

Reflections of EU-Turkey Relations in The Muslim World



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INTRODUCTION

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EU-Turkey relations are not followed only in Europe and Turkey. The Muslim world has emerged as an attentive observer of this evolving relationship. In this study, Yousef Al Sharif of Al Jazeera-Turkey and Samir Salha of Kocaeli University review the manner in which EU-Turkey relations have been assessed in the Arab media, and Rasul Bakhsh Rais of Lahore University discusses the debates in South Asia. Both essays demonstrate the centrality of the Turkish experience with the European Union in determining the verdict by the Muslims on whether the European modernity is grand, open-ended, inclusive, non-denominational and meritocratic, or whether it is petty, closed, exclusionary, sectarian and arbitrary. Needless to say, we all have a huge stake in how that verdict is shaped.

Turkey's eligibility for EU membership has been confirmed unanimously by EU leaders in 1989, 1999 and 2004. In 2005, European Council decided, again unanimously, to commence negotiation with Turkey, and that the shared goal of these negotiations was accession of Turkey to the European Union. Since then, however, there have been persistent efforts to open up Turkey's eligibility for membership into question, and to alter the terms of these negotiations. Advocates of these views may benefit from reviewing the evidence presented in this study. If EU arbitrarily suspends negotiations with Turkey, not just the Turkish public opinion but a much larger and a more critical audience will deliver a severe verdict on the European Union. As the Palestinian ordeal has become the central prism through which the Muslim world perceives the United States, EU's conduct towards Turkey may have become the central prism through which the Muslim world assesses the European Union. All parties concerned ought to conduct themselves with the care and acumen which this constellation requires.

TURKEY'S EUROPEAN UNION MEMBERSHIP: THE ARAB PERSPECTIVE NOTES FROM THE ARAB MEDIA

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Introduction

The disruption of political and social ties between the Turks and the Arabs began after World War I. Most Arabs believe that in re-orienting Turkey toward the West and introducing a raft of new laws and regulations to this end, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk pulled Turkey away from what was long assumed to be its natural place: the Islamic and Arab worlds.

It is this premise that informs the Arab media's criticism of Turkey's efforts to integrate with the West and to join the European Union. Another prevalent view among the Arabs is that Turkey, which was once part of their religious, social and political structures, cannot achieve integration with the West by merely changing its laws and switching from an Arab to a Latin alphabet. Our paper's primary goal is to analyze developments in Turkey's relations with Europe from the Arab perspective starting from 1959 when it first sought membership in the European Common Market. In so doing, we hope to provide a better understanding and to assess the dimensions of Arab reactions to the ups and downs in Turkey-EU relations.

In short, our report seeks to shed light on Turkey's EU membership and the profound changes witnessed in the Arab world's perception of this process. At the same time, we seek to analyze the reason for these changes.

Historical Background

Before delving into our main topic, it is useful to briefly examine Turkish-Arab relations from a historical perspective together with the political influence to which these relations were subjected. We also need to look at the changes affecting Turkish-Arab relations in recent times and the underlying reasons for these changes.

The turning point in Turkish-Arab relations came in 2002 with the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). We see clear and serious efforts on the part of Turkey to forge closer political ties with Arab states under the leadership of the AKP. Most Arab experts agree that Turkish-Arab relations have improved on all levels throughout this period. Indeed, the AKP has succeeded in garnering the support of the Arab world on a range of issues affecting Turkey.

This situation has led most Arabs to alter their long-held views of the European Union as an exclusively Western and Christian club that worked against the Islamic world and increasingly to embrace it as a community of democratic values: The thinking goes that, thanks to EU-inspired reforms, democratic rights have expanded in Turkey and a party with an Islamic background was able to gain power. Broadly speaking, Turkey's relations with the EU, and EU-inspired reforms in particular, have had a positive impact on Arab perceptions of Turkey.

In fact, however, Turkey has been steeped in the process of westernization since the 1920s. Most Turks would argue that their country has been on an inalterable course of westernization since 1923. This orientation forms the basis of a near immutable state ideology. Successive Turkish governments have sought to shape their administrative, political, economic and social institutions along Western lines.

After World War II, Turkey played a central role in Western efforts to keep the Soviet Union in check. In line with this role, Turkey chose to become a member of various Western organizations. There are several reasons for this choice and foremost among them, according to Egyptian researcher Ali Mohafaza, was the Soviet Union's designs on Turkey.

At the start of the 1950s Turkey made impressive progress in its relations with the West. The rapprochement manifested itself through Turkey becoming party to a swath of Western agreements, treaties and blocs. In the words of Mohammed Nouredine, a Lebanese expert on Turkey, the post-World War II period offered Turkey a golden opportunity to cement its process of westernization. For Turkey, siding with Europe and the West was an inseparable part of this project.

Turkey joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in April 1952, the Baghdad Pact in 1955, and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1959. Turkey, which saw Europe as central to its interests and

in spite of its occasional divergences from Europe, applied for membership in the European Common Market in June 1959. At this point everyone acknowledged the necessity of Turkey's membership in the EU together with the strategic and economic benefits that would flow to all sides as a result of its inclusion in Europe.

The European option embraced by Turkey's political elite and military alike was not an accidental choice. As noted by Egyptian writer Fahmi Howeydi, it was pinned on the vision outlined by Atatürk when he founded the Republic of Turkey. In the words of Atatürk: "The civilization in which Turkey's new generation needs to be shaped, both in substance and form, is European civilization. That is because there exists only one civilization and that is European civilization. The leading civilization is this. It is one that carries to power and tames nature. All nations of the world are obliged to draw on European civilization in order to survive and be respected."

Turkey expressed its desire to become part of the European project at the start of the 1950s. It saw the July 1959 Treaty of Rome as a historical opportunity and soon after applied for membership in the common market. This agreement marked a new stage for both sides in Turkey's application for full membership in the EU. It became clear over time, however, that such agreements remained on paper and that no concrete progress was being recorded in deepening Turkey's ties with Europe. In 1987 a new opportunity presented itself for re-invigorating the Turkey-EU relationship. This was followed by the signing in 1995 of a customs union agreement between Turkey and the EU, which was seen by both sides as a milestone in Turkey's efforts to join the union. In 1999 the EU conferred membership candidate status on Turkey, but formal negotiations did not begin until 2005.

When assessing Turkey's relations with the EU, it is evident that Turkey's EU candidacy remains a matter of debate among Turks and Europeans alike. There are Europeans and Turks who support Turkey's membership on the grounds that Ankara would become an important bridge for rapprochement and dialogue between Europe and the Muslim world. On the other hand, there are those who argue that Turkey's inclusion would have a negative impact on the European project. It is certain that Turkey's membership talks are the most difficult and challenging of all negotiations conducted thus far between the EU and candidate countries. There are several reasons for this, most prominent being the strong opposition voiced by the European public against Turkey's admission into the Western club.

Traditional Arab Perceptions

In the 1980s Turkey rarely featured on the editorial pages of the Arab press and was rarely debated on news programs. For the most part, Turkey was identified with Istanbul, a popular destination for Arab tourists. The bulk of news about Turkey was devoted to military coups, to statements by former President Kenan Evren (who led the last coup in 1980), to Kurdish rebel (PKK) attacks and to the Cyprus issue. Many Arabs were aware of Turkey's pro-Western impulses and its NATO membership, but Turkey's application in 1987 for full membership in the European Union had a bombshell effect on the Arab world.

Perhaps some Arabs were amazed simply because they could not accept that Turkey could truly be a part of Europe. Also, the Arabs had never fully grasped the concept of the European Union. It was relatively new and unknown to many. Their knowledge of the EU grew in tandem with Turkey's membership process. The prevailing view was that the EU was a Christian club and that is why, although Turkey had positioned itself in the West since 1923, its efforts to join the union were viewed as somewhat odd in the Arab world.

For most Arabs, Turkey's membership in the EU would not only change its laws, it would also alter Turkish culture and identity. In other words, EU membership would amount to Turkey's acceptance of Christian culture and this was impossible. Only a handful of Arab leftists were able to comprehend that Turkey's EU membership was a natural continuation of Turkey's Western proclivities and the changes introduced by Ataturk to civil law. Arab experts on Turkey preferred to emphasize its dual character. For them, the Turkish people were Muslims governed by harshly secular laws. The Arabs were unable to accept that a Muslim nation could either be integrated or co-exist with a Western, secular system.

It is important to recall that throughout the 1980s and 1990s Turkey's relations with the Arab world were in a state of crisis. This was reflected in the works of writers and journalists who wrote about Turkey. The water sharing dispute over the Euphrates and the Tigris, when lumped together with the Kurdish issue and the military cooperation agreement Turkey signed with Israel, made Turkey a target for many Arabs. Throughout this period it was nearly impossible to come across a single positive word about Turkey. Turkey's efforts to join the EU provided further ammunition for its

detractors in the Arab world. Be they Islamists, nationalists or leftists, not a single Arab supported Turkey's desire to become part of Europe. This mindset changed ten years later. As we explain further down, the change was a direct result of the improved relations between Turkey and the Arabs.

The Rise to Power of the AKP

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in the November 2002 parliamentary elections. At that time, the Arab media knew little about this party. That is because the news was dominated by the US occupation of Iraq. It took some time for the Arab media to grasp the full impact of the AKP but once it did its views on the party changed dramatically.

“Consider Turkey’s fate that its identity remains in suspension. It spurns the East and is rejected by the West. It is caught in the middle with no place of its own. It has neither settled in its own home nor has it found one with its neighbors. European states want illicit relations with Turkey based on their own traditions and the Copenhagen criteria. They have no intention of tying the knot formally any time soon. For six centuries the Turks were Europe’s biggest nightmare. But then the roles were switched. Europe has become the Turks’ biggest dream. A state that long regarded European civilization as a repulsive foe is now jumping through all manners of hoops to become part of it.”

Turkey after the electoral coup. Fahmi Howeydi. Al Sharq Al Awsat, Dec. 23, 2002 (A style needs to be determined for attributing quotes. Are these quotes translated?)

Beyond a certain point the entire Arab media began to follow the AKP with interest and admiration and soon held it up as an example of good governance in the region. There were many factors behind why it took so long for the Arab media to come around. One was that the AKP was considered an Islamist party, much like the Welfare Party that was banned in 1998 for anti-secular activities, and it took time for this prejudice to dissipate. A second factor was that part of the Arab media harbored suspicions that the Turkish military would remove the AKP from power in the same way it did the Welfare Party the year before it was banned.

A third factor was the AKP's controversial ties with Europe and the United States. The AKP's Islamist roots were assumed to be an obstacle to friendship with the European Union. That perception changed as a result of economic stability and EU-tailored reforms introduced by the AKP. The fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria with regard to human rights paved the way for formal EU membership negotiations to begin. This played an important part in the AKP's growing popularity among Arabs.

The following is an extract from one of the rare articles that appeared in Al-Hayat following the AKP's November 2002 victory. Hazim Saaghiyah, an expert on Islamic fraternities, penned it.

"Erdogan and Gül have provoked the kind of thinking that not even Abdulrahman Wahid did after he came to power in Indonesia. Both men speak about Islam and democracy. They have enabled us to talk about an Islamic democracy similar to Christian democracies in Europe."

Hazim Saaghiyah, Al-Hayat, Nov. 20, 2002

The challenge posed by America's invasion of Iraq, however, gave rise to conflicting views of the AKP. America's demands that Turkey allow its troops to use Turkish soil to open a second front against Iraq created the impression that Turkey was solely interested in financial gain as it bargained with the US over details of the deal. Confusion in the Arab media mounted when the Turkish parliament voted against a bill that would authorize US troops to cross through Turkey but then opened Turkey's airspace to US warplanes. The real picture did not become clear until much later.

"What angered the Americans the most was that the sole opposition to their demands came from the region's only democratically run country. This was a very bad sign for the Americans because the very democracy they were trying to export to the region had turned against America itself."

Rashed Khashana, The New Baghdad Pact's Pillars, Al-Hayat, March 6, 2003.

"The Turkish parliament paid heed to its conscience. It rejected the \$26 bln bribe offered in money and kind by the United States. In so doing it triggered a deep crisis in relations with America. This act by Turkish Parliament not only deserves to be applauded but it is also a testimony to Turkish democracy and strength of the Turkish public opinion."

"The overwhelming majority of Turks were opposed to America's invasion of Iraq. The Turkish parliament offered a lesson in morality and justice to those Arab parliaments and governments that supported the invasion, openly or not. It is clear that the Arab people will always respect and honor this noble stance of Turkey and its people."

Al-Quds Al-Arabi, March 4, 2003

A real understanding in the Arab press of the AKP and its domestic and foreign policies came only several years after it rose to power. It was only then that the Arabs began unequivocally praising the AKP and its performance. Some writers had preferred to reserve judgment. They waited to see how long the party could survive in government and whether it would be overthrown by the military. When the AKP emerged victorious with an even bigger share of the vote in 2007, commentary in the Arab press

became even more favorable. The AKP's overtures to the Arab world, its success in relations with the EU and the implementation of political reforms all contributed to this shift.

The main reason, however, was the fact that the AKP very quickly proved that it was not a religious party based on Islam. Rather it was a party that was open to all as demonstrated by the allocation of parliamentary seats not only to Islamists and pious Muslims but to those who espoused different views as well. In other words the AKP had accepted political dialogue and was willing share power with groups other than the Islamists. All of these factors played an important part in winning support from the Arab media and from the pro-Islamic media in particular. The party's experience was considered important and was described as a success story that inspired hope. For many it contained valuable lessons for Islamic parties in the region and there are several commentaries that can be cited as evidence of this connection. The majority came from pro-Islamic journalists and pundits in the Arab world.

"Even the West, which has prevented Islamists from coming to power in any Islamic country, was left helpless before the Turkish example. That is because it achieved what no other Islamic country has achieved. Through its judicious policies it married Islam with democracy. There is nothing extraordinary about Turkey being the country where opposites meet. Turkey has already fused Europe and Asia."

Mahmud al-Mubarak-IIaf 2007

"A factor that adds to the importance of these elections is that they are taking place at a very critical juncture in modern Turkish history. This period has unique characteristics. The most prominent one is that an Islam-rooted party, the Justice and Development Party, has been in power since 2002. It would be inadequate to analyze these elections from this angle alone. It is important to note that the AKP had embarked on reforms aimed at reshaping its regional and global roles even before it came to power. Multilateralism lies at the core of this new approach to foreign policy. Turkey will no longer be satisfied with expanding relations with one sole country or on one sole axis at the expense of others.

"It goes without saying that the biggest victor in these elections is democracy. Democracy is getting stronger by the day and it is no longer embassies or the barracks that are the source of power and change, but it is the people. We wish the same for the Arab people. In some of these societies parliaments have existed for no more than a year. And in some countries even though parliaments exist, executive decisions are discussed and adopted everywhere except within the parliament."

Mohamed Nour El-Dine-el Khaleej 2007 Turkey and the European Union

2004: The EU Starts Negotiations with Turkey

When Turkey came third in the 2002 World Cup this drew the attention of the Arab world. It is widely known that the Arab public rooted for Turkey and its footballers because they were seen to be representing the Muslim world in this very important international competition. The Arabs were unable to disguise their amazement at Turkey's success.

The success that Turkey achieved at the European Union summit in Brussels on December 17, 2004, was far greater. It prompted the entire Islamic world to shift its gaze to Turkey and the EU. When it became clear that the EU would be issuing the green light for Turkey's membership after so many years, the Arab media attended the summit in droves. Around 200 Arab journalists covered the summit. It must be noted that the Arab media covered the issue even before the summit took place and in numerous articles warned Europe against the dangers of disappointing Turkey a second time. Such an outcome would have negative repercussions in the Islamic world and among Arabs in particular.

Indeed between 2002 and 2004 the Islamic and Arab worlds were faced with very serious political and social problems. The events of September 11 had roused hatred in the West against Muslims. The West began accusing Muslims of being "terrorists." Israel had rejected the Arab peace plan, attacked the Palestinian camp in Janin in the West Bank and isolated Yasser Arafat. The US had occupied Iraq, civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan were being killed, tortured or exiled, and Saddam Hussein was on trial.

Throughout this period there was a profound sense of helplessness among Arabs and Muslims that only sharpened their enmity toward the West. This, in turn, provoked radical movements and terrorism. The world witnessed brutal executions of hostages in Iraq that were carried out in the name of Islam and the resistance. That is why the approaching December 17 summit was seen as an important test for dialogue between the Islamic world and the West.

It was as if the December 17 summit was not about starting negotiations with Turkey, but rather it was perceived as a defining moment for relations between Europe and the Islamic world.

Hopes and fears about its outcome could be seen in various articles that appeared at the time. Many authors insisted that Europe should avoid making the “wrong” decision and that a crisis with Turkey should not be allowed to emerge. It was as if the December 17 summit was not about starting negotiations with Turkey, but rather it was perceived as a defining moment for relations between Europe and the Islamic world. Turkey’s participation in the World Cup was seen through a similar lens. Who would stand to gain if Turkey were not to start membership negotiations with the EU? Here is what the writer Hamid Kashgouli had to say:

“There are many who stand to gain. Topping this list are the radical nationalists and the reactionary Salafists. The effects of this will be felt within Turkey itself as well as in its Arab and Islamic hinterlands. These forces will attack Turkey for its secular system and for turning toward the West. They will accuse Turkey of betraying and stabbing Islam in the back and of drifting away from Islamic values and ideals. They want Turkey to remain backward, poor, ignorant and radical. So these forces may on the one hand use the rejection of Turkey to provoke hatred of Europe and on the other to increase the potency of their violent, anti-secular rhetoric. Most Europeans fail to comprehend this approaching danger. They are unaware of the risks posed to the world by the strengthening of nationalist and Salafist currents in the East.

“Rejecting Turkey’s membership in the EU will lead to the strengthening of nationalist and religious movements in Europe and the Islamic world alike. That is because a European Turkey would be the gateway to Europe for the Arabs and the Islamic world. It would increase exchanges in the fields of culture and civilization between all countries of the world. If Turkey were to become part of Europe we would become Europe’s neighbors. We would gain knowledge about concepts of progress and modernity that would benefit our people. This, in turn, would promote peace and security across the world.”

Hamid KashKouli, *Civilised Dialogue*, issue number: 995; 23.10.2004

“However much geography is put forward as an argument against Turkey’s inclusion in the EU on grounds that 95 percent of Turkey lies outside of Europe, the main reason Europe does not accept Turkey is rooted in the latter’s cultural identity. Islam, which forms the basis of Turkey’s religious identity, is the real obstacle. Despite its embrace of secularism, a Christian Europe cannot absorb Turkey’s Islamic character. In the 19th century, European pressure led to Turkey becoming a laboratory for testing the compatibility of Islam and modern reforms. In this regard the outcome of the Turkish experiment will determine the future of relations between Islam and Europe.”

Saygid Wild Abah, *Al-Sharq al Awsad, Europe’s Islamic Knot and the Turkish Example*, 24 December 2004.

As can be seen from the above, the question of Turkey's relations with Europe has come to be analyzed in an increasingly detailed and sophisticated fashion. In the past it was treated in a simplistic and superficial manner that can be summarized as follows: Europe is a Christian Club and Turkey is pursuing an empty dream. Nowadays, however, we see a growing number of articles that discuss in depth and detail even the technical aspects of Turkey's EU membership. This shows that starting in 1999 the Arab world began to take Turkey's EU candidacy far more seriously.

For the first time, be they Islamists, liberals or nationalists, almost all Arab writers adopted the same stance regarding Turkey's EU membership. They argued that Europe needed to open its doors to Turkey. Commentary was more focused on Europe's reactions than on Turkey's. That is because for many the issue went beyond the membership of a neighboring country and the benefits that would ensue. The real question was whether Europe would heal the wounds of an Islamic world accused of terrorism or ignite the flames of a new crisis that would further stoke extremist violence in the region.

"Liberals in the Middle East believe that Turkey's membership in the EU will promote regional stability and engender developments that would benefit the people in the region. The most significant and practical outcome of Turkey's membership would be a reduction of the influence of radical Islam. Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's pragmatism is an example of this."

Adel Darwish, Absorbing Turkey, Europe's long journey, London, Al-Sharq Al Awsat, October 16, 2004

After the December 17 summit, news that Turkey would start membership talks with the EU in 2005 dominated front page headlines the day after and the decision was greeted with joy in the Arab press and in academic circles.

On the night of the December 17 summit, the Al Jazeera and Al-Arabiya news channels, which command wide audiences in the Arab world, provided extensive coverage. News that Turkey would start membership talks with the EU in 2005 dominated front page headlines the day after and the decision was greeted with joy in the Arab press and in academic circles. It also had a positive impact on the way Islamic and Arab nationalist writers

viewed the EU. Starting with the Egyptians, Arab nationalists who once considered Turkey's EU membership as impossible changed their opinions about Europe's credibility. Turkey's chances of gaining EU membership no longer seemed out of reach. Talk of worsening ties between East and West was set aside. A mood of optimism began to spread. An example of this optimism can be found in the following article by Dr. Jamal Abduljawad of the Al-Ahram center in Egypt. In it he underlines the importance of the December 17 decision and predicts that further courageous decisions were in the making.

"The negotiations with Turkey will be harder and longer than any of the negotiations conducted with other candidate states. Yet, past experience has shown that once the EU begins negotiations it does not rescind its decision to grant full membership to a candidate state. In the same way, a candidate state has never rescinded its decision to fulfill the conditions for full membership. Should past experience be repeated in the Turkish experience, then Europe's doors will open for Turkey."

Dr. Jamal Abduljawad, EU Membership is a Difficult and Burdensome Decision, Al-Ahram, December 27, 2004.

Similar views were expressed by Mohammed Abdullah Mohammed:

"The prevalent view in the Arab world is that Turkey's negotiations with the EU are a dream that will end in EU membership. Yet, for the longest time most believed that the EU would never accept a Muslim nation within its ranks. The Turkish parliament's decision to block US troops from using Turkish soil to attack Iraq enhanced Turkey's credibility in the Arab world. This decision freed Turkey from its image of being a Western pawn as Arab public opinion applauded Turkey's stance. At the same time Arab intellectuals were accusing their own leaders of signing secret agreements with the US in support of its invasion of Iraq. Turkey's experience proved that Muslim countries could espouse a principled stance. It is for this reason that even secular Arab intellectuals began to pin their hopes on Turkey and expressed dismay at the possibility that the EU might veto Turkey's membership."

Turkey and the Arab World: New Frameworks, Mohammed Abdullah Mohammed, Misak Education, Research and Analysis Institute, 25.10.2008.

Another point worthy of mention is related to the Arab media's unanimity concerning two factors in its analysis of the December 17 decision. The first is the joy and appreciation that it displayed as admiration for Turkey and the EU peaked. The second view expressed by all members of the Arab media was that this decision would mitigate the negative effects of the September 11 attacks and the ensuing tensions between Islam and the West as summed up in the "Clash of Civilizations" theory.

It is clear that the Arab media's analysis of Turkey's membership went beyond the technical conditions it needed to fulfill in order to earn EU membership. The political and social criteria were taken into consideration as well, even though there was little mention about whether or not Turkey would meet all these conditions.

The Arab media viewed the outcome of Turkey's membership process as a defining moment in relations between Islam and the West.

The Arab media viewed the outcome of Turkey's membership process as a defining moment in relations between Islam and the West. Turkey's unhindered progress toward EU membership would undoubtedly help eradicate religious radicalism in Europe and the Islamic world. It would also provide the best response to the "Clash of Civilizations" theory and to claims that Islam breeds terrorism. By the same token it would discredit attempts in the Muslim world to reduce Europe to a Christian club that is rooted in the mentality of the Crusades. Europe's approach to Turkey would clarify the definition of the EU for the Arab and Muslim worlds. Indeed there are parallels that can be drawn between the Muslim approach to Europe and that of Europe toward Turkey. Most articles in the Arab press point to the negative consequences of Europe's possible rejection of Turkey.

"German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has on many occasions expressed the view that rejecting a Turkey that has met all of Europe's conditions would be tantamount to betraying the Muslim world. This would prove that the EU has double standards and would not be in Europe's interests. There is little doubt that many Muslims in the Arab world and elsewhere believe that Turkey sold its soul when it declared its intention to join the EU. Yet there are also many more people who believe that Turkey's inclusion in the European family is a most desirable goal."

Will Turkey Join the European Union? Omar Khush, Lebanon, Al Mostaqbel newspaper, October 19, 2005

The outcome of the December 17 summit raised hopes within the Arab media that Arab countries would draw lessons from Turkey's membership process. Turkey's approaching membership in the EU might positively influence Arab regimes and bolster democracy. Also, once Turkey joined the EU, Europe's borders would extend to Iraq and Syria.

“It goes without saying that Turkey’s efforts to join the EU will make it freer, safer, and more democratic, just and financially stable. A wealth of knowledge will be accumulated through this endeavor. This will be a gain not only for Turkey’s Islamic movement but also for neo-Islamist movements across the world. World peace will be enhanced. Dialogue between Western and Islamic cultures will be strengthened. Co-existence between Islam and the West will be bolstered. It would be wrong for Turkey to retreat to a corner and be told that it cannot be civilized because it is Muslim. This sort of argument would amount to the following: Even if you scrape off your skin we will not accept you. It is true that there is a great historical gap in terms of development and progress between Europe and us. But unless the West supports us as we pass through the crisis that we are undergoing, then it doesn’t have the right to demand from us acceptance of human and citizenship rights or the rule of law or a philosophy of religious tolerance.

“Should Turkey join the EU, then this will have a profound effect on the entire Muslim world and on the Arab world in particular. This process will contribute to their political and intellectual modernization. In the future, near or far, they will all be forced to imitate what Turkey is doing.”

Muslim Turkey and the EU, Dr Abdullah Turkmani, er-Rey, 01.03.2006

The Arabs criticize French President Nicholas Sarkozy on account of his behavior toward Turkey. The attitude of a European politician toward Turkey often shapes his or her image in the eyes of Arabs.

“U.S. President Barack Obama’s comments that Turkey must be part of the EU and that Turkey’s geo-strategic importance, its culture and its influential foreign policy will enrich Europe show his greatness. Sarkozy’s opposition to Turkey’s membership demonstrates his littleness.”

Yasser Abu Hilale, Jordan’s Al-Gad newspaper, April 7 2009

“Turkey is closer to fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria than many countries that have already joined the EU. That is because Turkey is a founding member of the Council of Europe. It is also a founding member of NATO. Its army is the second largest in NATO. Moreover, Turkey has led NATO efforts to bring stability to Afghanistan following the collapse of the Taliban regime. This is why we believe that Sarkozy is wrong about Turkey. And the sooner he accepts his mistake the better it will be for all concerned.”

Amir Tahiri, Al Sharq al Awsat, May 2, 2008

Under the spell of this positive atmosphere the Arab media began to speak of the positive effects of Turkey’s EU membership, particularly for the Eastern Mediterranean countries that are geographically close to Turkey. But the talk was countered by the official line. Many authoritarian regimes in the Arab world that had shunned all reforms were taken aback by the EU’s December 17 decision.

Such regimes were convinced that no matter how many democratic reforms Turkey undertook and no matter how much it cleaned up its human rights record, the EU would always keep its doors shut. Especially certain regimes were eager to perpetuate the belief that Middle Eastern countries would remain undemocratic forever. According to these regimes, democracy was part of a Western conspiracy designed to divide their countries and tear their identities apart. The example set by Turkey as it sought to clean up its human rights record and to bolster its democracy in line with its EU aspirations was not popular among these regimes. Therefore the state-run media argued that EU-inspired reforms were aimed at usurping Turkey's sovereignty. The reforms were dictated by the EU and disregarded the dignity of the Turkish people. Turkey was obliged to carry out the EU's orders but would never win the right to join the EU. The December 17 decision caught the state-run Arab media by surprise and the official reaction to it was therefore delayed. Khayrallah Kharyallah's article confirms this phenomenon.

"What is happening in the Arab world? Isn't it odd that a matter as important as Turkey's EU membership has not prompted soul searching at the highest level? Turkey borders Iraq and is affected by the events there more than any other country. Despite this it realized that political and economic reforms were inevitable. Turkey understood that the path to Europe and to regional clout was tied to reforms. The courage displayed by Turkey, and in particular its determination to prevent an issue as sensitive as Cyprus from becoming an obstacle to its relations with the EU, transformed Turkey into a country with a future, one that solved its problems through modern means and with the support of Europe. Turkey understood at the end of the Cold War that its role as the West's eastern flank had ended. It, therefore, needed to carve out a new role for itself. It knew how to keep up with the new world that emerged. Naturally, it is the one country that best availed itself of the helpless situation that prevailed in the Arab world."

Turkey, Europe and the helplessness of the Arab world, Khayrallah Kharyallah, Al-Rayeh, Wednesday December 22, 2004

2005 and Beyond

The honeymoon between Turkey and the European Union did not last for long. Relations between the two began to sour after Turkey refused to open its air and seaports to Greek Cypriot carriers in line with the customs union agreement. Meanwhile, the EU failed to deliver on its promises to end the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots. This was followed by demands

from Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angel Merkel that Turkey be given “privileged partner” status rather than full membership in the EU. It became clear that the dreams triggered by the December 17 summit might lead to disillusionment.

At this point the Arab media unhesitatingly criticized the EU. It chose to ignore the reform fatigue that was beginning to envelope Turkey. It preferred to focus instead on the rigid stance adopted by the EU. Articles suggesting that the EU would pay a heavy price for its intransigence began to proliferate. They argued that Europe’s attitude would have a negative impact on Islamic public opinion and would foster radicalism. Some articles went as far as to call on Turkey to shelve its European ambitions and return to the Islamic fold. The dialogue between East and West had suffered a big blow. The Arab media characterized Sarkozy and Merkel’s statements as a double standard. It additionally charged that promises made to Turkey at the December 17 summit had been broken and that Turkey had been betrayed.

“It is well known to the members of the EU that shutting the door on Turkey entails the risk of alienating the Turkish public and of stoking violence. This, in turn, creates the risk of instability in the Middle East, which is already very volatile.”

The reasons for Europe’s decision to start negotiations, Majedah Tamer, *Civilized Dialogue*, issue number 1328, 25.09.2005

“Europe’s wavering attitude toward Turkish membership prompted Turkey to start strategic dialogue with the Gulf countries. Last July experts from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) met with their Turkish peers at the GCC headquarters in Riyadh. With the participation of the GCC secretariat, the groundwork for strategic cooperation between the GCC and Turkey was laid. Strategic dialogue between Ankara and the Gulf capitals started, relations between Turkey and the GCC were discussed and ways for deepening this dialogue were examined. In particular, progress in negotiations on the signing of a free trade agreement between Turkey and GCC member states was evaluated.

The Modern Turkish Train: Can it Run off the GCC Railway? September 6, 2008, Al-ray newspaper, Bahrain.

At the same time Turkey’s influence in the Middle East and in the Islamic world was growing. Turkey had repaired its ties with Arab and Muslim states. Ankara had started playing a role in the Palestinian cause. Syria and Israel began secret and indirect peace talks via mediation from Turkey. Turkey tried to bridge differences between Europe and Iran over Iran’s nuclear program. Turkey also tried to secure an agreement between Afghanistan’s President Hamid Karzai and Pakistan’s former President

Parvez Musharraf. Turkey played a substantial role in persuading the Sunnis to participate in the first elections that followed the overthrow of Saddam Hussain in Iraq. Thus, the EU's stock began to fall in the Arab world whereas Turkey's began to rise.

As the positive image created by the EU in December 2004 began to dissipate, many articles sought to console Turkey and argued that Turkey would not be the losing side if the EU were to shut its doors. Turkey was able to benefit from the EU reforms even without joining the EU and the Middle East could provide an alternative. Many articles began again to emphasize that the EU was untrustworthy. It is worth noting that the Arab media's present attitude is very different from the one it displayed during the crisis between Turkey and the EU that erupted ten years ago. Today the Arab press, be it Islamist, leftist or even nationalist, is on Turkey's side. There is not a single Arab publication that belittles Turkey or accuses it of pursuing the EU at all costs.

"The EU cannot overlook Turkey's power in a region that is so sensitive. It goes without saying that even if Turkey fails to fulfill its European dreams, it is still Turkey that will emerge victorious in all respects. Turkey's acceptance of the long and difficult list of conditions for winning EU membership has strengthened the hand of its ruling political elite. They will thus be able to implement the planned reforms. In other words they will draw on the Turkish people's expectations of EU membership to carry on with the changes. They will implement reforms with regard to human rights abuses and freedom of expression in the shortest possible time. This will empower Turkey and cement its prestige as a powerful state and as a role model for the region."

EU refuses to take up the responsibility for Turkey , Amal Musa, al Sharq al Awsat, 15.05.2007

"There is no doubt that Turkey has benefited from the membership process. It is Turkey that has gained the most. Its economy grew by an annual 7 percent. There is a European dimension to this level of development. This rate of growth should serve as an incentive for the EU, which does not accept countries with failed economies to join its ranks. Secondly, through its conciliatory stance Turkey has boosted its bilateral ties with the region. It enjoys good relations with Tehran and Washington alike. It also has good relations with Israel and (non-moderate) Arab states. This aspect of Turkey makes it a good intermediary for the Europeans. The Europeans do not want war; they want regional crises to be resolved through peaceful means. They know that war would be a disaster for them."

The EU is playing with Turkey, Ermist Khori, Al Akhbar, and Monday December 10, 2007

"The Turks are enjoying their well-earned pride and their economic success. This success has placed Turkey among the world's 15 most important economies. It has

become the world's sixth largest producer and exporter of textiles. These and other developments have bewitched visitors to Turkey. This makes Egyptians such as me wistful. Because when Sultan Selim conquered Egypt in the 16th century he was dazzled by the progress and vitality in the arts and sciences. He took many talented artisans and artists back to the capital of the Ottoman Empire. There were scholars in this group as well. These people lived in Ottoman lands for centuries and transferred their knowledge and experience. Later on Sultan Selim sent them back to Egypt, though some opted to stay behind.

"Upon reading about a boat full of poor and unemployed Egyptians seeking to enter Turkey illegally my shame doubled. Sadness and bitterness welled up inside me. In the event, the boat was unable to survive the big waves that washed over it and it sank. The dreams of those 90 Egyptian youths sank as well. Once upon time Egyptians would go to Turkey to teach their arts and their trade. Now they were jobless and ending up dead on Turkey's shores.

Letter from Turkey, Fahmi Howeydi, al-Sharq al Awsad, December 27, 2007

Another matter worthy of comment is the sparseness of articles on the effects of domestic reforms on political life, human rights and democracy. The reason for this is the closure case launched against the AKP following the July 2007 elections. For this reason Arab public opinion failed to grasp the scope of the EU reforms and the improvements in Turkish laws. As far as they were concerned, the power struggle between "secular forces" and the elected government was continuing full force. The fact that the often anti-democratic means deployed to unseat the Islam-rooted AKP came to naught, made the ruling party all the more popular in the Arab media and among the Arab public.

"The secular fundamentalists are wasting their time. It is not only Turkish public opinion that is opposed to them. The West no longer wants to be on board their sinking ship. The success of Erdoğan's political vision and ideas will be of benefit to the entire world. The most lucrative project to resolve the tensions between Islam, secularism and democracy in the Muslim World is Erdoğan's project. It will help build bridges to Europe."

Turkey: The Secularist Mafia is Obstructing the Islamic Civilisation Project, Yasser Abu Hilalah, Al-Ghad, Jordan.

Even the pro-nationalist Egyptian media, which tends to view Turkey as both a rival and an outsider that should keep its nose out of Arab affairs, expressed its admiration for Turkey's performance.

It is worth citing in this connection an article written by Mustafa el-Faki, an Egyptian journalist and member of parliament from the ruling National Democratic Party. He is also the head of the parliament's foreign relations committee.

“Turkey is a country whose stature that we Arabs have failed to take sufficient advantage of. We did not enlist its support to defend our own position in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The same can be said of our position regarding Iraq and Iran. In the Arab mind the image of Turkey is associated with sultans, palaces, wars and conquests. This historical baggage is an obstacle to friendship between Turkey and the Arabs. The Turks have rightly determined that pursuit of EU membership is a better option than that of leading the Middle East. This is a relative matter and it is for the Turks to decide. They are the ones who are suffering the consequences of being stuck between their Ottoman heritage and the principles of a modern and secular state.

“Let us be brave enough to confess that we failed to develop healthy ties with the Turks over the past few decades. We held them at arm’s length on the grounds that they were Israel’s strategic partner and that Turkey and Israel were partners in the military industrial sector. Other times it was because Turkey was seen as a pawn for American and NATO interests in the region. We must have forgotten the ingenious position adopted by Turkey when America occupied Iraq. Thanks to its strategy Turkey won lots of friends but did not lose any. Yes, if we came to understand Turkey’s significance and gave it observer status alongside Iran in the Arab league this was a very wise decision. It came too late, however.”

Turkey and the Arabs, from the Ottomans to Secularism, Mustafa el-Faki, Al Hayat, 16.07.2008

The Arab world’s admiration for Turkey peaked with its performance at the January 2009 Davos summit. That is when Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan quit the meeting after accusing the Israeli President Shimon Peres of being proud of killing Palestinians. Footage of that scene is among the five most viewed videos on Al-Jazeera’s television website.

Some commentators suggested a return to the Ottoman era if only to re-unite Turks and Arabs. This allowed Arabs to overcome negative feelings such as the idea that Ottomans were colonialists who had held them back.

“Truly one wants the Ottoman Empire’s strength and greatness to return. In a world that deploys all its might to erase and marginalize the existence of Muslims, individual Muslims yearn for all kinds of attitudes and positions that will restore their dignity and make them feel like human beings. Turkey’s Prime Minister Erdoğan made us truly happy and honored us because we share the same history, culture and religion.”

Hind as-Sibai el Idrisi, Arab Times – January 30, 2009.

“This is not the first time since the Justice and Development Party led by Erdoğan was elected to power that the Turks have espoused a pro-Arab stance. We mustn’t forget the clear position adopted by Erdoğan regarding America’s invasion of Iraq. He was fiercely opposed to letting American forces use Turkish soil to attack Iraq.

Although, on the other hand, Arab lands and skies were open to the occupation forces! From the very first day that Israel attacked Gaza, Turkey's stance was far more "Arab" than that displayed by many people who spoke Arabic or claimed to be Arab. Turkey's condemnation of the attacks enhanced its prestige. This was crowned by Turkey's actions in Davos. It was a cold shower for the Arabs who pleaded for Washington and the United Nations to intervene. If the Arabs want to be free of humiliation, they might have to consider a return of the Ottoman state under the guise of a "new Islamic Caliphate" led by Erdoğan."

The return of the Ottomans, Ahmed Zaidan, Alray, January 31, 2009

It is noteworthy that Turkey's stand at Davos and its criticism of Israel's Gaza offensive indirectly helped to calm the anger felt by the people of the Middle East against the West and Israel. The people felt that Erdoğan had wrought revenge on their behalf, albeit through diplomatic means. The EU also became a target because Arab public opinion accused it of remaining indifferent in the face of Israel's assault on Gaza. Not a single article was written about Sarkozy's role in helping to defuse the Gaza crisis, yet Turkey's role and Erdoğan's words and actions were mentioned time and again.

Unequivocally, Turkey's influence in the Middle East was seen as greater and more important than the EU's. In some Arab media it was argued that Turkey was seeking to prove its weight and significance to Europe through its active diplomacy in the Middle East. In so doing it was hoping to overcome Europe's objections to Turkey's membership in the EU. What is important though is that Turkey's actions helped ease regional tensions and the hatred felt by the Arab public regarding the West. Otherwise this hatred might have ballooned into an even greater hatred and, as in the old days, been channeled into attacks against Western interests.

Turkey and Erdoğan's courage was far greater than that displayed by the Arabs and this left Arab leaders and governments in a bind. So did calls for Arab-Turkey cooperation based on the Ottoman model and that is why Saudi Arabia's Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper and Egypt's Al Ahram newspaper all but ignored the Davos affair.

We will end this section by referring to Obama's April 2009 visit to Turkey. In fact Obama's visit was aimed at cashing in on Turkey's rising stature in the Middle East and in the broader Islamic world. The aim was to improve America's battered image in the region. Obama praised Turkey generously and stressed its regional role. Although Obama refrained from calling Turkey

an Islamic state and praised its secular regime, his interest in Turkey was welcomed in the Islamic world. At this point a new comparison emerged between Turkey's relations with America and its relations with Europe.

Obama addressed the Islamic world from the Turkish parliament where Erdoğan's Turkey said "No" to America. Many pro-American Muslims had been hoping that they would be honored by Obama's first visit to a Muslim country, but Obama decided to bequeath this honor on a country that America wanted to win back rather than on one that was already in America's pocket. Neither Erdoğan nor many members of the Turkish parliament speak English but they were able to grasp American rationalism much in the same way that Obama was able grasp Islam and Islamic civilization without speaking either Arabic or Turkish.

After his speech Obama embraced Erdoğan. He embraced a man who had been recorded on camera showing his anger to Perez in Davos and consoling wounded Palestinians who had escaped the butchery in Gaza.

Obama uttered the following words in the Turkish parliament that had rejected the Bush administration's plan to use Turkish soil to attack Iraq and had disregarded America's tremendous pressure and generous rewards. "Let me say this as clearly as I can: The United States is not at war with Islam and will never be." Obama added that America's relationship with the Muslim world "cannot and will not be based on opposition to Al-Qaeda. Far from it. We seek broad engagement based upon mutual interest and mutual respect."

Obama also supported Turkey's EU membership with the following words: "Let me be clear: The United States strongly supports Turkey's bid to become a member of the European Union ... Europe gains by diversity of ethnicity, tradition and faith. It is not diminished by it." With these statements Obama emerged like a giant power, unlike Sarkozy who retained his dwarfism.

Obama-Erdoğan and Power of Democracy. Yaser Ebu Hilale Ürdün el-Gad April 8, 2009.

The Phenomenon of Turkish Television Series Dubbed in Arabic

The rapprochement between Turkey and the Arab world in recent years and Turkey's positive influence on Middle Eastern affairs led to increased curiosity among the Arab people. They wanted to know Turkey more intimately. Starting from 2005 the number of Arab tourists visiting Turkey began to increase. It is probably this curiosity and rapprochement that prompted the private Saudi news channel MBC to embark on a unique adventure. MBC bought the rights for many Turkish television series and having dubbed them in Arabic began broadcasting them.

When these series were first shown in 2008 they became unexpectedly popular. This adventure began with the broadcasting of the TV series “Gumus” (Silver/Noor). Soon after, these series and their main characters left all Arab countries in their thrall. Despite fatwas issued by religious leaders who frowned on the Western-style culture and values that these series inculcated, notably through the romantic relationships around which they revolved, an overwhelming majority of the Arab public stuffed their ears and became avid fans. So much so that Arab TV channels bought the rights to all the series produced in the last three years, dubbed them and broadcast them. In fact these channels began competing with each other to buy the rights to Turkish series. As of today there are 17 Turkish series airing on Arab channels and they have played a big part in drawing Arab tourists to Turkey. The number of Arab tourists visiting Turkey in 2008 jumped a whopping 200 percent.

When we examine the commentary about these series in the Arab media we do not see a direct link between the Arab viewers’ interest in Turkish drama and Arab countries’ policies toward Turkey. That is because in describing the impact of these series, the commentators tend to emphasize the interest shown by Arab viewers in Turkish drama and in beautiful Istanbul, which is often the setting for such series. Yet, it needs to be acknowledged that there is a growing psychological acceptance of Turkey among the Arab public. Turkey, once viewed as an enemy, an outsider and an ally of Israel, has come to be hailed as a country that stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the Arab people and the Arab cause and this psychological acceptance has played a part in the success of Turkish series.

The fact that these series incorporated common values and traditions alongside free, European lifestyles has also contributed to their popularity. Iranian series are of a high quality and are dubbed in Arabic as well, but they do not command the same enthusiasm and interest among Arab viewers.

“Turkish series were successful because they touched the hearts of people and brought out their secret thoughts. It is thanks to these series that tourism in Turkey has flourished this year.

“The success of Turkish TV series ‘Kaybollar Yılları’ (The Lost Years), ‘İhlamlar Altında’ (Under the Linden Tree) and ‘Gümüş (Silver)’ encouraged Turkish businessmen and air companies to lure Arab tourists to Turkey. Thanks to this trade, Arab tourists were able to see firsthand Turkey’s natural beauty, its Islamic heritage and the customs and traditions of the Turkish people. The fact that the majority of Turks are Muslims and that they have preserved their Islamic traditions

dating from Ottoman times is of great significance. This, in turn, has made Turkish series even more popular in the Arab world. Another factor contributing to their success are the many similarities between Turkish and Arab customs. Arabs are also drawn by the simple way in which romantic and social themes were presented in these series. Such themes are rarely touched upon in Arabic drama.”

Turkish series, Dr. Abdullah Al-Ghareeb, Al-Dar newspaper, July 18, 2008

“For months the ‘Noor/Gumus’ series and its hero Mohammed/Mehmet have been dominating the agenda. The series is being broadcast via an Arab-run satellite channel. This is a channel that is known throughout the world for broadcasting high-quality artistic material to a very wide audience. Almost everyone acknowledges the popularity of this romantic series. The series embodies all the criteria that guarantee success. This leads viewers to eagerly await each episode.”

The phenomenon of Turkish series and the Noor series example, Zamal Sheikh Yayha, Civilised Dialogue, August 2008.

Conclusions

By following Turkey’s relations with the European Union, Arab readers have gained a deeper and broader understanding of the EU, its structure, its functions and its goals. For more than a decade, this process has provided ample material for the Arab press. Thanks to such coverage Arab readers have been given the opportunity to become better acquainted with the EU and its sister institutions.

At first, the prevalent view in the Arab world was that Turkey was pursuing a pipe dream: The EU would never accept Turkey. The most important reason for this was the differences in culture between Turkey and Europe. The membership conditions laid down by the EU constituted a direct affront to Turkey’s sovereignty and pride. They implied a subjugation of Turkey to Europe’s will. This view changed because of two important factors. One was Turkey’s success in implementing EU reforms. The positive effects of these reforms were felt as Turkey’s economy, human rights record and democracy all grew stronger. The gap between Turkey and the Arab states was growing. The other factor was the EU’s 1999 decision to anoint Turkey as an official candidate for membership followed by its 2004 decision to start membership talks with Turkey.

This forced the Arab world to re-evaluate its views on Turkey’s campaign to join the EU as Turkey’s efforts began to be taken seriously. As the Arab public became aware of the positive impact of the EU reforms on Turkey’s economic and political life, its attitudes began to soften. When high-ranking European officials declared their opposition to Turkey’s membership

Europe's actions came under attack. Soon after Arab regimes that failed to match Turkey's success became targets as well.

Turkey's EU process also helped to change the views of Islamist Arabs with regard to Europe. The Arabs used to believe that membership in the EU would force Turkey to change its culture and to accept Christian and Western culture in its stead. They saw the rise to power of Necmettin Erbakan and the Welfare Party in 1996 as marking the end of the European dream and as the start of Turkey's return to the Islamic sphere. But Erbakan's old friends in the AKP insisted that there were no contradictions between Turkey's Islamic identity and its quest for EU membership. They were able to prove that the EU embodied political criteria that allowed democracy and human rights to flourish. Islamic societies could reap the advantages of these criteria and implement them as well. This situation prompted Islamist Arabs to alter their views of the EU as a purely Christian club.

The EU's rejection of Turkey without any plausible justification, however, would amount to the betrayal of Muslims by the West and to a rejection of dialogue efforts by the Muslim world.

The September 11 attacks and the West's accusations that Islam was linked to terror enhanced Turkey's EU membership drive in the eyes of Arabs and Muslims. It became a test of Western intentions toward the Islamic world. If the West were to accept Turkey, then this would prove its sincerity. The dialogue between civilizations would be completed and the tension caused by radicals on both sides would abate. The EU's rejection of Turkey without any plausible justification, however, would amount to the betrayal of Muslims by the West and to a rejection of dialogue efforts by the Muslim world. A rebuttal of Turkey would signify a refusal to integrate the Islamic world's most advanced country in terms of its economy, democracy and human rights.

The EU's image in the Arab media began to improve after the start of membership negotiations in 2004. Its evaluations of European leaders were closely linked to their attitudes toward Turkey. The most obvious example of this were the criticisms directed at Sarkozy for his opposition to Turkey's membership. If the EU were to reject Turkey this would lead to an Arab

perception of the union as an exclusively Christian club that spurns all dialogue with Muslims. This argument was repeated in many articles that held up Turkey's membership bid as an opportunity for dialogue between East and West. Turkey's case proved that Islam and democracy were compatible and that a Muslim nation could exist within a democratic society free of violence.

Arab media's evaluations of European leaders were closely linked to their attitudes toward Turkey. The most obvious example of this were the criticisms directed at Sarkozy for his opposition to Turkey's membership.

In analyzing many articles we also came across negative views in the Arab press about the reforms that Turkey had to carry out. The reforms were seen as an imposition of the EU's will and it wasn't until the Arab press became aware of the positive effects that they began to praise the reforms. Thanks to these changes the military's influence over politics had somewhat diminished and the AKP was therefore able to govern more freely.

If one were to summarize the Arab public's views on Turkey's EU membership process one would conclude that in general the Arab media applauded the reforms. It recognized that they had neither transformed Turkey into a Christian country nor polluted the identity of the Turkish people. Still, the Arab media did not disguise its distrust of Europe. It accused the EU of dragging its feet on Turkish membership. One also should stress that because of the EU's attitude most Arabs doubt that Turkey will ever become a full member.

Finally, it should be noted that articles touching on the improvement in Turkish-Arab relations and on the success of Turkey's foreign policy outnumber articles that talk about Turkey's lagging commitment to EU reforms over the past three years. That is because we were unable to find a single Arab comment on this subject. Perhaps the reason for this is that the articles that were written about Turkey-EU relations were all in support of Turkey's membership. Such articles insisted that if Turkey were left out of the EU then it would not be the losing side. For, Turkey has achieved significant political and economic progress and the Middle East's doors are always open to Turkey.

TURKEY'S QUEST FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION: PAKISTANI AND MUSLIM INDIAN PERSPECTIVES

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Introduction

Turkey's efforts to make a transition from a candidate to full member of the European Union has spurred a huge debate in Europe. What really provokes interest even in countries that have no visible or immediate material interest in this matter is the question of Turkish identity, and whether or not it is congruent with what modern day Europe is and how the major actors in the EU might determine the future growth and direction of the community and its relationship with the approximate countries and regions.

The study attempts to analyze how Pakistani and some Indian Muslim intellectuals, commentators and observers of Muslim and European affairs view EU's treatment of Turkey's application for membership. We have used material from the print media, mostly English, but have also included two of the most influential Urdu newspapers, *Nawa-i-Waqt* and *Jang*. The *Nawa-i-Waqt* has a conservative, right-wing leaning and represents a specific worldview on issues concerning the Muslim world. The *Jang* is a mainstream newspaper. The English newspapers that have been used are generally centrist and quite neutral and don't follow a particular ideological or political line. We have also interviewed academics and heads of influential think tanks.

While reading articles in the print media or talking to our interviewees we had several questions in mind: What do Pakistani and Muslim Indian intelligentsia think of the EU and its handling of Turkey's application for membership? Why hasn't the EU admitted Turkey already? Is it because Turkey does not fulfill requirements of membership or it is because existing EU members want to confine it to white, Christian states of Europe? How much is Islamic nationhood a factor in the imagination of EU members in not fully accepting Turkey? Will the EU ever accept Turkey as a full member and why or why not?

What follows is a descriptive account of comments from selected Pakistan and Indian (Muslim) intellectuals who we have interviewed or have read their articles in newspapers and magazines.

Descriptive Account of Views

Dr. Ijaz Shafi Gilani (President Gallup Pakistan, President Gilani Research Foundation and Visiting Professor of Political Science, International Islamic University, Islamabad) is of the view that “Europe’s exposure to Turkey is of longer duration and intensity. It is not something which is unknown to two civilizations.” He thinks historically it has been a “relationship of competition and hostility. And it is still the same. The relationship between the two might improve because Turkey is getting stronger in a mature and confident manner.” When we posed him this question: Does Turkey’s identity and location matter to Europe in considering its application for EU membership? His response was the “color of the EU is overwhelmingly white. Ninety percent of its population is either Christian or have no religion. If Turkey enters the EU, there will be another religion entering its fold. The polls show there is no support for Turkey’s entry into the EU.”¹

Dr. Tahir Amin (chairman, Department of International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad) thinks “Europe views Turkey essentially as a Muslim country. If it becomes integrated with the EU, it will aggravate immigration problems. Some of the EU member countries have problems with Turkish immigrants. There has been Islamic re-insurgence of Islamic identity in Europe, which makes local communities uncomfortable. They are apprehensive about Islamic fundamentalism.” He argues the “EU cannot accept a state with Muslim majority in the union. Muslim identity is a number one problem for them.”²

Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmad (associate professor of International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad) has a rather mixed view of EU’s treatment of Turkey. He thinks the primary reason for delay, if not absolute rejection, of Turkish membership is that it is a “Muslim society. And Europe has residual grievances of Ottoman Turkey. Turkey embraced the European model of state and society under Kemalism, and throughout the last century it wanted

1 Author’s interview with Dr. Ijaz Shafi Gilani, Islamabad, April 27, 2009.

2 Author’s interview with Dr. Tahir Amin, Islamabad, March 12 and April 27, 2009.

to be part of Europe and not the Middle East, but it has not been fully accepted.”

According to Khalid Rehman (executive director, Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad), “the EU considers Turkey as a Muslim country and therefore a problem. The Islamic identity of Turkey is an issue for it. Secularism accepts Christian identity of Europe but it cannot reconcile that with the Islamic identity of Turkey, although the later is constitutionally a secular state. There is strong opinion in Europe against Turkey’s acceptance into the EU because it is a Muslim country.” He also thinks that besides the Muslim character of Turkey, there are technical reasons like negotiations on issues of democracy, human rights and changes in the penal code that will take time before Turkey meets the standards of EU membership.³

Ejaz Haider (consulting editor of *The Friday Times* and op-ed editor of *Daily Times*, Lahore) doesn’t look at EU’s treatment of Turkey’s application in absolute terms or in black and white. He thinks it is a combination of both the Muslim identity of Turkey as well as other problems associated with the country. In his opinion, “the EU has not accepted Turkey because it has a puritanical European view of Turkey. It has a sense that Turkey is big and Muslim.” He thinks there are multiple views in Europe of whether or not Turkey should be accepted into the EU. “It depends where one is getting the perspective from – the liberal or conservative quarters.” He thinks “there is a question of discrimination against Turkey because countries with lesser credentials from Eastern Europe have been admitted. This leaves a big question mark on whether the EU will bring in Muslim Turkey.”⁴

Dr. Shireen Mazari (former director general of the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad) thinks of the EU primarily as a Christian bloc of countries in which “Turkey will have no chance ever to enter into. Turkey will not become a full member because the Islamic identity of Turkey is deeply etched into Christian Europe’s mind.” But she also thinks there are other reasons as well. In her opinion, “Christian Europe is concerned about the population size of Turkey. They would have the largest voting bloc in EU institutions and thus greater influence on decision-making.”⁵

3 Author’s interview with Khalid Rahman, Islamabad, March 14 and April 29, 2009.

4 Author’s interview with Ejaz Haider, Lahore, April 4 and April 30, 2009.

5 Author’s interview with Dr. Shireen Mazari, Islamabad, March 9, 2009.

Dr. Zafar Ul-Islam (editor, *Milli Gazette*, New Delhi, India) thinks there is a long history of European rejection of Turkey. He thinks it is an “old history. Turkey has not being accepted by Europe since 1908 and after 1923 secular reforms. Underdevelopment of Turkey is not an issue because countries with economic conditions worse than Turkey have been accepted.” Why then does he think Turkey has not been accepted? “Turkey is a Muslim nation. It doesn’t matter if it has a secular ideology.” And what does he think of the EU? “It is Christian.” For that reason he thinks that Turkey will never be accepted.

Professor Kalim Bahadur (former professor of Middle Eastern Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India) answered questions I sent him via email. “In my view religion seems to be the major factor that determines European countries’ attitude to the Turkish application for membership. It is not withstanding the fact that Turkey has been associated with numerous economic and political organizations of the EU.” He however thinks that “9/11, terrorist attacks in the U.S., reactions to the Danish cartoons and the increasing migration of Turkish workers to France and Germany and other European countries have accentuated the so-called Islamophobia.” Other factors like Turkey’s human rights record, the military’s role in the country’s political system and the dispute around Cyprus are only minor issues but good enough to put off the case. He is of the opinion that “in the present situation the prospect of a Christian only European Community appears to be very comforting to the leaders of these countries.”⁶

Iftikhar Gilani (prominent journalist based in New Delhi, India) thinks the West (Europe) is “inherently biased toward Muslim countries,” which he thinks is reflected in the attitude of the EU toward Turkey. They “have suspicions about Turkey as a Muslim country.” But that is not the only issue. Gilani thinks the Muslim countries (without specifically talking about Turkey) don’t have much regard for human rights and minorities. They have failed to develop a pluralistic, democratic and stable political order.” How is that relevant to Turkey? The overall “image of Islam and the Muslims hurts Turkey’s case for EU membership.”⁷

Jawed Naqvi (prominent journalist based in Delhi) thinks Turkey presents a very complex case. In the first place, what does it mean to be a Muslim

6 Telephone interview with Professor Kalim Bahadur on April 30, 2009 and receipt of his response to written question via email on May 1, 2009.

7 Author’s telephone interview with Iftikhar Gilani on April 30, 2009.

state? Can Turkey and Saudi Arabia be put in one category as Muslim states? "Turkey is not being denied full membership because of racism. Islam has not been a factor in Turkey's membership in NATO, so why should it be for EU membership." In his opinion, Turkey has been an integral part of the Western strategic perspective and it has acted as a spearhead of their strategy in the Middle East (for example recognition of Israel and accommodation of it, unlike many other Muslim states). It is a part of Western domination. Even among the Muslim countries it represents the West and the Western perspective." Then what is the reason for Turkey not being accepted as a full member by the EU? "Turkey is an unstable democracy and it has a questionable human rights record."⁸

Rashmee Z. Ahmed (Indian journalist and commentator) makes an interesting comment in suggesting that European fears about Turkey are not justified. She berates Europe for it being "childishly fearful" that "Muslim, fast-multiplying Turkey could swallow it whole if it is allowed into its favorite club, the European Union. But she thinks that behind these fears the real reason is that "Europe is running scared of the gobbling Turkey. It would rather like Ankara to fall down on a point of principle, such as insufficient Kurdish human rights."⁹

Another editorial commentator Masooda Bano (Pakistan) takes a similar view of the EU. She thinks "the EU's fears of Turkey's possible inclusion reflects an intolerance of Islamic beliefs; a tendency to immediately equate Islam with fanaticism." She relates this view to the concerns in Germany and France about Turks in "Muslim neighborhoods. The women in headscarves, the minarets emerging on the German landscape and the calls to prayer are generating a strong reaction against Muslims who are increasingly being viewed as alien to German values." She thinks "fears are also expressed in the EU about adding 70 million Muslims to the EU. Concerns are also raised that Turkey is not fully secular and democratic. The "key concerns relate to including a Muslim population in a largely Christian union where there are general fears about Islam as a religion and its followers as fanatics."¹⁰

Nadia Abbasi (researcher, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad) takes a different view of why the EU is reluctant to accept Turkey. She thinks

8 Author's telephone interview with Jawed Naqvi on May 3, 2009.

9 Rashmee Z. Ahmed, "Europe fears 'gobbling Turkey'," *The Times of India (New Delhi)*, September 12, 2004.

10 Masooda Bano, "Prejudices to be challenged," *The News International (Rawalpindi)*, December 18, 2004.

“the Turkish Republic has been a secular state for almost eight decades, much longer than many members of the EU. Turkish entry into the EU seems to be more a power sharing problem than an ideological one because Turkey as a member of the EU club would have the same, if not more, votes than Germany, given that its population could rise to 80 million over the next decade.”¹¹

Some of the commentators argue that even if Turkey eventually fulfils all the conditions set out for it by the EU, it still will not be accepted as a full member.¹² Why will it not be accepted? We find a mix of answers as referred to above. Shadaba Islam, who files stories for *Dawn* from Brussels and has commented frequently on this subject, says “Fears about the entry of mainly Muslim Turkey are also believed to have contributed to the cold-shouldering of the treaty by Dutch and French nationals.”¹³ She further argues that “cold-shouldering it will not only slow down the reform process in Turkey but also send a negative message about Europe’s tolerance and openness to the Islamic world.”¹⁴ Another editorial page writer Mohammad Jamil assesses Turkey’s case in the same manner, saying “Turkey’s opponents have mala fide intentions ... There is a perception that they do not wish to have a Muslim country in the EU’s fold. Though they pretend to be broadminded and tolerant of other religions, they are not.”¹⁵

There is also a view that “Turkey is neither fowl nor fish” in the context of Muslims states and the West debate.¹⁶ According to one view “most of the Muslim countries think Turkey is less a Muslim state and more a secular, liberal state, while the European countries think no matter how liberal Turkey becomes, it will remain essentially a Muslim state. And for that matter may not mix (culturally) with Europe.”¹⁷

Tariq Fatemi (former Pakistani diplomat and ambassador) makes a similar argument. “Even larger numbers were deeply suspicious of what the entry of a huge Muslim country, Turkey, would do to the Judaeo-Christian character of the EU. In fact, the Turkish factor was exploited nakedly by the

11 Nadia M. Abbasi, “Resistance to Turkey’s EU membership,” *Dawn* (Islamabad), July 15, 2004.

12 Anwar Ghazi, “Will Turkey join the EU?” *Jang* (Urdu daily, Lahore), January 29, 2008.

13 Shadaba Islam, “Half a century of the EU,” *Dawn*, March 7, 2007.

14 Shadaba Islam, “EU confused over Turkey,” *Dawn*, December 12, 2006.

15 Mohammad Jamil, “EU: the case of Turkey,” *The Post* (Lahore), December 14, 2006.

16 Jawed Naqvi, *op.cit.*

17 Ahmad Kalim Khan, “Will Turkey join the Europe” *Nawa-i-Millat* (Urdu weekly, Lahore), November 15, 2006.

right wing parties in both France and the Netherlands to create religious and economic fears.”¹⁸

Which countries in the EU, according to South Asian intellectuals, fear and oppose Turkey more than others? Germany and France top the list. Why does Germany oppose Turkish entry? It has three million Turks on its soil and “if Turkey becomes an EU member, then more Turkish migrants will settle in Germany.”¹⁹ The French are “groaning under the weight of the EU’s largest population of Muslims and have remembered – with some assistance from their charismatic presidential hopeful (now president) Nicolas Sarkozy – Turkey is not European enough to qualify.” And “Austria, with its long memories of holding back the Ottoman invaders from the gates of Vienna, has suddenly and stridently offered a principled objection to integrating a huge Muslim nation into the Judaeo-Christian club.”²⁰

Analysis

We need to put these comments into an intellectual context. We think it is necessary to briefly debate what really informs academics and editorial writers and ordinary folks in Pakistan and India about the character of modern Turkey, its foreign policy orientation, interests and its dream of joining the European Union and why the EU appears to be “resisting” Turkey’s entry into the union.

Turkey under the Ottomans, its central place among Islamic communities and countries and the ongoing intellectual debate that Islam and the West constitute two different ‘worlds’ have greatly influenced the views and opinions of most of the Pakistanis. The Pakistani intellectual in general views Turkey through the lenses of Islam and history. He has a number of reference points for his understanding of Turkey and its efforts to integrate with Europe. The first is the deep feeling of Pan-Islamism among the Muslims of the subcontinent. This affinity toward the Islamic countries, their heroes and their concerns and problems was shaped primarily by the minority syndrome, as the Indian Muslims looked outward for support against the Hindu majority. It is also important to

18 Tariq Fatemi, “A serious setback to the EU,” *Dawn*, June 27, 2005.

19 M. M. Hasan, “Turkey and its quest for EU membership,” *Nawa-i-Waqt* (Urdu daily, Lahore), January 14, 2005.

20 Rashmee Roshan Lall, “Will EU open its gates for Turkey?” *The Times of India*, October 2, 2005.

note that the Muslim aristocracy on the subcontinent during the Mughal and the earlier Sultanate period had strong Turkish, Persian and Central Asian elements. There are still traces of their influence in the aristocratic classes of Pakistan.

In Pakistan, the idea of an Islamic world runs supreme in the minds of most of the citizens, intellectuals and media persons. That generally colors their opinions and views about what happens in the outside world, particularly relating to the Muslim countries and societies. Their feeling toward them is that of support and sympathy.

However Turkey is a very distinctive Muslim state compared to the rest of the Islamic countries. It has a professed policy of secularism, has greatly modernized and has clear European or Western orientation in its foreign and security policy. It is a NATO member, has a very close strategic partnership with the United States and has over time reformed its state institutions along secular-modernist lines.

Pakistanis commonly hold the view that Turkish society is divided along secular/religious lines. But there is clear a difference among them on how strong is this divide and how similar or dissimilar this is to the secular-modern vs. traditional-Islamic trend in Pakistan and other Muslims societies. Even Islamist-leaning intellectuals believe that “the Islamic character of Turkey is different from the rest of the Muslim world” because of deep Kemalist modernization.”²¹ Other scholars we have interviewed take the same position that Turkey’s path has been very different in modernizing itself. Rehman thinks “Turkey is a model for Pakistan because (Turkey) is rooted in traditions but moves with the modern world.”²²

There is a reason why Pakistanis, like many others from the Islamic world and European states, are keenly interested in the process of how Turkey reshapes itself and in its relationship with the EU. Whether or not Turkey becomes an EU member may also determine if the country plays a larger role as a middle geopolitical and security ground between somewhat stable, peaceful and settled Europe and the Middle East, a region that faces internal violence and multiple challenges of security and state formation.

21 Author's interview with Dr. Tahir Amin, Islamabad, March 12, 2009.

22 Author's interview with Khalid Rahman, Islamabad, March 14, 2009.

Significance of the Turkish Experience

What makes Turkey a unique model for the Muslim world, Central Asia and the larger Southwest Asian region, including Pakistan in particular, is the unique historical and cultural position that it occupies between two different worlds of Islam and Europe. Will Turkey be accepted into the European Union? Our assessment is that the majority of intellectuals and editorial and opinion page writers base their answer to this question on how they view Turkey. In Pakistan, the conservatives, a rough label for those who would like Islam to take root in economic and political development or at best blend this process with Islamic shades of modernization, argue that Turkey will not be accepted as a full member. Tahir Amin is quite clear on this point: "There are cultural and civilizational reasons on the part of Europe. They cannot accept a state with a Muslim majority in the EU. It is a number one problem among many others, like the demographic bulge of Turkey and the threat of migration into Europe."²³

Will Turkey ever become a member of the European Union? Amin's view is that it is not going to join in the next ten years and "not until Europe changes its outlook toward Muslim countries." Asked if there were any other reasons for the EU to not accept Turkey, he gave a clear-cut answer: "These are the principle reasons."²⁴

In contrast to other Pakistani intellectuals, Ishtiaq Ahmad takes the view that cultural and civilizational divides that have taken a lot of space in the popular media are not real when they come to Turkey. Not only is Turkey a "very different" Muslim nation, it wants to bridge the gap with the Western world and it is a better candidate than any other country to become a model for integrating the Muslim world with the West. Its modernist transformation is irreversible and it wants more of the same. Ahmad sees no fundamental difference between the secularist and traditionalist sectors of Turkish society. Yes, they are politically different, have different approaches to issues like pursuing the EU course or how tradition can be blended with modernity and secularism without eliminating either of the two but neither can a very clear social or philosophical boundary be drawn between them. He disagrees with the contention that the Justice and Development Party,

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

or AKP's, pursuit of membership is primarily or even only for domestic political considerations – for redefining civil-military relations.

There are real material interests that Turkey can realize by integrating with Europe. Turkey, according to Ahmad, has “gained a lot in education, social development and in civil society initiatives even just by starting the membership process.”

Analysts we have interviewed and the ideas gleaned from the opinion pages have a great sympathy and support for Turkey joining the EU. Some of them seem at pain to find out why Turkey is being barred while states from Eastern Europe with lesser political and economic credentials are being admitted. All of them argue that Turkey is not a Muslim state in the way many other states are and its religion-leaning parties like “the AKP have culturally and politically evolved and accepted the notion that it is not necessary to reverse existing secularization. Rather they find it acceptable to Islamic politics.”²⁵ The so-called Islamic parties of Turkey unlike their counterparts in other Muslim countries don't place the idea of *millat* (Islamic community or fraternity) at the center of their politics. Rather, they highly desire integrating with the European nations. Ejaz Haider argues that the AKP has transformed itself and its Islamic politics and is no different from the Christian Democratic parties in European countries.²⁶

No other Muslim country has settled many of the social issues that have religious imprint as well as Turkey has and its transition to democracy and modern governance is far better than others, too.

Turkey inside the European Union will have incentive for realistically addressing largely perceptual issues that create conflict between Islam and the West. No other Muslim country has settled many of the social issues that have religious imprint as well as Turkey has and its transition to democracy and modern governance is far better than others, too. That may address some of the irrational fears about Islamic culture, values and Islam itself being frozen in time.

²⁵ Author's interview with Ejaz Haider, Lahore, April 4, 2009.

²⁶ Ibid.

Conclusion

Turkey is the only predominantly Muslim state that has modernized without losing its traditional Islamic culture. Its transformation into a secular democratic state breaks two widely held myths. The first is that democracy and rule of law are only Western traditions because they are embedded in cultural and religious traditions. The other is that states with Muslim majority populations cannot democratize, also for quite opposite cultural traditions. In the words of former Prime Minister and President Suleyman Demirel: "The Turkish experience has amply demonstrated through the years that secular democracy can prosper in a predominantly Muslim society while also preserving traditional values."²⁷ Turkey, as model of tradition and modernity, draws a lot of attention from intellectuals, politicians and policymakers in Pakistan and other Muslim states. The formal, institutional integration of Turkey with Europe will strengthen secular democratic forces in Muslim states that are locked in a struggle with traditional Islamist groups for defining the identity of states and societies in the modern world.

Turkey, as model of tradition and modernity, draws a lot of attention from intellectuals, politicians and policymakers in Pakistan and other Muslim states.

Pakistani intellectuals reject the EU's fears about Turkey. They believe efforts by some European countries to block Turkey's "possible inclusion reflects an intolerance of Islamic beliefs and a tendency to equate Islam with fanaticism."²⁸ While there appears to be some scepticism about whether or not Turkey will be accepted as a full member, they believe if that happens, Turkey will serve as a cultural and civilizational bridge that is much needed at a time when Islam and Muslim societies are mercilessly demonized in the Western press.

There is also great interest in Turkey's modernization and admiration for what it has been able to achieve. Its economic and political development

²⁷ Quoted by N. Ravi, "Where Islam jostles for political space," *Hindu*, May 29, 2007.

²⁸ Massoda Bano, "Prejudices to be challenged," *The News International (Rawalpindi)*, December 18, 2004.

is widely considered as a model for Pakistan and other states. Its reforms to law, its constitution and political institutions make Turkey more democratic than it has been during the past decades. They argue that even if the negotiation process for full membership drags on, the positive gains are already obvious in terms of great access to European markets, the flow of capital and technology and assistance in social and educational development.

The Pakistani and Muslim intellectuals in India take a bipolar view (Islam and the West) of the international reality and see the prospects of Turkey in the EU through this prism. While they argue that Turkey has already made considerable gains and may continue to do so even if membership negotiations go on without end, the issue of Turkey's Muslim identity will become a factor if it doesn't succeed in obtaining membership in the community. Turkey can amend anything, change institutional settings, rewrite laws and change social and political conditions to meet EU standards, but in the end it may not change the historical fountains of its culture, values and traditions. The great hope is that Europe may redefine itself as a culturally plural continent with so many religions, ethnicities and races that share a common social and political space.

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