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Turkey and the EU: The Ultimate Challenge

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The European Union began accession negotiations with Turkey on 3 October 2005: a beginning awaited for more than four decades and expected to yield results after (at least) ten years. Not only will the negotiations take years to complete, but they may also be broken off at any time. The phrase "emergency brake" has now entered the political vocabulary: an emergency brake mechanism can be applied if the monitored reforms are found to have stalled in key areas involving human rights. But careful analysts point out that it could also be applied if the Union finds itself short of capacity to admit new members.

As all important decisions in the EU, this one, too, was made by consensus. But this consensus has practically polarised the opinions both of politicians and the public in Europe. France and Austria plan to hold referendums, which is unprecedented in the history of enlargement. In Germany and France politicians from one and the same party are divided on the issue. Elsewhere, there is a feverish search for compromise variants that will delay any decisive steps. In other EU countries (such as Italy) there are virtually no debate. For its part, Eastern Europe seems to be following the US position — which holds that Turkey is an important bridgehead to the Middle East not only from a geopolitical perspective but also in the context of "exporting democracy" — and is thus seldom involved in the essential debates on the essence and form of the EU.

Only a year after the start of negotiations, many of the apprehensions proved well-founded. The opening of every negotiation chapter gave some a chance to "politicize" the issue, emphasizing human rights, while others countered that their job is merely to "harmonize" legislation. France and Turkey fell out over the legal definition of "genocide". A casual statement by the Pope raised suspicions in Turkey about preparations for a "crusade" which neither the visit of the German Chancellor nor that of the Pope himself could dispel. The Cyprus issue, a traditional bone of contention, turned into a test for European compatibility in the eyes of the EU, and in the eyes of Turkey into a means of extortion that, once exhausted, would only be replaced by another, and then by another, and another... with no end in sight. Or, as the Turks (our neighbours) say, *sonsuz bekleyis* — endless waiting. Semi-officially Bulgaria's and Romania's accession came to be called not the fifth but rather the "for the time being last" enlargement, while the overwrought nerves of the receiving countries culminated in the slogan "We've had enough!" — with which the exhausted functional capacity for absorption replaced (at least for the time being) the debate on European identity. This debate had stalled not least because of the vicious circle in which the draft European Constitution found itself. Finally, the end of 2006 saw a stalemate: the negotiations were "frozen",

and it became natural when referring to the time of waiting to say that it would take longer than Abraham had to wait for the birth of a lawful son, Isaac, after the birth of Ishmael. The European parties came up with opinions and gloomy forecasts about the future, and their Bulgarian partners quickly followed suit — but without contributing a specific, "neighbour's" point of view, or (most often) carping about the problem of the number of votes cast during elections in Turkey.

At the beginning of 2007, Turkey's leaders launched a counter-attack, making what was literally a "heroic gesture". They decided to develop and follow a reform plan of their own, irrespective of the demands of the EU. Later, an enviably self-confident Recep Tayyip Erdogan coined the expression, "European integration is like a train you get on and off when you want to." Turkey was faced with the problem of conducting a series of changes in the laws of the country; it set its own deadlines for fulfilling the EU recommendations and closing the negotiation chapters. Its reform plan provided for closing the most problematic chapters in two years, and finalizing negotiations in 2013. In spring 2007, however, the French political scene was taken over by Nicolas Sarkozy, who did not hesitate to defy his country's officially declared position and quickly became a spokesman for the policy of a "privileged partnership" or, in typical French style, of a "Mediterranean union".

The summer of 2007 saw elections in Turkey, too. The ruling party secured a landslide victory not least by unswervingly following a course towards EU accession. It thus literally left Euro-scepticism as a card in the hands of the opposition. After he became prime minister and after Abdullah Gül was elected president, on 31 August 2007 Recep Tayyip Erdogan made a key speech, announcing an acceleration of reforms aimed at EU accession and stressing once again: irrespective of the other side's timetable. His pledge "to abolish torture" was reported worldwide and seemed to give a green light for guaranteeing human and other rights in the country. Only a month later, this course was "broken" because of reactions and military actions outside the country, on the territory of Iraq, against Kurdish rebels. It turned out that minority rights were apparently not (yet) on Turkey's agenda, which was confirmed by the annual Progress Report.

2008 promises to be just as dynamic and full of twists and turns. Commentators point out that there are important, even dramatic, developments in Turkey virtually every day. In the EU countries implementing the rules and principles of the Treaty of Lisbon, the differences will hardly culminate in the elaboration of a common policy and position. Bulgaria, an EU member for more than a year now, does not have the right to watch from the sidelines. Neither from the perspective of politicians nor from the forums of the public sphere. This issue of *Critique & Humanism* is an attempt to debate the problems related to Turkey's EU membership in a scientific, open and rational way — without passing anything over in silence — with neighbours and with partners.

Even casual observations are enough to confirm the hypothesis of this project, namely that the problem is extremely serious: Turkey's accession has become *the ultimate test for the EU*.

Not only the viability but also the identity of Europe are now at stake.

The case of Turkey explicates a *dilemma* inherent in the EU itself: how to find the right balance between "internal identity" and the EU's role as a "global actor"? Moreover, this case involves the question of what version of *multiculturalism* we want to have in the EU. This is what makes the negotiations with Turkey different from those with the countries from the so-called "western Balkans": Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina — and Kosovo. Of course, one might say that the problems of the western Balkans pale in comparison to those in the negotiations with Turkey, as the latter may call into question or undermine any future enlargement. But then they may also outline a favourable prospect for the former, in that they are not so complex and threatening.

Where do these peculiarities come from?

From the perspective:

- of *history*: Turkey has been a rival of Europe for centuries. Both a political and a religious one;
- of *geography*: five–sixths of the country's territory is in Asia;
- of *social wealth*: its division in Turkey is polarized in a way that is not found elsewhere in Europe;
- of *population*: Turkey would have as many representatives in the EU institutions as Germany;
- of *geopolitics*: Turkey is a "difficult" region, literally delimited by a frontline;
- of *modernization*: Turkey has not experienced many of the processes of modernization, especially as regards the understanding of human rights.

All these dimensions seem to tip the scales of the decision in a negative direction. But at the same time, the EU is bound by a *promise* to Turkey. And then, Turkey's *economy and GDP are growing* at a rate Europe can only envy. This tips the scales of the decision back to a state of vacillation.

In this twilight zone of unclarity I will point to *two issues*, one related more to functionality, the other related directly to identity. Of course, as is (theoretically) well-known to philosophers and (practically) to all of us, promises do not equal obligations. Politically, the promise was made at a time when the EU was not what it is today (i.e. a political union), and has since fulfilled that which it could have granted Turkey at that time: close economic relations. But then, anyone familiar with the spirit of capitalism knows how crucial the role of undertaken commitments is. The last promise for opening negotiations was made at the end of 1999, the year Nato changed its charter, conducted a war outside its territory (in what was then Yugoslavia) and demonstrated how incapable of action the EU actually is when it comes to military operations. Incidentally, the idea that Turkey's inclusion in the Union will make up for this military weakness or that it would provide cannon fodder in the place of European youths can be found both in popular tabloids and in serious journals.

The problem of worldview differences is just as multi-dimensional. A number of leading experts have shown that Islam in Turkey is different from Islam (especially) in the Arab world. Others stress the possibility of the development in Turkey of an "Islamic Democratic" party similar to parties that are already traditional in western Europe. Still others note that politics constantly confuses the questions of the integration of the Turks living in the EU (who total more than six million, i.e. as much as the population of some of the member

countries) with the question of making Turkey a fully-fledged part of a united Europe; and thus, instead of solving the first problem, it replaces it by (inciting) the second.

There are so many unclear issues that they cannot even be enumerated. Nor does this publication have such an ambition. At the same, the idea to compile *texts by Bulgarian, Turkish, Greek and German authors* discussing Turkey's integration into the EU, was formed not only to present different opinions and positions. The fact that Bulgaria and Turkey are neighbouring countries requires a careful reading of these opinions, determining an own position. That is because both the version of a "European border" between the countries and the alternative of "common European citizenship" raise specific problems which should not be resolved hastily or *post factum*. Hopefully, this academic debate will also help the political parties in Bulgaria to determine their positions or at least to declare them publicly and unambiguously.

A few words need to be said about why, on what grounds, this project is conducted primarily by philosophers. When Jürgen Habermas visited Iran in 2002, he later gave an interview to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. There, he explains how, in his opinion, western philosophical and sociological debates fit into the religious-philosophical context typical of Iran, and points out that, ultimately, that is why the foundations of the theocratic regime are subjected to constant public and academic debate. What cannot happen in politics is happening in science. Which, according to many of the people he talked to in Iran, cannot lead to events similar to the consequences of the Reformation in Europe.

In 2006, in Frankfurt am Main, Ömer Özsoy became the first professor of Islamic theology in Germany. From him I learned about the "Ankara School" of theology: that a modern faculty of theology had opened in Ankara in 1947, exactly a century after a similar Ottoman undertaking in Istanbul; that today the scriptures, even the *Koran*, are interpreted historically, based on the hermeneutics of Enrico Betti, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur — and not as an eternal revelation outside time; that similar attempts in Egypt in the 1960s had failed not least because they used the Hegelian dialectic instead of the means of traditions in linguistic philosophy.

These are but two examples of how philosophy can play the role of an engine of worldview changes. While our attempt in this issue of *Critique & Humanism* does not go so deep, it definitely claims to provide an opportunity for a public debate in which the guiding principle is that of *Parteilichkeit für die Vernunft* — taking the side of reason (Habermas). And as according to the principles of hermeneutics every fruitful discussion needs to be based on pre-established consensus, what we can use as a starting point in the discussions between Bulgaria and Turkey on their European future is the fact that exactly one hundred years ago, in 1908, Bulgaria won full sovereignty while Turkey restored the broken line of its constitutionalism. A "common" political event that is, for both countries, undoubtedly "European" in spirit.

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