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Turkey and Europe: Will East Meet West?

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This December the European Union will make one of its most difficult decisions: whether to open final status negotiations with Turkey on full accession to the union. Turkey's application presents Europe with unique challenges and opportunities. Muslims have had a long, illustrious, and often tragic presence in southern and eastern Europe. With large-scale postwar immigration from Turkey, North Africa, and South Asia, they also have become the second-largest and fastest-growing religious-cultural community in Western Europe.

The challenge of successfully integrating this large population and stabilizing Europe's relations with its vast and crisis-prone southern Islamic rim highlights just what is at stake with Turkey's candidacy for EU membership. Without Muslim migration and labor, European countries that face shrinking growth and aging populations will not be able to sustain acceptable levels of economic productivity. A Turkey that is a full member of the EU is also poised to play a pivotal role in the continent's foreign policies, especially in the neighboring Muslim world.

For the Turks, EU membership promises a resolution of the “Eastern Question” and the crisis of national orientation that emerged in the nineteenth century and has continued to plague Turkish politics and society since the formation of the Turkish republic on the ruins of the Ottoman Muslim empire. Turkish success or failure in this endeavor will also have a major impact on the broader com-

munity of Islamic nations. For centuries Istanbul served as a political lodestar for surrounding Muslim countries. If Turkey is able to resolve the tension between its European and Islamic orientation, it may also be able to play a central role in once again providing a model of leadership and stability for an Islamic world that emerged in the wake of the First World War badly fractured.

HOW WESTERNIZATION WAS WON

Turkey's attempts to accommodate itself to European norms and institutions predate the creation of the Turkish republic by nearly a century. During the nineteenth century, Ottoman Turkey increasingly undertook modernization and sought to be recognized as a member of the European society of states. It was during the founding of the Turkish republic in 1923, however, that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk equated Turkish modernization with the wholesale adoption of a Western identity. Atatürk wanted to create a modern, homogenous, and secular nation-state. He viewed Turkey's Ottoman-Islamic heritage as the chief obstacle to achieving any and all of these goals. Unfortunately, his view of “Westernization” tended toward the superficial, concentrating on external appearances and manners while notably failing to appreciate the political basis of Western dynamism in the norms of representative government, pluralism, and freedom of thought and expression.

Atatürk undertook a drastic and authoritarian model of modernization by abolishing the Islamic caliphate; adopting the Western alphabet, dress code, and calendar; and, more positively, giving women the right to vote and enter all professions. This top-down modernization project, known as Kemalism, became the chief legitimating ideology of the republican elite. But this elite for decades did not attach much value to liberal-democratic norms,

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which it argued were unsuitable for Turkey. Instead, it legitimized its monopoly of power in a strongly centralizing state by claiming this power was indispensable to fulfilling Atatürk's vision of creating a "European Turkey."

The cardinal principles of Kemalism were secularism and civic nationalism. The secularism was derived from the French-Jacobin tradition of laicism and, in contrast to the Anglo-American tradition, sought to circumscribe and ultimately do away with religion as a vestigial superstition. Kemalism viewed even the magnificent cultural and aesthetic legacy of Ottoman Islamic civilization with hostility because it was perceived as highlighting Turkey's "Oriental" heritage. Yet, despite the best efforts of Kemalism, the Ottoman Islamic tradition remained the basis of ordinary Turks' identity and culture. When republican officials realized that they could not eradicate this legacy through fiat, they decided to heavily regulate religion through the Directorate of Religious Affairs.

This process of forced secularization had two profound and paradoxical effects on Turkish Islam. Islam became an identity in opposition to the more authoritarian and antidemocratic aspects of Kemalism; and, simultaneously, it underwent a major Western-style rationalization and reformation to counter state pressure and charges of obscurantism. This transformation was also crucially tied to the emergence of a vibrant Anatolian middle class. It continues to set the dominant mode of Turkish-Islamic political engagement and ideology—in contrast to prevailing trends in the Arab world and South Asia, which are centered around the Sharia (Islamic law) and anti-Western Salafi-Wahhabi-influenced Islamist political movements. Indeed, the ruling Muslim-oriented Justice and Development Party of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has, in this fundamental sense, more in common with traditional European Christian Democratic parties than with many political Islamic movements in neighboring Muslim countries.

THE TURKISH MELTING POT

The second pillar of Kemalism centered on creating an ethnically homogeneous nation-state. To a remarkable degree, the republic succeeded in assimilating millions of Muslim Albanian, Bosnian,

Greek, Bulgarian, Tatar, Cherkess, Chechen, and Georgian refugees as "ethnic Turks." Ironically, in doing so, the nascent Kemalist republic followed the Ottoman system of determining national identity on the basis of nominal religious affiliation. Thus, at the end of the Turkish-Greek War in 1921, Turkish-speaking Orthodox Christians from Anatolia were sent to Greece and Greek-speaking Muslims from the Aegean were sent to Turkey during a two-year exchange of populations.

The one notable exception to this policy of ethnic assimilation was the largely tribally organized Kurdish population of south and eastern Anatolia. The policy of draconian secularization and ethnic assimilation sparked the Kurdish revolt of Sheikh Said in 1925, which was more religiously inspired than ethnically derived. Along with the secular-religious divide, the "Kurdish question" would emerge as the

major fault line in Turkish state-society relations. It also brought considerable criticism of Turkey when it again exploded into a full-scale insurgency in the 1990s, claiming more than 30,000 lives.

The Islamic and Kurdish questions figure centrally

in Turkey's ascension into Europe through a supremely ironic permutation that could not have been imagined by Atatürk or his opponents. The most ardent proponents of Turkey's EU membership are the Muslim democratic-oriented parties led by Prime Minister Erdogan's Justice and Development Party and their supporters in the Anatolian heartland. Indeed, Erdogan's government has done more in two years to undertake sweeping political-judicial reforms and address human rights concerns than virtually all the previous postwar Turkish political parties. These include laws to defend basic civil liberties, safeguard freedom of political and cultural expression, and penalize torture. His government has also shown a determination to settle the thorny Cyprus conflict and normalize relations with EU neighbor Greece.

The most threatened and recalcitrant segments of Turkish state and society are now the Kemalist military-bureaucratic guardians of Atatürk's long march to the West. To understand how this remarkable role-reversal has come about since the "soft coup" of 1997, when the military unseated an Islamist-leaning government, one must trace the

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evolution and liberalization of Turkish politics and the economy in the wake of the previous military coup in 1980.

ANATOLIAN TIGERS

After the 1980 coup (which occurred in response to larger-scale violence between right-wing and leftist political forces), Prime Minister Turgut Özal emerged as the first Turkish leader since the late Adnan Menderes to attempt to address the alienation of traditional Anatolian society from the political establishment. Özal, who had spent some time in devoutly Mormon Salt Lake City, Utah, became convinced that religious faith and traditional values need not be an impediment to socioeconomic success. He also viewed Turkey's authoritarian political culture and statist economy as the chief causes of sclerotic national development and societal polarization. Özal's liberalizing reforms in the political and economic sector were crucial in allowing the emergence of a dynamic market-oriented Anatolian Muslim bourgeoisie. The financial resources and patronage of these "Anatolian tigers" would in turn fuel cultural and sociopolitical modernization outside the Kemalist authoritarian and anti-Islamic purview.

Much of this development was initially socioeconomic and cultural rather than political. Politically, the transformation manifested itself in the success of Özal's Motherland Party and a coalition of center-right political forces through the 1980s. Following Özal's sudden death in 1993, the Motherland Party coalition splintered. A new government led by Prime Minister Tansu Ciller and the True Path Party came to power. In the 1995 general elections, Necmettin Erbakan's Welfare Party won 21.4 percent of the vote, allowing an explicitly Muslim political party for the first time to become the dominant partner in a coalition government with Ciller's True Path Party.

The Welfare Party had its origins in the political Islamic movement started by Erbakan just prior to yet another earlier military coup in 1971. The Turkish military decided to tolerate this tempered manifestation of political Islam as a potential domestic ally in the cold war struggle against leftist movements. The party that grew out of this movement took part in elections and became a minority member of coalition governments beginning in 1973. Erbakan sought to promote his party as the voice of the marginalized pious Muslims of Anatolia against the "Westernized and oppressive" establishment parties. By 1995 Erbakan's policies and rhetoric had

been moderated by the influence of the Anatolian middle class within the party. However, he still remained committed to an Islamic identity in sharp contrast to the official European identity and program of Westernization, which for Erbakan and many followers was still associated with Kemalist authoritarianism and anti-Muslim zealotry.

After forming his first coalition government, Erbakan was forced out of office in June 1997 by a secular coalition of forces orchestrated by the military. Certain hard-line Kemalist factions within the military initiated a number of policies to cleanse the public sphere of any political Islamic manifestations, including the banning of the Welfare Party by the Constitutional Court in 1998. The chief charge leveled against Erbakan was that he was threatening to derail Turkey from its European journey by giving preference to ties with neighboring Muslim countries and even calling for an "Islamic NATO and Common Market" (the latter in response to the Bosnian Muslim carnage that enraged many Turks). The Kemalist hard-liners in the military and bureaucracy, however, were not able to implement their additional plans for a *Kulturkampf* against growing Muslim influences culturally and economically; the Turkish economy and society had grown too complex to sustain such heavy-handed military interventions. This was shown by the fact that the Welfare Party reconstituted itself as the Virtue Party in December 1997, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, then the popular mayor of Istanbul, was able to bounce back from a brief jail sentence on trumped-up political charges to become the country's most popular politician.

The soft coup of 1997 precipitated a generational and ideological split within the Welfare Party. Erbakan and an old guard were reinforced in their suspicions of Westernization and a new generation of "Young Turks" led by Erdogan and allies critical of Erbakan's direction and leadership. This emerging split came to the fore in July 1999 with the defection of prominent Erdogan allies. Erdogan and his *yenilikeiler* (reformist) allies formed the new Justice and Development Party (JDP) in August 2001.

THE MUSLIM YOUNG TURKS

The opposition's role-reversal on Turkey's national orientation saw the new party deploying the rhetoric of Westernization against Kemalist military-bureaucratic authoritarianism. As the Muslim Young Turks around Erdogan took over from Erbakan and started to stress the need for

democratic institutions, the rule of law, human rights, Anglo-American secularism, and civilian control of the military, they did so for more than instrumental or rhetorical purposes. Along with the Kurds, who had moved their struggle into national and international courts and human rights forums following the arrest of Kurdish Workers Party leader Abdullah Öcalan in February 1999, this new generation of Turkish Muslim political leaders grasped that the most effective way to overcome Kemalist authoritarianism was to use the Kemalist holy grail of EU membership to finally enshrine ostensibly “Western” values in the Turkish republic. The sole ideological rationale for the guardianship role that the military-bureaucratic establishment had played through the years was its mission to ensure Atatürk’s vision of a European Turkey. Now, when the EU’s Copenhagen Summit in 2002 revealed that the final hurdle for Turkey’s EU membership was prohibiting the antidemocratic excesses of the military-bureaucratic establishment, the old guard was thrown into crisis.

This time it was difficult to imagine a repetition of the cyclical coups that had rocked Turkey almost every decade from 1960 to 1997. A consensus had emerged in Turkish society that fundamental rights and freedoms must be institutionalized and guaranteed for all if they are to protect any. Furthermore, the dramatic transition from military-bureaucratic authoritarianism was supported by the promise and pressure of EU membership.

It would be a mistake to explain the Muslim-oriented opposition’s transformation as the result of simply fear or opportunism. The JDP realized that EU support was vital to forestalling another military-led coup. However, this support was conditioned on the preservation of the principles of secularism and democratic rule in Turkey. The EU would not tolerate establishment of a theocratic polity and implementation of religious law. This forced Turkey’s Islamists of various shades to internalize and frame religious and ideational goals in terms of a broader European and universal discourse of human rights and political liberalism.

An additional factor in this transformation was the role of the dynamic Anatolian bourgeoisie and its increasing dependence on European export markets. To enhance access to Europe, the Anatolian middle class realized that it had to modify tradi-

tional anti-Western suspicions and internalize the global discourses of human rights and democracy for political and economic self-interest. Finally, the support proffered by the EU and the allure of integration allayed the fears of many more Westernized and secular Turks about the intentions of the JDP and its supporters, allowing the sweeping political reforms to move forward.

THE LURE OF MEMBERSHIP

The two decisive events in Turkey’s domestic transformation were the November 2002 national elections and the December 2002 EU Copenhagen summit. The 2002 parliamentary elections saw for the first time in modern Turkish history a clear democratic mandate for a single-party government. Erdogan’s JDP won 363 of the 550 seats in the parliament by receiving an unprecedented 34.2 percent of the popular vote. The Republican People’s Party, which received 19.4 percent of the vote, placed second in the balloting.

A month later, in December, the EU’s Copenhagen Summit declared that accession talks would

start after 2004 without delay if Turkey fulfilled the political and juridical criteria for EU membership set at the summit. This prospect of full membership was decisive in allowing the transition from authoritarianism in Turkey. Those who had first put forward Turkey’s EU membership as a way of suppressing Islamic political identity now watched as a Muslim democratic party with the country’s first electoral mandate emerged as the most aggressive advocate of EU accession and reform. The JDP made EU ascension the main goal of its domestic and foreign policy and mentioned the EU 17 times in its party program.

Erdogan’s new government accelerated the tentative steps toward reform undertaken by the previous government by amending the constitution, reducing the role of the military in the National Security Council, and bringing the military budget under civilian control. The Turkish Parliament also moved to allow broadcasts in Kurdish dialects and supported a UN plan to unify the divided island of Cyprus, thereby removing the threat of a Greek veto to EU membership. Almost all of these revolutionary domestic and foreign policy transformations were only possible within the context of meeting EU membership criteria.

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THE EUROPEAN DIVIDE

The prospect of Turkey's political membership in the EU has created an existential anxiety for many Europeans. Samuel Huntington termed Turkey a "torn country" between East and West. Yet, as the country that appeared to be "torn" over its national orientation became increasingly unified behind the project of European integration, Europe itself emerged as deeply "torn" over how far east its borders and identity should extend.

Former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the father of the EU's new (proposed) constitution, has argued that Turkish entry would be "the end of Europe." A September 2004 poll in France showed only 16 percent of respondents favored Turkish entry into the EU; a similar poll that same month in Germany returned a figure of only 33 percent. The European public in general is skeptical of full Turkish EU membership. In the last European parliamentary elections, Turkey's possible membership sparked controversy. Many nationalist and conservative parties sought to differentiate themselves from liberal and leftist parties by adopting a "no" position on Turkish membership. In Austria, the center-right governing coalition, which includes the far-right Freedom Party, openly took an anti-Turkish position. In France, the governing conservative party came out against Turkish accession, forcing President Jacques Chirac to take a more cautious stance toward Turkish membership. His ambitious finance minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, sought to take advantage of this apprehension by saying the issue of Turkish membership should ultimately be decided in a national referendum; Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin descended to cultural chauvinism, asking, "Do we want the river of Islam to enter the riverbed of secularism?"

The main opposition party leader in Germany, Angela Merkel of the Christian Democratic Union, has written a letter to conservative national leaders in the EU suggesting a "privileged partnership" with Turkey rather than full membership. The government of German Social Democrat Chancellor Gerhard Schröder advocates opening membership talks if Turkey meets the Copenhagen criteria. This split reflects a wider European ideological divide. On the right are those who want a racially, religiously, and culturally derived definition of Europe drawn from the medieval conception of Christendom in the Holy Roman Empire. On the left are adherents of

Enlightenment notions of universal human rights, equality, and secularism with certain concessions made to pluralism and multiculturalism.

This fundamental European divide was illuminated in recent comments by Dutch EU Commissioner Frits Bolkestein and Senior Vatican Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger alleging Turkey's irredeemable "otherness" and even recalling the 1683 Ottoman siege of Vienna (which among other things introduced kaffee kultur to today's sophisticated Viennese and Amsterdammers). The comments were denounced by British Commissioner Chris Patten, who said that Europe must not become a "Christian Club," and by German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, who insisted that there must be no religious barriers to European membership.

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

Both Europe and Turkey now face a moment of truth. The forces and interests for Turkish integration with the continent seem roughly equally poised with those repelling it. This attraction and repulsion have revealed fascinating changes in identity and ideology both within and between Orient and Occident, Islam and Christendom. For many Europeans, integration with a large Muslim country of 70 million people with a lower level of economic development and a much faster-growing population seems a daunting prospect. Equally daunting, however, may be a Turkey cast adrift just as Europe faces a demographic implosion and growing economic and security challenges from around the world. Failure to enter the EU could derail Turkey's transition from authoritarianism and abort the vital broader example it represents of a leading Muslim country's successful adoption of liberal democracy and advanced capitalism.

Turkish integration would, however, greatly enhance, rather than hinder, Franco-German ambitions for an autonomous European security and foreign policy capable of competing with the United States and an emerging China. As a member of the EU, Turkey's size, strategic location, and historical legacy as the seat of the Ottoman Muslim Empire would also give it unique influence in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and western and Central Asia, as well as the Middle East. How the Eastern Question in Europe and the Westernization conundrum in Turkey are addressed will have a profound impact on the rest of the globe as well. ■