

Jonathan Gast, 2006

An OP-ED on:

Why not to be afraid of Turkey joining the EU

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# Why not to be afraid of Turkey joining the Club

By: Jonathan Gast

Proponents of Turkey's future accession to the EU emphasize that Turkey could be a bond between the West and the Islamic world, that Turkey will counter the ageing population of the EU, that the EU will help to modernize Turkey, and that the EU will secure human rights for repressed Kurds.<sup>1</sup> These are all noble goals, but they do not address European fears of Turkey's accession. The European opposition argues that Turkey is not culturally European, that it will create a wave of Turkish immigration to richer countries, that a large Turkey will dilute the EU's political structure, and that its lack of wealth will burden the rest of Europe.<sup>2</sup> All these fears are unwarranted, and for proponents of accession to make a point, they must counter these claims with positive information. As I will show, Turkey poses no threat to European identity, its political influence in the EU will be fair, it will not burden Europe economically, and massive Turkish immigration will not result from accession.

Those who fear Turkey will *Islamize* Europe are mistaken for the same reason that Poland's accession did not *catholicize* Northern Europe with its religiously active Catholic population. All EU member countries must meet minimum economic and political requirements before accession, and among these are secularization, individual freedoms, equality of women, and the protection of civil rights among all ethnicities.<sup>3</sup> Turkey is a strict secular state, and if it keeps its promise to meet minimum requirements for accession, it will be no less a threat to the EU religiously than Poland. Yet, some argue that Europe's consistent opposition to the Ottoman Empire in Europe is enough to warrant its exclusion from the EU. Historically it is true that Europe opposed the Ottoman Empire's rule in Europe, however, they opposed it no more than the French opposed German rule or the Italians opposed Austrian rule.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, those who

advocate Europe as a Christian club ought to take a hard look at themselves. Most Europeans are not even religious. Since 1980, membership in denominations dropped 20% in Belgium, 18% in the Netherlands, and 16% in France.<sup>5</sup> Yet 12 Million Muslim citizens already live in the EU, and nobody opposes the eventual EU candidacy of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania, which have predominant Muslim populations.<sup>6</sup> If the EU draws the line against Turkey on religious and cultural grounds, it will prove extremist Islamic groups and xenophobe writers like Huntington correct. Consequently, the EU itself will face the conflicting goals of protecting its large Islamic populace while trying to remain Christian.

Those who think Turkey's sheer population will politically outnumber the EU are also incorrect. By 2015 Turkey would make up 14% of the EU's total population—only second to Germany.<sup>7</sup> Yet nobody argues whether Germany with its large population overpowers the EU. Turkey would be manageable in a union with 30+ members.<sup>8</sup> The EU must adjust its political institutions to meet the needs of a larger union, but by 2015, it will. In this sense, Turkey will be as equal as any other member.<sup>9</sup> As noted before, Turkey must meet minimum political requirements, and thus, it will admit to being of the same mind-set as other EU members. Already, Turkey has eased its grip over the political realm. The death penalty has been banned, and despite pro-nationalist outrage, an illegal demonstration concerning the genocide of Armenians by the Ottoman Turks has recently gone unpunished.<sup>10</sup> This demonstrates Turkey's commitment to adjust to EU political norms.

Still, others believe the sheer size of Turkey and its poor economy guarantee bankruptcy for the EU as well as a massive migration of Turks. In the 1980's with the accession of Spain and Portugal, and more recently with former Easter bloc countries, many argued the imbalance in economic conditions would mean massive migration to richer EU countries. Yet, both times,

these fears proved unfounded.<sup>11</sup> Many worry that Turkey would financially drain Europe's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), but this institution will also undergo reform in the near future.<sup>12</sup> By 2020 the European workforce will be less than half of its total population, and consequently, any beneficial programs like CAP will overburden the dwindling workforce. Turkey, however, will have over 2/3's of its population in the workforce, and this can provide the support for a prosperous EU.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, one cannot underestimate the power of 70 to 80 million consumers added to the European economy.<sup>14</sup>

If anyone doubts whether reforms will take place in Turkey, then be at ease. With EU members as critical about Turkey's accession today as Austria, who nearly prevented agreement, Turkey will most certainly not be able to join unless it meets *all* requirements.<sup>15</sup> If it does, Europe stands to benefit. If it does not, Turkey will at least have made positive strides toward freedom and democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> "Q&A: Turkey's EU entry talks," *BBC News*, 4 October 2005, (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4107919.stm>).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, Patrick Savidan, and Nathan Bracher, "European Borders," *South Central Review* 20 (Summer – Winter 2003): 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Jeff Chu, "O Father Where Art Thou?" *Time Europe*, 8 June 2003, (<http://www.time.com/time/europe/html/030616/story.html>).

<sup>6</sup> Antonio Missiroli, "Crossing the Bosphorus: Turkey's Accession to the European Union," *The Wall Street Journal*, 1 October 2004, (<http://www.brookings.edu/views/op-ed/fellows/missiroli20041001.htm>).

<sup>7</sup> Edward Gomez, "WORLD VIEWS: Turkey's bid to enter EU has world-shaping significance," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 October 2005, (<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/gate/archive/2005/10/04/worldviews.DTL>).

<sup>8</sup> Missiroli 2003.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Gomez 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Missiroli 2003.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Giles Merritt, "Head-to-head: Turkey and the EU," *BBC Online*, (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4294576.stm>).

<sup>14</sup> Missiroli 2003.

<sup>15</sup> "Q&A: Turkey's EU entry talks," 2005.