Turkey and the European Union: troubled European or European trouble?

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I

The decision at the December 2004 EU summit to begin the process of admitting Turkey into the European Union brought the question of Turkish accession to the fore once again. It marked yet another twist in the long-running saga of EU–Turkey relations and, more specifically, the story of the Turkish quest for EU membership; but, for once, it appeared to be a very positive development. The European Council 'welcomed the decisive progress made by Turkey in its far-reaching reform process and expressed its confidence that Turkey will sustain that process of reform ... It invited the Commission to present ... a framework for negotiations with Turkey ... with a view to opening negotiations on 3 October 2005.'[1]

The long wait was apparently over: Turkey was finally—indeed, formally—scheduled to realize its cherished European vocation. On the face of it, the summit seemed to herald the end of over 40 years of Turkish efforts to join and participate fully in the process of European integration; but was this statement all that it seemed? After all, the EU had been in this neighbourhood more than a few times before, handing out sweets and promising much more to those who would stick with the EU gang. The devilry is always in the details, and there have been plenty of both in the EU's dealings with the eastern Mediterranean; now the crucial detail remained when exactly Turkey would be allowed to join the EU, while the negotiations over the precise terms and form of membership still gave ample scope for the devilry. The Mediterranean region in general, and Turkey in particular, have witnessed too many false EU dawns to be enthused by mere summit statements.

In fact, there was not long to wait before the inevitable EU backtracking began. While the EU's pronouncements at the December 2004 European Council clearly signalled renewed efforts to make progress in its relationship with Turkey, the suspicion that what the EU (or at least part of it) had in mind would fall some way short of welcoming Turkey as a full member of the European club was all too quickly confirmed. Austria gave voice to thoughts shared by many others in the Union in suggesting that full membership for Turkey was a long-term objective, and that a more appropriate framework for the EU's relations with this

[1] European Commission, *Enlargement Newsletter* 21 Dec. 2004, p. 6.

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eastern neighbour might be a 'privileged partnership'. Any lingering hopes of full membership for the Turks in the short run were eventually completely dashed when accession negotiations were partially frozen at the end of 2006.

In the eastern Mediterranean, old problems—on this occasion, the position of Cyprus—tend to flare up periodically and undermine Turkish progress towards joining the EU, while at a deeper level, the context within which EU–Turkey relations are discussed is apparently still as ambivalent and ambiguous as ever. While Turkey's strategic value is widely accepted within the EU, there remains a school of thought within which the country is seen as an outsider to the European mainstream, condemned to irresolvable difference from its western neighbours on historical, religious and cultural grounds. This perception generates an animosity which has continued to exist in spite of Turkey's pursuit of EU membership over nearly 50 years. It is perhaps ironic that a continent, many of whose nations engaged in two bloody wars within living memory, but have been able to bury the past and move forward together, cannot forgive Turkish transgressions in previous centuries.

Turkey was actually the second country—close on the heels of Greece—to seek a formal relationship with the Union soon after its inception as three European communities, and the possibility (the Turks would say probability, or even certainty)[2] of membership was conceded very early: allegedly, in the 1963 Ankara Agreement.[3] Moreover, Turkey's formal application for EU membership in 1987 preceded those of all the countries that joined the EU in 1995, 2004 and 2007. But the pursuit of EU membership for Turkey has been a painfully slow process, not helped by the backdrop of negative complications; the most notable of these has been the strife in Cyprus, although Graeco-Turkish relations in general have continuously undermined Turkish ambitions. More fundamentally, there are widespread concerns in the EU about religious and cultural differences between the current EU membership and Turkey, and there remain to this day doubts about whether Turkey is really European.

The main purpose of this article is to revisit EU–Turkey relations and to consider the potential impact of the EU pronouncement at the December 2004 summit and the subsequent (reluctant) decision to begin negotiations in October 2005. Two substantive arguments will follow from this. First, the machinations of the last two years suggest that the best Turkey can hope to be (eventually) offered is some kind of special status and/or form of partial ('outer-tier') membership of the EU. Developments during 2005 and 2006 have shown that the underlying beliefs and attitudes that generate opposition to Turkey's membership of the EU are deeply ingrained and persistent. The EU also has its own problems, following the French and Dutch rejections of the European constitution in 2005 and can do without

[2] There has always been some disagreement over the precise interpretation of the Ankara Agreement with some on the Turkish side arguing that it implied automatic entry to the EU in 1986. In fact, a careful reading of the relevant part of the Agreement (see note 3) clearly reveals that membership was conditional (as the EU insisted) on various conditions and the history of EU–Turkey relations records that the latter had not fulfilled the relevant conditions in 1986 and, therefore, was (quite rightly) not offered EU membership.

[3] European Commission, 'Agreement establishing an Association between the European Economic Community and Turkey', *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L217, 1964, Article 28.

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the complication of absorbing Turkey at the present time. Second, any permanent relationship that falls short of full membership has been rejected by Turkey in the past as inadequate and continues, rightly, to be so rejected. Europe was not built by faint hearts. The EU should take the essentially political decision that Turkey will be allowed to join the EU as a full member in the near future, say, within five years. Turkey would not be the first country to join the EU that was not fully prepared.

The next section of this article briefly provides some essential background information about and context for current developments by examining the historical development of EU–Turkey relations and the perceptions and preferences of the participants in the debate, and by summarizing the main arguments used. In addition, some reference is made to the fact that the EU itself has changed. Section III considers whether a 'privileged partnership' or some other alternative arrangement might be more appropriate for Turkey. It also explores what 'membership' might mean for Turkey in a 'flexibly integrating' EU. Section IV focuses on the key concepts of religion, culture and 'Europeanness'. It is asserted here that the EU must cease to be constrained by its history. It is time for the EU to forget its old insecurities and to break out of Europe. To this end, the article will propose a more pragmatic approach to the difficult concept of 'Europeanness', and will also support the case for a multicultural EU which treats all religions equally while recognizing the importance of Christianity in the development of Europe and the European Union. In the context of EU–Turkey relations, this translates into having the political will and vision to 'accelerate history' once again by offering Turkey *genuinely* full membership. For many years Turkey has been 'European trouble'; it should now be allowed to make the transition to being a 'troubled European'. A short final section summarizes the argument and concludes that Turkey should be allowed to join the EU as a full member in the very near future.

II

The story of relations between the EU and Turkey is well known. EU policy has frequently been unclear, ambiguous or even misleading, to the extent that it has at times encouraged high expectations on Turkey's part when in reality there was no possibility of the country's accession in the foreseeable future. While this policy did little to facilitate the advancement of Turkey's membership aspirations, it suited the EU very well to have some degree of ambiguity in this relationship. Some would go further and argue that in fact the EU's attitude has been self-serving—that it has wished to keep Turkey on board for security reasons alone—and that, furthermore, its approach to Turkey has on occasion been unfriendly and insensitive, even hostile. Turkey, for its part, has shown an eagerness to embrace the high expectations engendered by occasional Commission rhetoric to the point of self-delusion, and has simply failed to deliver on many of its commitments to the EU. The confusion caused by unhelpful policies has been aggravated by the longstanding problems that already affect this relationship from one side or both, relating to Cyprus, Greece, the role of the army in Turkey, its (lack of) respect for

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human rights and the influence of Islam.

The standard (European) critique of Turkey's membership bid is based on an assessment across four categories (economic, political, cultural and security), leading to the conclusion that Turkey's actual economic weakness and political shortcomings, plus the potential difficulties arising from religious and cultural differences, are much too severe to be offset by the (admittedly strongly positive) contribution of Turkey to European security through its membership of NATO. Consequently, Turkey is not acceptable as an EU member but needs to be nurtured because of its role in maintaining security in the eastern Mediterranean and as a role model for neighbouring Islamic states. The Turkish characterization of the membership debate is somewhat different. At the core of this alternative (Turkish) view is criticism of EU policy for inconsistency, with especial stress on the incompatibility of actual policy with the stated objectives of the EU–Turkey association agreement; at the same time, Turkey's failure to move quickly enough towards compliance with EU economic and political norms is conveniently ignored. Neither of these interpretations is particularly helpful, and both have tended to antagonize the other side.[4]

In fact, the confusion and misunderstanding that are apparent in analyses of EU and Turkish policies largely reflect the confusion and misunderstanding implicit in those policies. EU–Turkish relations have tended to follow the pattern of a ritual dance, with the prospect of Turkish accession to the Union periodically pulled out of the conjuror's hat only to disappear almost immediately back up his sleeve. This is a good trick to begin with, but becomes progressively less so as it is repeated again and again. This pattern of hope, disappointment and rejection has become a dominant feature of Turkey's relationship with the EU, and in the past two years the cycle seems to have repeated itself yet again. It is true that Turkey is probably edging its way towards EU membership—but at too slow a rate. The EU is a moving target, and the longer Turkey is kept waiting, the broader and deeper is the *acquis communautaire* (which it played no role in creating) the Turkish government has to accept and 'sell' to the Turkish public to get a positive vote in a referendum. Furthermore, the longer it has to wait, the greater will be the dissatisfaction and resentment felt towards the EU in Turkey. Religion in Turkey is a given, its security value is fairly constant, its economic and political credentials are improving. Consequently, as time goes by, the net advantage (to the EU) to be had from keeping Turkey out is decreasing, while the cost (to the EU) in terms of loss of Turkish goodwill is increasing. Blocking Turkish membership is not a costless policy.

Nevertheless, on balance, the views within individual EU member states seem to be coming together and hardening into an essentially negative position. Only Britain has consistently supported Turkey's membership bid; and for many observers in the EU, even this is of questionable value, as British support has been alleged to be based (to some extent) on the view that Turkish accession will impede further EU integration. Furthermore, the fact that Britain is echoing the

[4] Haran Arikan, *Turkey and the EU: an awkward candidate for EU membership?* (Aldersot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 2–3.

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policy of the United States (which favours Turkey's EU membership on security grounds) is a reminder of longstanding concerns about where British loyalties really lie. Traditionally, two other member states have had strong views on Turkey but, unlike Britain, they appear to have changed sides. Germany, which has the largest community of Turkish migrants of any member state, has encouraged Turkey—at least in government and other elite circles—whereas Greece has sought to block Turkish accession—at least until a number of Graeco-Turkish local disputes were resolved in its favour. However, in recent years, Greece has shifted to a much more pragmatic position and is now very positive about Turkish membership. It considers that EU accession would commit Turkey permanently to the European club, thereby facilitating the resolution of the various longstanding eastern Mediterranean disputes and improving Graeco-Turkish relations generally. Meanwhile, a change in government in Germany has brought a change in policy towards Turkey—perhaps better expressed as the adoption of a policy by the incoming ruling party that is more in keeping with the views of the general public. The Germans now argue that Turkey is not ready for full membership and they favour a more limited attachment such as a 'privileged partnership'.

The views of the other 20 or so EU members are spread across the whole range of opinion but, on aggregate, tend to oppose rather than favour Turkish accession:

- Austria (probably the strongest opponent of Turkish accession) and France agree with Germany and plan eventually to hold referendums on the subject (which are virtually certain to produce negative results);
- many of the smaller EU states—including the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and the Baltic countries—are divided or marginally (and cautiously) in favour of Turkish accession in official and government circles while the public are essentially ignorant of what it would mean;
- both Poland and Romania, the two largest of the entrants since 2000, have publicly stated their support for Turkey's application, but are wary of the competition for EU subsidies that would be provided by such a large country;
- Italy, Spain and Portugal tend to favour Turkish membership, seeing it as restoring some semblance of balance within the EU between the Mediterranean and northern Europe, but share some of the broader concerns.

To summarize: the lack of any strong supporter (other than Britain) and the opposition of France and Germany make full Turkish membership an unlikely prospect in the immediate future. Nor can the Turks take much encouragement from the stances of the EU institutions. To the hostility of the EU's Council of Ministers (implied by the above analysis of national governments' positions) should be added that of the European Parliament, which has repeatedly condemned Turkey for human rights violations and related issues, and the longstanding scepticism felt in the Commission about the feasibility of Turkish accession. As for popular opinion in the EU, if referendums on Turkish accession were held in all 27 member states, a vote in favour of Turkey joining could not be anticipated with any confidence

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anywhere: not even in Britain, its most consistent supporter at government level. The most likely outcome would be a very clear majority of member states not in favour of Turkish membership. Much of the general public simply see Turkey as too big, too poor, too far away and too Islamic.

Turkey does, of course, have to fulfil a number of conditions before it can join the EU, most obviously the 'Copenhagen criteria' established in 1993 at the Copenhagen European Council. These are applied to all prospective members and fall into three categories:

- political commitments relating to democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for minorities;
- an economic requirement, specifically a functioning market economy;
- acceptance of the *acquis communautaire* and various other EU objectives.

Turkey has had particular difficulties with the political requirements, but even if or when it fulfils the Copenhagen criteria, it faces a barrage of further requirements (drawn up specifically for Turkey), as set out in a recent Commission document:[5]

- the negotiations are 'open-ended' and may end with Turkey being offered some arrangement that falls short of full membership;
- all 35 chapters (policy areas)—more than ever before—have to be agreed unanimously in the Council;
- there may be long transition periods in some policy areas for some new member states, and if Turkey falls foul of any of the Copenhagen criteria then negotiations can be suspended;
- no applicant likely to have a substantial financial impact (as Turkey will) can join before 2014.

While these 'extra' accession criteria are not unexpected, perhaps even not unreasonable, they are not taken kindly by the Turks who increasingly and justifiably feel that they are having to do more to 'earn' EU membership than previous applicants.

In the face of the widespread opposition among the current membership, and the extensive and arguably unfair criteria to be fulfilled, Turkish accession to the EU may begin to seem a lost cause. It is, however, still possible to be optimistic. Just as Turkey has changed over time (to meet the EU membership criteria) then so has the EU. The EU of today is completely different from the EU with which Turkey signed an association agreement over 40 years ago in 1963, and even from the EU it applied to join 20 years ago in 1987. Today's EU is huge—it incorporates most of the European continent, is arguably the major player in the international economy, is beginning to develop a political and security dimension, and has a clear agenda. The contention that a new member—even one the size of Turkey—could severely undermine and disrupt that agenda is founded in a legitimate concern but can hardly be supported. It is still possible to argue that, having allowed 12 countries to become members over the past three years, the EU already has enough

[5] European Commission, *Accession negotiations with Turkey: negotiating framework* (Brussels, Oct. 2005).

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on its plate absorbing these newcomers. However, on the other hand, one might argue that if the EU can accept 12 new members, especially when one of them is such a large and relatively poor (to the EU) country as Poland, then it is quite able to (and may as well) let Turkey join sooner rather than later. But first it is necessary to address the EU's preference for offering some arrangement that falls short of full membership, and the Turkish 'problems' of geography and religion; and it is to these that we now turn.

III

For many years, the EU has offered a growing range of relationships to its European neighbours, including association, the European Economic Area (EEA), the Barcelona Process (for the Mediterranean) and, more recently, partnership and the neighbourhood policy. These all fall short of and were quite clearly different from full membership. However, as the EU embraces differential or variable integration such distinctions may begin to blur. In fact, a multi-speed Europe has existed for some time, as witnessed by the Schengen Agreement, adoption of the euro and the transition periods for new EU members in some policy areas. But the continued expansion of the Union, especially to include member states that are economically and/or politically divergent from the EU's inner core, may push the EU beyond this as, increasingly, questions are raised about its ability to continue to integrate as a unified whole (even at varying speeds). To be precise, it has grown increasingly difficult in the EU to reconcile the views of those countries that want and are able to integrate more rapidly (mostly founding and longer-standing members) with the views of those who are unable or do not want to do this (mostly newer members). Allowing the former to go ahead and form an inner core while allowing the latter to hang back and form an outer circle should (in principle at least) solve this problem. The implication of this is that the EU might change from the current situation where exclusion from a particular policy is only temporary (multi-speed) to one where such exclusions are permanent (multi-tier). This in turn has important implications for the very concept of 'membership' (of the EU): specifically, it ceases to be a fixed concept and becomes a variable one. Thus, the membership for which a country applies may not be the membership it is eventually offered.

From the perspective of existing members of the EU, a multi-tier arrangement has much to commend it. It allows them to carry on integrating while aspiring members get up to speed, thereby resolving the 'widening versus deepening' dilemma. New EU members have obvious difficulties in taking on the responsibility of full EU membership simply because they are faced with such a large *acquis* to embrace—much of it, indeed, even before they join the EU, as was the case with the most recent enlargements in 1995, 2004 and 2007. Joining the EU is an increasingly complicated business. Thus, for example, when Britain joined in 1973, the *acquis* it had to accept was small compared with what new members are expected to absorb today. While Turkey—like most aspiring members—has been engaged in tracking EU legislation and has already adopted much of it, more and more is

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continuously being created; the EU has become an increasingly rapidly moving target. Consequently, there is a superficial logic in delaying full membership and giving prospective members more time to adopt the *acquis* while simultaneously binding them to the EU through some agreement that is still called 'membership' but is only partial and actually amounts to no more than a form of association, partnership or similar arrangement.

In fact, the EU has repeatedly tried to persuade Turkey to accept something short of membership—association, then a customs union and currently 'partnership'—and has intended this to be an alternative, rather than a stepping stone, to full membership. The problem with any such arrangement is precisely that it is *not* full membership, and the aspiring member ends up with much of the pain of belonging but little of the gain. To be precise, a mere free trade area or customs union means that the aspiring member faces the 'pain' of facing EU competition but does not get the gains, which include:

- guaranteed access to the EU's single market: association and similar agreements always include safeguard clauses which allow the EU to suspend trade concessions temporarily and, of course, agricultural trade is largely excluded anyway;
- access to (and receipts from) the EU's structural (and other) funds;
- a seat at the EU decision-making table: only full EU members have a role in determining the EU's rules and regulations.

Dressing up old arrangements and calling them EU 'membership' does nothing to change the fact that anything short of full membership is intrinsically deficient and is acceptable only as a staging post on the way to full membership. Unfortunately, it is becoming clear that the EU—or at least substantial parts of it—are still persisting with the line that Turkey is not yet ready for full membership. However, EU membership is not only now an expanding concept but also a variable or flexible one, and so the critical question becomes: what precise form of membership will be on offer to Turkey? The EU toyed with offering some of the east European countries membership without the Common Agricultural Policy, but backed off when it met with opposition.[6] It is unlikely to back down in the Turkish case, and 'membership' as envisaged for Turkey could be little more than being part of a outer tier on the fringes of the Union. Such an outcome would be unacceptable. Any form of quasi-membership is rightfully of as little interest to Turkey as it was to previous applicants. It is membership of the central 'hard core' and full participation in the decision-making process that the Turks seek, and they should accept no less.

[6] Tim Josling, 'Can the CAP survive enlargement to the East?', John Redmond and Glenda G. Rozenthal, eds, *The expanding European Union: past, present and future* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997), pp. 100–101.

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IV

While Turkey can make changes to its economy and political system to fulfil the EU's accession criteria, there are two 'givens' that cannot be changed—namely, religion/culture and geography/physical location. These are fixed characteristics of Turkey, and it is to the first of these that we now turn. Some critics would argue that Turkey is simply not Christian and its cities do not 'feel' European in the way that Paris, Prague and even many of those on the periphery of the existing 27-strong EU do. But it could also be said that parts of Marseilles, Leicester and Bradford do not 'feel' European either. Yet these (and similar) cities are all within the EU and function perfectly satisfactorily as parts of it. Sizeable Islamic communities reside within the existing boundaries of the Union and, since increased size inevitably brings increased diversity, an EU of 27 is surely ready to absorb a state in which Islam is the main religion. The accession of Turkey would increase the Muslim element of the total EU population from the current 3 per cent to approximately 20 per cent—not an insignificant proportion but still only a sizeable minority, and mostly located within Turkey, so that the Islamic presence within the current EU member states would hardly be more visible than it is now. The key comparison is between Poland and Turkey. Crudely stated, these two countries pose similar economic problems to the EU but are polar opposites in religious terms; it is interesting to note that their treatment by the EU has been strikingly different, to the extent that Turkey's treatment has been called unfair.[7]

This will always be a complicated issue, and it inevitably remains difficult to disentangle and distinguish between the important and the superficial strands that make up the rationale behind opposition within the EU to Turkish membership. It has never been clear whether the cultural/religious arguments simply reinforce the strong economic and political arguments against Turkish accession, or whether the latter act as a smokescreen for the former. As Turkey gradually addresses and diffuses these more tangible economic and political concerns, the EU will find it harder and harder to continue as a de facto but not de jure 'Christian club' and will find itself increasingly pushed towards adopting a multicultural identity or, alternatively, having to defend a cultural/religious argument against Turkish accession directly. The present international political situation is in some ways not helpful, as Islamic communities within Europe become targets for mistrust and antagonism (and worse)—but they will not go away, nor will Turkey and nor will the rest of the Islamic world. Christian and Islamic states have to coexist and the overriding objective must be to find a way in which they can do this peacefully. Working together as full members of regional and international organizations in pursuit of common interests seems a sensible and pragmatic way forward. Finally, allowing Turkey to join the EU as a full member in the near future would send out a powerful and positive message to the Islamic world.

The question of whether Turkey is really European has been a frequent starting point of analyses of Turkey's bid to join the EU, and while the conclusion eventu-

[7] Arikan, *Turkey*, pp. 211–21.

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ally reached is often not wholly negative, rarely is it unambiguously positive: there is usually a degree of doubt and with it a sense that this constitutes evidence supportive of Turkey's unsuitability for EU membership (albeit in an ill-defined and intangible way). To some extent this is unfair, in that no one in the EU has been willing to provide an 'official' definition of what being European means, precisely—in part, quite probably, because it suits the Union to have a vague criterion for membership that relies on interpretation; in part also possibly because any definition may have an implicit racial component, which would take the debate into areas where no one wants to go. Interestingly enough, the EU has been more willing to indicate (by practice, at least) when it considers that a country is *not* European—for example, by rejecting overtures from Morocco.[8] This is a much safer and more defensive way of proceeding, and less likely to set unwelcome (to the EU and/or its members) precedents. In fact, this empirical ambiguity of definition is in line with the ambiguity in the statement of the principle of who may join the Union as set out in the original founding treaty. The relevant article (237) of the Treaty of Rome does not state that a country has to be European to join. It actually says that 'any European State may apply to become a member of the Community'; it does not say that non-European countries may not apply. The latter may have been the intention, and that is certainly the way that the article has been interpreted; but being wholly, let alone only partially, non-European does not, according to the Treaty of Rome, exclude a state from applying to join the EU.

Nevertheless, despite the determined effort to avoid making a formal definition, the need to consider what being European actually amounts to remains with us. In fact, developing a methodology for defining 'Europeanness' in principle is not difficult; the big problems lie in making the definition operational. 'Europeanness' can be broadly defined in one of two ways. The first of these is the 'structural' approach. This expresses 'Europeanness' in terms of some measurable variable of which a state has to have a given percentage, the one most commonly chosen (though often presumed rather than explicitly stated) being geography. The qualifying threshold seems to have been effectively set just above zero—so that having any territory within Europe makes a country European—although there is no reason why this should not be set at a higher figure, say 40 or 50 per cent (or even higher). However, even in the absence of obvious guidelines for the threshold, geography is not, in practice, an entirely reliable choice: lines on maps are drawn by people, not set in stone, nor necessarily agreed by all parties, particularly in the case of the map of Europe. This means that nation-states, Europe and hence 'Europeanness' have vague and shifting borders and edges, and become imprecise measures. In the present context a structural approach based on geography is not particularly helpful, as the lack of an obvious threshold means that the Turkish case can be argued either way. On the one hand, part of Turkey (Istanbul and Western Thrace) is in Europe as commonly defined; on the other hand, this is a

[8] Morocco has in the past expressed an interest in joining the EU and, indeed, actually applied for membership in 1987, but was quickly rebuffed by the EU on geographical grounds.

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very small part of Turkey and 95 per cent of the country is in Asia, as commonly defined. Moreover, a similar argument might be put forward for Russia, raising the prospect of an interesting precedent being set by allowing Turkey to join the EU.

Unfortunately, the alternative—a 'behavioural' approach—produces similarly ambiguous results. This approach would basically define being European as behaving in a European way and as being perceived as being European by being invited to participate in European activities. Obviously, EU membership is the ultimate mark of being European, but there are a whole range of lesser organizations and activities, right down to the trivial level of European song and football competitions. 'Europeanness' from this perspective is not a physical or geographical attribute—although geographical location will be something that, in part, determines a state's ability to act 'in a European way'. It is not location or some other attribute that defines being European, but rather having the capacity to behave in a European way. As already suggested, it is possible to interpret the case of Turkey either way. On the one hand, since the 1920s Turkey has assiduously pursued European ways and should therefore be considered European (or at least as a passable imitation); on the other hand, there are those who still consider Turkey an alien country: Muslim, with a history and culture separate from Europe's and fundamentally different from what might be considered European in the West.

Ultimately, however, 'Europeanness' is surely a ludicrous concept on which to base a 'club' of nation-states in which—even after 50 years—the basis for most of the integration that has taken place is still predominantly economic. The concept of 'Europeanness' might be appropriate for an organization concerned with cultural or even political integration; but not one focused on economic integration. To be sure, geographical proximity is certainly a practical consideration; for example, it would be difficult for New Zealand to function as a member of the EU. However, geographical proximity is quite different from 'Europeanness': it is a condition rather than a key criterion for integration, and in itself not a necessary condition for membership. It is quite clear (from the state of the world) that geographical proximity does not necessarily imply harmony and compatibility. Indeed, being European is a very particular and constrained kind of geographical proximity. However, the fundamental argument is that economic criteria ought to be used to determine membership of a predominantly economic club.

In reality, the ever-expanding EU is pushing back its boundaries to the extent that 'Europeanness' begins to look like a potentially limited and limiting concept in the twenty-first century—and one that may not be as important as it seemed in the 1950s. In short, is the European in 'European Union' any more than a convenient form of shorthand which is now outdated? Does it now need to be replaced by a revised and appropriately updated definition—perhaps to embrace any democratic state in or geographically close to Europe that shares European principles and ideals? After all, some countries that are currently considered sufficiently 'European' to join are potentially of dubious eligibility; in particular, one thinks of Iceland, which is in many ways 'Atlanticist' rather than European, and Greenland, which was part of the EU for over ten years and is hardly a mainstream

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European state. A potentially broad definition would formally give the EU some discretion and would pave the way to membership not only for Turkey but also for other countries such as the Ukraine and eventually even Israel which have quasi-European status. It sometimes seems that the concept of 'Europeanness' is not really a working criterion for EU membership but rather an emergency escape route to which the current EU is keen to retain access.

V

The Commission's latest report on Turkish progress towards eligibility for membership (issued in November 2006)[9] is far from encouraging and only one chapter (of 35) was successfully negotiated to completion and was closed in 2006. But it is still possible to be much more positive about Turkey's application for EU membership than this situation suggests. The EU has become huge, and now straddles and dominates Europe; for the most part, it is already built or designed, and even a country the size of Turkey can exert little influence on its basic shape and direction. There is a need to move forward more quickly, as the feeling of being slighted, of being treated unfairly and badly, is growing in Turkey. While Turkish threats to turn away from Europe are almost certainly empty ones—Turkey would not sit easily in a Middle Eastern framework, even less so in some contrived Black Sea-centred regional grouping—an embittered and frustrated Turkey would be an erratic and unpredictable partner. On the other hand, might not Turkey's development in the future be more likely to suit the current EU membership if it could be watched and influenced from very close quarters—that is, if Turkey were to become a fellow, full, EU member? Moreover, is not Turkey more likely to follow the European line of interest if it has been allowed to invest its future in the Union by joining it?

It is all too easy to expose Turkish shortcomings and sagely pronounce that Turkish accession can only be a long-run project; that it just 'can't be done' in the immediate future. But the Commission did not think that Greek accession 'could be done' when it issued a negative opinion in 1976, and yet it was done only five years later. Similarly, the EU did not even want to include a reference to EU membership when it negotiated the Europe Agreements with the newly democratic, former Soviet bloc states in central and eastern Europe; and yet in barely 15 years ten of them have moved from being Soviet satellites to full EU members. The idea of a divided Cyprus acceding to the EU was widely considered to be absurd; but Cyprus did join in 2004, and is still divided. Requiring Turkey to comply with all the copious entry criteria and conditions before it can join the EU is both unfair and inconsistent with previous practice; indeed, there are arguably some longer-standing EU members that still do not comply completely with all the requirements that aspiring members have had to meet. In the past, the EU has been prepared to take risks with new members. Thus, for example, Spain's post-Franco democracy was not fully secured when Spain acceded to the EU in 1986; in

[9] European Commission, *Turkey 2006 Progress Report* (Brussels, Nov. 2006).

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fact, Spain was allowed to join in large part to safeguard Spanish democracy and to allow it to develop and become fully established. Turkey's efforts to fulfil the EU membership criteria would be greatly assisted by a similar show of generosity on the EU's part. Turkish accession 'can be done'—it just needs the same vision and political will that has been displayed at key moments in the Union's past.

Fundamentally, the EU has a choice: it can continue to try to influence Turkish policy and development by keeping Turkey at arm's length and continuing to regard it as 'European trouble'; or it can take a historic step and welcome Turkey as a full member, allow it to develop its Islamic identity within the confines of the European club and let it become a 'troubled European'—an awkward partner, perhaps, but much more amenable in the Union than out of it. The EU should choose the latter option. It is bigger and stronger now than in former times, and is well able to accommodate Turkey. In short, Turkey has waited long enough. Despite the Union's efforts to hide behind a wedge of conditions and criteria which are expressed in absolute terms as if they were actually measurable, it cannot disguise the fact that accepting a new member is essentially a political decision based on qualitative judgement rather than quantitative measurement. There are no fixed points on scales to indicate when a country is ready for membership because there are no scales to measure democracy, the degree to which an economy is market-based, commitment to the *acquis politique* and *finalités politiques* and so on. Turkey has brooded on the fringes of EU threatening 'European trouble' for long enough and should now be taken in as (another) 'troubled European'—and the sooner, the better. The key lesson of the past 20 years of European integration must surely be that nothing is impossible. To argue that Turkish accession can only take place in the long run sounds very hollow indeed in the face of what happened in Europe in 1989, 1999 and 2004–2007.[10]

[10] The end of the Cold War, the agreement to implement the third stage of EMU and the two most recent enlargements, respectively.

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