude that, although serious progress has been made, the Copenhagen political criteria will not have been fully satisfied by the end of 2004. It is to be hoped, therefore, that an opinion will be expressed as to whether the criteria are likely to be satisfied before negotiations are concluded. If the answer is in the affirmative, the European Council, notwithstanding its previous utterances, should open negotiations but make clear that:

- the criteria have not yet been satisfied;
- considerable progress has been made;
- there is every reason to believe that they will be satisfied by the conclusion of the negotiations; but
- accession will not be possible without all the political criteria being fulfilled.

There should be no concealment of the fact that accession is unlikely before at least 2015 and a clear statement that the issue of religion is irrelevant.

And this is the very point. Once Turkey has achieved in practice institutional stability guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, the issue of religion becomes irrelevant. However, it will require a tremendous effort on Turkey's part, because compliance has to be achieved, not only in Istanbul but also in south-east Anatolia.

Once there is an affirmative EU decision to open negotiations, the focus should then be on the opportunities that this brings. An open attitude is the only way to ensure that Turkey's accession will not be a bridgehead but a bridge, with Turkey fully integrating into the Union. It will be incumbent on EU leaders, however, to explain fully their actions and the consequences.

As Franklin D Roosevelt memorably said, "*We have nothing to fear but fear itself.*"