

- Beyond marginality -

**The changing position of the Kurdish
community through Turkey's
membership of the EU**

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Introduction

We probably don't know the real reason why Turkey is still left out of the EU. Is it because they are an Islamic country and by that don't fit in the Jewish/ Christian Europe or because they don't recognize the human rights, especially when it comes to the Kurdish people? But are those not in particular the reasons why Turkey should be included to Europe? If they join the EU, the situation is bound to change and if this is done in a proper and acceptable way, it will only broaden the perspectives of Europe and flourish her economy. It is just a matter of time before Turkey becomes the new China, with her broad export and production and her tourism. But what I really am interested in is the contribution to the Kurdish minority when it comes to the future membership of Turkey. If Turkey becomes an EU country, what will happen to the Kurdish people? Something will happen to them and they will form a relevant factor in this situation.

Therefore it is important to look at the consequences, for Europe as well as for Turkey and the Kurdish minority. What are the advantages and the disadvantages for all parties? In this paper I will emphasize these consequences and look especially to the consequences for the Kurdish minority. Will the inclusion of Turkey have effects on the politics against the Kurdish people and does the inclusion have other aspects which are in favour of this minority and probably other minorities. Will it solve the current conflict and will the Kurdish community get more included into the Turkish society? Will the Kurdish community as a whole be able to develop itself and if so in what direction will it lead to new tensions? All these questions remain and need to be answered if the membership takes place.

Therefore, the question is:

What will the process of Turkey entering the EU mean (and is meaning already) for the Kurdish minority in Turkey as well as for the minority outside of Turkey?

To examine these aspects, I will look at contemporary literature and resources on inclusion of Turkey. By that I will partly describe the current situation and what is happening right now and partly describe what will likely happen in the future.

Setting the scene

Not only does the inclusion of Turkey mean a greater Europe, it also means that there will be new areas and people involved in Europe. This has of course consequences on several things. First of all it means that boundaries become less important and immigration to the rest of Europe will be more easy and natural for the Turkish people. It will also mean a new structure in the market and the rebuilding of it. Relations between countries and international companies will be more widespread and complicated. Norms and regulations in relation to different subjects will be adjusted, especially for Turkey. This means a great investment for both parties. It will also mean a change for the minorities in Turkey and their current position. They will surely be affected by a new position of Turkey in the EU in several ways: the human rights will be more respected, cultural rights could be more freely practiced by the minorities and it could influence the political dialogue between the minorities and the Turkish government. Therefore current questions and conflicts could be solved in a more humane and peaceful way.

But there is yet a long way to go for Turkey. Besides, they are only candidate-state right now and do not apply to all of the Criteria of Copenhagen. This document refers to issues regarding democracy, human rights, and treatment of minorities, the law system and the free market economy¹. It needs more adjustments. The adjustments need to be made on the current problems and the current attitude Turkey has towards several cases. One of these cases is the Kurdish conflict. I will now describe the current happening and the process of entering.

The Turkish way!

Before Turkey can join the EU, it needs a juridical and economic rebuilding². That there is still no discussable date for Turkey's entering, shows there is still no guarantee to and trust in the inclusion from both sides. This distrust and low motivation finds its roots in the past: differences in governmental and religious perspectives/ ideas and a strong national pride from the Turkish side. Because of this, the process of Turkey's entering the EU is being held back. The Turkish media sent out that Turkey made great improvements in the years 2001-2002, referring to several 'historical' constitutional reforms. For Turkey all is done and there is just one thing that remains: the entering-date! But what Turkey and its media forgets is that the adjustments need to be really implemented and Europe is waiting for more implementations. Yet, the commission for the EU-expansion, doesn't make it that difficult for Turkey to adjust itself. It is Turkey who still ignores some subjects, especially when it comes to the Kurdish conflict. The EU on the other side also had a lacking, diplomatic attitude: to speak openly about the conflict and the 'Kurdish' people and the ending of the restrictions towards education, weren't on the agenda. The adjustments towards Kurdish education and language and the Kurdish media had for a long time a silent, diplomatic attitude; implementing it was far from reality.

¹ 'Naar rustiger vaarwater, een advies over betrekking tussen Turkije en de EU', from the AIV(advisory council on international affairs), p. 7.

² From an interview with Bert Cornillie, regarding Turkey and the EU (nov. 2002): Derwich, M., Driesen, L. (red.), *Turkije, klaar voor de Europese Unie? De Turkse realiteit getoetst aan de Criteria van Kopenhagen*, Ferho, Brussels (Kurdish Institution), 2002, p. 29.

The recent years Europe admits the conflict and speaks openly about the restrictions of the Kurdish education³. It is also made clear that by ending these restrictions, Turkey will go towards a membership in the EU. Since 1991 it is officially made clear that speaking the Kurdish language is legally not punishable. The Kurdish identity has also become difficult to deny. Still Turkish authorities are not willing to give out and admit more to the Kurdish identity. They kept the regulations regarding the Kurdish language negative and pursued the cultural assimilation of the Kurdish people. Lessons in Kurdish language had also to be in line with the interests of the Turkish government and were as ever not allowed to be given in the own mother tongue; it was still a taboo. There were however some conditions regarding the teaching of the language. These are⁴:

- only students between the age of 12 and 18 years old are allowed to follow the language course,
- students have to accomplished their primary school (8 years old),
- students have to be in a physically and mentally good state,
- students must have the permission of the parents,
- 'ethnic' clothing is forbidden,
- lessons can only be held during the day offs, like weekends and holidays,
- the education is only possible in private schools, not in community schools,
- the education must be permitted by the minister of Education and be controlled by inspectors of this Ministry,
- teachers must be Turkish citizens and have a diploma,
- convicted (criminal) persons can not be allowed to teach (you can be convicted even if you join a protest!!).

Following all these conditions and the treat, it becomes impossible to find teachers or to get students who can follow these courses. Besides this so called adjustment, the Turkish government had others, which were also not generous. The Kurdish media and radio broadcast were finally allowed. Tv-broadcast by only 30 minutes a day and a maximum of 2 hours per week. Radio was allowed to be broadcasted 45 minutes a day and a maximum of hours per week. All of the broadcasting must be translated into Turkish. This made it impossible for Kurdish people to enjoy their language. The taboo on the Kurdish identity still remained. But were does this taboo and repression come from? Why does Turkey not accept the Kurdish minority and their culture?

The roots of the cultural and social inequality

Before even concentrating on the Kurdish population in Turkey, we must for a minute put eyes on the Turkish government and the people itself. With the governance of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the beginning of 1920, Turkey became a republic. While the French republican authorities served its people and shared the wealth with them, the Turkish republic caused a greater alienation between the people and the authorities⁵. After the civil war in the beginning of 1920, the traditional (moslim-) schools were closed down, but there was less rebuilding of other schools. So the governance not only repressed the cultural and religious diversity, it also did not set out enough social en cultural facilities. The solid basis to form a strong Turkish community lacked in comparison with France.

³ From an interview with Bert Cornillie, regarding Turkey and the EU (nov. 2002): Derwich, M., Driesen, L. (red.), *Turkije, klaar voor de Europese Unie? De Turkse realiteit getoetst aan de Criteria van Kopenhagen*, Ferho, Brussels ((Kurdish Institution 2002,p. 29.

⁴ Idem footnote 3, p. 29-30.

⁵ Idem footnote 3, p. 30.

In the Kurdish areas the same took place, but in a more rigorous way⁶. In the years between 1920 and 1930 there were less schools build in the Kurdish area in comparison with the rest of Turkey. The uncultivated country-land of Kurdistan was also being terrorised by the government. The protests against this dictatorial regime, which were held frequently, were repressed with blood. The language became forbidden, the Kurdish people were named 'mountain- Turks', who spoke a bad dialect of the Turkish language. The governor however, Ataturk, had a mission. He wanted a strong nation which leant on a strong Turkish identity. Each threat should be repressed in blood. This was his way of making Turkey modern. Turkey took away day by day the power of the traditional Kurds and did not finance the Kurdish area in its development. The money was used to build official, state facilities, the Turkish army included. There were no investments made in Kurdistan out of fear of economic growth and by that a support towards the Kurdish National Movement in the South-East. To activate the assimilation and to suppress the cultural identity of the Kurdish people, the Turkish government migrated great groups of the Kurdish community to the west of Turkey. Meanwhile, the east of Turkey, became less educated and was waiting to explode. The poverty raised and there was no access for the Kurds to enjoy any development⁷. The only way to develop as an educated Kurd, was to join the army and official politics, in which the most Kurds had to deny their origin. Instead of sharing the development and culture with its people as a whole, like France did, Turkey and its army shed more blood and repression and made it impossible not to react radically. The people from the east and the west became also more alienated from each other

The role of the army

The military complex of Turkey enjoyed the underdevelopment of the Kurds and there resistance⁸. It made them stronger in convincing the Turkish community to protect the nation. They became more powerful and supported by the people. What the community did not know was that the army wasn't only keeping itself busy with maintaining the order and law. The army had also economic interests. More people settled themselves in this scene to become wealthy. It was also being financed by the governance, and not by itself. 5 % of the BNP went to the army, which was not done by any other country. They also have the greatest manpower in the area: 1 million men.

All this concentration at military and state security business, caused that normal state issues were not being discussed and handled⁹. The education, healthcare, policies on employment and the social security suffered from it and received too little financial support to speak of any quality. Meanwhile the army had the latest and modern equipment. Turkey has now reached the ground when it comes to her economy. Still the military complex keeps convincing the people with arguments regarding the national integration and national governance. The also advise the politicians, who still on this day accept their proposal regarding any subject.

⁶ From an interview with Bert Cornillie, regarding Turkey and the EU (nov. 2002): Derwich, M., Driesen, L. (red.), *Turkije, klaar voor de Europese Unie? De Turkse realiteit getoetst aan de Criteria van Kopenhagen*, Ferho, Brussels ((Kurdish Institution), 2002, p. 30.

⁷ Idem footnote 6, p. 31.

⁸ Idem footnote 6.

⁹ Idem footnote 6.

Towards the membership

It should be clear that if Turkey wants to join the EU, adjustments are necessary. Still both parties act suspicious towards each other¹⁰. Turkey on the one hand wants to join the EU on her terms and finds it reasonable to do so. Europe should take Turkey's side into consideration, because of the position Turkey is in right now. They fear their aggressive neighbours and the so-called separating terrorism. The militaries also fear for weakening of the army and the eventually break up of the country. Europe also emphasizing the human and ethnic rights too much and is choosing too easily for the weakest parties. Europe on the other hand accepts the fact that Turkey is in a difficult situation, but also gives out that she is exaggerating the threats. Turkey has also not shown a voluntary and open attitude towards reformations and a membership that is based on a consensus. All in all Turkey is misleading itself with arguments she thinks its strong. But in the end their current position and the position they strive to is not pragmatic and effective. Like I also pointed out above, Turkey causes the threats she is dealing with now or in the future. If Turkey wants to join the EU on reasonable terms, she has to be willing to set things right and come clean with her fate and future. Like their great governor Ataturk once said: 'Peace at home, peace in the world'.

The necessary changes

Turkey still lives out the republican ideology. Though the people aren't that flexible as they supposed to be¹¹. The pragmatic thinking has become wishful thinking. The old values are more of a dogma and if Turkey wants to join the EU, they have to step back from the old, dogmatic values. Turkey also has to accept that the statutory military self-defence is not necessary. Treats can be minimised if the offensive also lowers.

Turkey has to begin the process of entering the EU with changing her fundamental attitude. Like Germany and France have giving a lot of their national tradition when they joined the EU, Turkey has to do the same¹². In doing so, Turkey should not convince itself that their national unity will fade away. There need be a new integration process introduced. This process has to give Turkey the certainty and the conviction that military control can and need to be reduced and should be kept in the borders of Turkey. New, expansionary projects cost too much and don't have effective and utile results. And it is not what Turkey needs anymore. Furthermore the civil society needs to highlighted. Ethnic and religious identity should not be repressed anymore. The Kurdish as well as the Muslim have shown their disagreements and aggression towards this repressive attitude. What Turkey also needs to change is the hypocrite solidarity. When needed, the Turkish government and especially the army, accept the Muslim groups and even the fundamentalists. And in time they will be put back in their places; not really civil-wise. This has caused a lack of trust in the government the recent years and has shown that the elite rules.

Besides taking into account the cultural component and the Turkish fundamental attitude, it is also relevant to look at the economic reformations¹³. It has reached the ground and the inflation is rising. This is due to the lacking performance of the economic trade, the monetary depths and high costs of the army. Turkish businessmen and rich Islamic admit that Turkey is

¹⁰ From an interview with Bert Cornillie, regarding Turkey and the EU (nov. 2002): Derwich, M., Driesen, L. (red.), *Turkije, klaar voor de Europese Unie? De Turkse realiteit getoetst aan de Criteria van Kopenhagen*, Ferho, Brussels ((Kurdish Institution), 2002, p. 31.

¹¹ Idem footnote 10, p. 32.

¹² Idem footnote 10.

¹³ Idem footnote 10, p. 33.

bound to change and by that welcome the membership to the EU. On long terms, even the juridical system is bound to change. A difficult criterion stays the politics of Turkey. Turkey has to give her people and the Kurdish minority (and of course other minorities) civil rights. The army needs to step back and only be activated if needed so and should be employed to watch over the European borders. In the end it is not the state security that bothers the army, but the loss of control over the finances and the loss of the advantages that they enjoy right now. To save the economy, the army will become superfluous.

The EU and her part

Not only Turkey has to change her attitude, Europe has also a job to do. It must show that is not a Christian club¹⁴. It has no effect to think in religious traditions when there are also differences between Christians. It was possible to join Greece, Spain and Denmark in one union and to work on different levels. And the Islam is already existing in Europe and is bound to become greater and greater. If the Christian argument does not disappear, the Turkish side will only be more confirmed in their *underdog*-position. It is necessary for Europe to show her confidence in Turkey and to show that she has interest in Turkey and its care. But she must not admit to the old state ideology, which has brought Turkey down and will have the same effects on Europe.

To achieve this it is necessary that Europe and Turkey convince each other. In this process Europe must skip some of her priorities to convince Turkey¹⁵. This can lead to a new coalition and relation where confidence is the basis. The functioning will thereby get more attention in time. Possible threats, which Turkey spoke of, will become irrelevant. This will not be an easy job to do, but Europe must show Turkey that things cannot go on like this. The period of Kemal Atatürk and its national consolidation has expired and Turkey must enter a new period. But Turkey also has to take an open-minded position and show that she is willing to declare an ending to the old kemalistic period, which is not effective. Europe and the European Commission are after all putting much at stake ; they will pay a great amount of money to reform the poor economy and social structure of Turkey. To be precisely it will cost Europe 14 milliard Euros per year¹⁶. This effects some countries and the negotiations towards Turkey's membership, but then again Turkey must receive this contribution just to overcome the poverty. The beginning will always be difficult.

The structure and protection that will come from Europe and the membership, will in time flourish Turkey's economy. After all, it is the military system that has made the country weak and poor and has attracted the threats, which Turkey is using in her argumentation. With the finance directed to the business and social structure, Turkey will overcome the recession more quickly than being foreseen. Thus it is the question whether Turkey has enough income already.

¹⁴ From an interview with Bert Cornillie, regarding Turkey and the EU (nov. 2002): Derwich, M., Driesen, L. (red.), *Turkije, klaar voor de Europese Unie? De Turkse realiteit getoetst aan de Criteria van Kopenhagen*, Ferho, Brussels (Kurdish Institution), 2002, p. 33.

¹⁵ Idem footnote 14.

¹⁶ 'Toetreding Turkije kost de EU 14 miljard per jaar', ANP, february 2004.

The future expectations

To let Turkey enter the EU, she must reform on political, juridical and economic grounds. Otherwise there will be no future for Turkey's youth¹⁷. The armed conflict in the south-east area must be resolved in a diplomatic manner. And if Europe also wants to grow, she cannot leave Turkey outside the union. Besides, if Turkey doesn't enter soon, it will develop more strong relations with the US and become more pro-American, while Europe is becoming more independent and less related with America. This will in time effect the current economic relations between Turkey and Europe.

What to expect

The future of Turkey's process of entering will develop slowly and in time. But she will need a renewed position to establish a stable and durable context and state of mind¹⁸. A critical dialogue thereby must not be put aside. The value of Turkey must be recognized and Europe must form an example for her. Europe helped and is helping other countries which were poor, so why not Turkey! Demographically it is a risk, but the flourishing economy and import will change that situation. In the beginning the reformations will only reflect on the national developments and wealth. In time this will be shared on the European level. Furthermore Europe does not have to fear a lot from Turkey. To keep some European harmony, there can be mechanism made to keep this in balance. And Turkey is not all alien towards Europe; decades of experience in the NATO makes her a well informed partner and there already exist an Kurdish and Muslim culture in Europe.

When we look at the consequences for the Kurdish minority, inside and outside of Turkey, a lot will happen and a lot is already happening. Turkey counts 20 % Kurdish people of her total population¹⁹. This is about 12 million people. This percentage also counts for the population outside of Turkey and Kurdish people there come to recognize more and more their ethnic origin. This is partially due to the coup in 1980, when a lot of young Kurdish sought asylum in Europe. Their presence and the guerrilla war of the PKK in Turkey, made more Kurds self-aware of their ethnic origin. It has become impossible to deny the Kurds. Furthermore more Kurds in Europe have developed and organized stimulating environments for linguistic and cultural activities. Kurdish politicians and intellectuals express their ideas and put it into Kurdish writings. The Kurdish Institute of Paris developed a standard for the northern Kurdish language, the Kurmanci, and gathered a rich collection of books and documents on Kurdish history. More of these institutes are being formed and publications in Kurdish have become natural in different European countries, like the Netherlands. Kurdish constitutes itself as a modern written language and since 1991 it is even permitted to publicise in Turkey. Several Kurdish journals have moved their offices from Europe to Turkey and became a publishing boom. In Europe, Kurdish media has also grown and is now in a modern state.

This Kurdish movement outside of Turkey, formed partially by technology and partially by the presence of the large Kurdish community, has added a new dimension to the Kurds. You

¹⁷ From an interview with Bert Cornillie, regarding Turkey and the EU (nov. 2002): Derwich, M., Driesen, L. (red.), *Turkije, klaar voor de Europese Unie? De Turkse realiteit getoetst aan de Criteria van Kopenhagen*, Ferho, Brussels (Kurdish Institution), 2002, p. 34.

¹⁸ Idem footnote 17, p. 35.

¹⁹ 'Shifting national and ethnic identities: the Kurds in Turkey and European Diaspora', Journal of Muslim minority affairs, by Martin van Bruinessen, April 1998.

could speak of a 'long-distance nationalism'²⁰. But if we return to Turkey, we still see an increasingly high labour migration, flight from the war and forced village evacuations. The Kurds living in Turkey have become less than two third of all the Kurds²¹. They are also ill-paid, discriminated and treated as underclass. This causes and keeps causing mass migration and globalisation and the tensions that come along with it. It also causes more awareness of the ethnic separateness. Therefore the conflict between Turkey and a large part of the Kurdish population continues to be escalating. An alternative is undeniable, or a confrontation will take place where increasing violence will be witnessed. The social costs of the war will rise, just as its economic costs. Therefore an membership will only put an end to this undiplomatic and inhumane situation towards the Kurds. The Kurds will also be able to contribute to the national economy and product, as they form 20 % of the population. This will thereby also effect the confidence and position of the Kurdish minority inside and outside of Turkey. The separatism will weaken. But this can only be accomplished if the role of the military complex weakens and the Kurdish population gets included in the Turkish economic and social structure. Without any help of Europe this will become very difficult and impossible to do, as there is so little confidence in the Turkish state – due to their suppressive behaviour- and as following a widespread support among the Kurds for Kurdish politicians and parties. But as there is globalisation and migration caused, it is also Europe's problem and in its interest to interfere. The separatism will also decrease in Europe. Furthermore, Turkey does not stand alone in rebuilding her country and the south east. If she shows serious interest in and strive to a solution for the conflict in the Kurdish area, she will be financially supported by the EU²². This as a political gesture.

²⁰ *Shifting national and ethnic identities: the Kurds in Turkey and European Diaspora*, Journal of Muslim minority affairs, by Martin van Bruinessen, April 1998.

²¹ Idem footnote 20.

²² *Naar rustiger vaarwater, een advies over betrekking tussen Turkije en de EU*, from the AIV(advisory council on international affairs), p. 58.

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