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Headline: Let Turkey into the EU

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Should Turkey be a member of the EU? You can come up with arguments both for and against but you have to realize that, above all, this is a political question. Geography, religion and the famous conditions for accession are convenient excuses for the people who do not want the country to ever become a member. The criticism of Turkey is, on many points, justified but why is it only against the Turks that we accept the consequence and say no?

The first argument against the Turks is rather simple: It is about geography. It has always been puzzling how this can suddenly be a factor, during the Cold War Turkey was Atlantic enough to become a member of NATO. But back then we had to defend ourselves against the Soviet Union.

Added to that is the minor detail that parts of Turkey are actually in what many consider as Europe, while the rest is not. Turkey is not alone in this situation, other EU countries also stretch across the borders of Europe. For example, Greenland was part of the EU for a brief period, Spain has cities in North Africa, and both Malta and Cyprus are closer to non-Europe (Africa and the Middle East) than to Europe.

There are also all the islands, territories and colonies which are attached to certain EU countries (France, Great Britain and Holland) around the world and the Atlantic islands belonging to Spain and Portugal. It is not as simple as it sounds.

It is more interesting that the distinction is relatively new. The ancient Greece, which we normally like to refer to in discussions about philosophy, math and democracy, encompassed large parts of the Mediterranean coast of what is now Turkey. There was no distinction back then and Turkey was far more European than us up North.

Even more important is the fact that no one can seriously claim that EU membership is about a line on a map. And so what? Unless you believe that the EU should be a religious community, it should not matter. There is also the question about Bosnia, they are Muslim too – so should they be kept out too? Or what about an eventual reunification with Cyprus, does that mean we throw out the Mediterranean island because there are too many Muslims on it? No one is considering doing that.

A typical argument would be that, as it is an Islamic country, they do not segregate religion and politics and therefore they are not „mature“ enough to join a Western cooperation. However, you should remember that Turkey is a secular country, more secular than many of the EU member states.

If what we are afraid of is having a member country which bases its politics and argumentation on religion (and a conservative interpretation of it) then we are a bit too late. If that were the case, we would never have welcomed Malta or Ireland, not to mention Poland.

„Turkey cannot meet the conditions we set for a member country“. Now we are approaching something, because judicial security and democracy in Turkey is not how we would want it to

be. Respect for human rights leave much to be desired and there is more corruption than what's good for you.

At the same time the Army's influence is sometimes difficult to distinguish from the civilian system. All this is true. On the other hand, you can say much the same about Romania and Bulgaria, and we let them in without any major problems. In Bulgaria it is not the Army which is the problem but the mafia. The situation in Romania is not much better, on the contrary. There is no shortage of scandals about corruption and fraud. Only three months after the country had become a member of the EU, you could watch the President accuse his Prime Minister of corruption – and vice versa.

The judicial security is not so good either. There are complaints about political persecution from Romania, just like the old security police is being accused of still controlling large areas of the media, business life and the political system.

Many of the other EU countries have also had their own problems. Not least with regards to judicial policy and corruption. Some of the largest corruption scandals in Europe have been in some of the original EU countries, France and Germany, and have involved people right at the top of the political system. And we haven't even mentioned Italy.

In Belgium, the parents of lost children are complaining that the police are not thorough enough in their investigation. Conspiracy theories explaining that this is due to pedophile rings reaching all the way up to the top in Belgian society arise often. The trust in the judicial system always working is limited.

All this we have been able to ignore when talking about other countries than Turkey. Not that it was correct to do so, but it does raise an important question: why do separate rules apply to Turkey than the other member-and applicant countries?

Something would indicate that the accession criteria are not traditionally firm but have more the nature of a wish list or excuses for not accepting the country.

„Turkey oppresses its minorities“. Again a correct point of criticism. The Turkish state comes over „less than fortunate“, to use a diplomatic phrase, not least in relation to Kurds and Armenians.

Unfortunately, it is the same in many member countries with minorities. Just look at the gypsies. Attempts have been made to wall them in, persecuted by the police and the authorities, regarded as less intelligent, ill adapted and can often not be taught in their native language. Or the Slovak in Austria or the Basque in Spain and so on.

An interesting sidebar to this is that the EU often prides itself of having secured peace between the hereditary enemies, Germany and France. If that was really true, shouldn't that be a clear reason why Turkey should be in the EU right now? Because it could probably also secure a lasting peace between the Greek and Turkish enemies. Who knows, maybe it could even lead to peace and unification on Cyprus?

What is it about? The answer is simple: it is about power. Power and politics.

If you look at the French presidential campaign it is obvious that the question about Turkish membership was a tool to garner votes and the same was the case in Germany.

That both France and Germany are fighting against Turkish membership is due to something else, namely the size of the country. In the EU size does matter. Large countries simply have more power than small countries. If the Constitution is pushed through, this will be strengthened and Denmark will, comparatively, lose influence to, amongst others, France. This is precisely where the question about Turkey is relevant, for if Turkey joins the EU, there will suddenly be another large country and that will have consequences. A Turkish membership of the Union would really mean less power and influence for both France and Germany and it is perhaps here we should find the true source of the rejection. Even though this, for the rest of us, could be reason enough to support it.

The answer to the question about Turkish membership of the EU would from our side be: Yes! Sitting on the fence and making excuses must stop and a serious plan for getting Turkey into the EU must be made. It will take some time, but the country must join and we must say this clearly and with commitment. It is that simple.