

Will Turkey be Europe's lost tear?

VIEW



JOHANN-VOLKER PETER

Turkey is not ready for the EU. Yet, whoever chooses to ignore its efforts for integration into Europe draws a border on the political map which does not exist in reality. The EU can support Turkey's modernisation by encouraging its efforts. If Turkey and the EU do not take this chance, Turkey will become the bridgehead only for Europe's gradual Islamisation

always belonged to Europe's countenance in history — not only since the ancient world and the Byzantine Empire but at the latest since its association with the EU in 1963. Has the EU thus been right to offer accession talks to Turkey (on Friday, December 17, 2004)?

A recent survey indicates that the French (67 percent) and Germans (55 percent) oppose EU membership for Turkey (*Le Figaro*, December 13, 2004). Some Europeans are against Turkey's entry to the EU for economical reasons. Others have adopted this attitude towards the Turks because the Muslim communities have not integrated into Europe. Certainly, Turkey's accession to the EU holds the danger of a cultural overthrow of Europe as the country is gradually Islamised in spite of its constitutional secularism.

Since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, its population has increased from almost 14 million to 70.8 million people today. During the last forty years alone Turkey's population has almost doubled. The Council of Europe informs in its demographic report for 2003 that "in all European countries, except Turkey, the total fertility rate is currently below replacement level."

This does not mean that the integration of Turkey will necessarily fail. The EU has adopted in one go the entry of 74.1 million people in May 2004 from East Europe and the Baltic states. This was possible because the EU and the new countries shared the political background. It also seems that the accession of the new member states can be borne economically. What about Turkey?

Turkey never gave up its efforts to integrate into Europe. It joined a customs union with the EU on January 1, 1996. It is also a member of the Council of Europe since 1949 and the NATO since 1952. It has participated in the NATO missions of the SFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina since 1995, the KFOR in Kosovo in 1999 and the ISAF in Afghanistan since 2001. Turkey

also served as West-Europe's south-eastern shield against the Communist threat.

According to its constitution, Turkey is a parliamentary democracy with free elections. The separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary are constitutionally guaranteed. Like other European constitutions, the Turkish constitution provides for a Constitutional Court that can judge constitutionality of the laws enacted by the parliament. The constitution recognises the basic rights to freedom and equality for all people.

But, Amnesty International has underlined in its February 2004 memorandum to the Turkish prime minister that human rights are still being violated. The violations are "grouped into four main areas: continuing allegations of torture and ill-treatment by law enforcement officials; impunity of law enforcement officials for such crimes and the need to address the legacy of violations; continuing restrictions on freedom of expression and the criminalisation of peaceful expression of dissenting opinion; and violence against women."

Since 2003 there have been 2,616 complaints to the European Court of Human Rights against Turkey. In 77 decisions the court has ruled on 76 occasions that human rights have been violated. The proportion is disillusioning. It is certainly not enough to recognise human rights in the constitution; there must be consistent practice. Otherwise the state is inhuman even if it disguises the fact and its constitution is 'nicely written'.

The role of the military is unclear, too. According to its self-conception, the military is a guard against Turkey's Islamisation. While holding down radical Islamists is reassuring, this is a political not a military issue. The military cannot be a state within the state. It must be politically neutral and controlled by civilian authority.

Apart from the labour market problem lurking in Turkey's accession to the EU, Turkey might be a reliable economical part-

ner. It already exports 51 percent of its products to the EU. Though the Turkish economy is still inconsistent and suffers on account of its high foreign debt, it is a growth market with a high potential. Therefore the economical relationship with Turkey must be welcome. Germany, Turkey's biggest trading partner, can lead the way. Germany has not only the highest Turkish share of population in the EU but also has a highly developed infrastructure. Economic trends show that by 2010, 100,000 Turkish entrepreneurs might engage 650,000 employees in Germany with about 95 billion euro annual sales. The two countries have opened a joint chamber of industry and commerce, the only bilateral chamber in Turkey according to the Turkish Act on Chambers. The economic exchange can be expected to lead to greater intercultural exchange and a better understanding of each other.

One must realise that Turkey is not ready for the EU. Its internal policy with respect to human rights, its economy and its ambiguous situation about Islam do not allow its membership. Nevertheless, whoever chooses to ignore Turkey's efforts to enforce its integration into Europe draws a border on the political map which does not exist in reality. After the EU has offered qualified accession talks to Turkey, the country has the chance to become a full member of the EU in more than ten years. It seems thus that Turkey has sufficient time to deal with its political, economical and cultural problems. In fact, the EU can support Turkey's modernisation by encouraging its efforts concerning human rights and economic uplift. However, Islamic fundamentalism must be curbed. If Turkey and the EU do not take this chance, Turkey will become the lost tear of Europe in spite of a common history. It will be excluded from Europe forever and be the bridgehead only for Europe's gradual Islamisation.

Dr Johann-Volker Peter is attorney-at-law in Frankfurt-Main, Germany

A TEARFUL FACE DOES NOT LOOK forward to the future. Almost 97 percent of Turkey's national territory belongs to Asia while only 3 percent is lost in Europe. From this perspective, Turkey is not a natural member of the EU like Germany and France. However, Turkey