Chapter Seven
The EU Enlargement Process as a Peace Promotion Instrument: the Kurdish conflict in Turkey

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Abstract

Among all the European Union (EU) peace promotion mecha-
nisms, the enlargement process seem to present the best results.
This is due to the way it links non-member states to the possibility
of EU membership, which, in hindsight, is the biggest benefit that
an unstable, poorly developed state, on the EU borders can have.
As peace and stability are compulsory requisites to join the 'club,'
any conflict evolving in that country will have the tendency to be
solved, at least in theory. This chapter analyses the degree of influ-
ence that the enlargement process has been having in the Kurdish-
Turkish conflict, especially up to the re-escalation of the fighting
during 2004. It will explain the evolution of the enlargement proc-
ess, the concrete analysis of the Turkish relation with the EU, and
Turkey's Kurdish problem, including its characterization and rela-
tion to Turkish security.

Enlargement as a Peace Promotion Instrument

Despite the permanent enlargement/deepening binomial in the Eu-
ropean integration process, only in the eighties has the EU (formerly the
European Community) emerged as a regional stabilization instrument.
Greece (1981), Portugal and Spain (1986) were among the first candi-
dates to feel its impact. As Larrabee and Lesser explains:

> In opening its ranks to the three South European countries, the
> EC gave priority to political considerations — particularly the desire
> to stabilize democracy in these countries — over economic concerns
> (2003: 48-49).

The enlargement process to the East marks a new step in the use-fulness of this EU foreign policy mechanism. Besides its integrative (in relation to the more advanced countries which were not part of the EU) and stabilization roles (the enlargement in the eighties), the 2004 enlargement adds a pacification dimension to the process. For example, in Cyprus there was a need to reach a minimum agreement between Greece, Turkey and the two sides of the island[1]; in various Central European countries (mainly in the Baltic region), measures had to be taken in relation to minority rights, one of the political requirements in the Copenhagen criteria (the others are, economic and communitarian), established in 1993, whose fulfilment is a *sine qua non* condition for a state to adhere to the EU.

Conditionality and Socialization

The fulfilment of these criteria constitutes the core of the conditional dimension in the 'europeanization' process of a state vying for EU membership. The further away a state is from these criteria, the more prolonged and difficult is the process. In this context, the other side of the 'europeanization' process — the domestic actors' socialization — becomes even more important. If the conditionality deals with structural changes in the short-term, the socialization of domestic actors is a long-term process. It encompasses the progressive insertion of various actors — elites, civil society, and military — in EU ideas, values and goals. Their socialization will allow the conditionality process to be based on solid supportive foundations. On the contrary, if these foundations are not solid, the fulfilment of conditions will be in jeopardy, and adhesion to the EU out of sight: 'the effectiveness of the conditionality mechanism largely depends on the possibility of Europeanization through socialization' (Noutcheva *et al* 2004: 18).

There is a depoliticized dimension in this process, which imposes political measures as if they were mere technical details. This depoliticization does not match with the political decision that is the approval of a

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[1] Although only the Greek part of Cyprus adhered to the EU, Brussels was very satisfied with the results of the referendum held in the Turkish part of Cyprus. In the December 2004 negotiations, when the EU decided to set October 2005 as the starting date for the Turkish adhesion process, Erdogan's government assumed a tacit compromise to recognise Cyprus as an EU Member and to open its Customs agreement to that country (Bowley 2005). Even the more sceptical cannot deny that the EU has, at least, been able to definitely remove the spectre of a Cypriot civil war.

candidate state adhesion. There is a paradox between the conditionality strictness and the subjectivity of the EU member-states behaviour, which can easily fall into the field of incoherence. In this case, the EU may not only become less attractive, but also loose the confidence of the candidate state, which may even signify the de-socialisation of that country's domestic actors.

When this process is developed in a social pacification context, the consequences of such a setback may be quite harmful, leading to destabilization of the country (Noutcheva *et al* 2004: 16). As such, the introduction of the Copenhagen Criteria has turned the enlargement process into a more sensitive issue than previously. The possible accession of Turkey is profoundly connected to this problem, as it also has its own needs concerning the pacification of its society.

The Turkish Process

This is a complex process, which has been dragging on since the sixties, when Ankara and Brussels signed the Association Agreement (1963). The goal was to create a Customs Union, with accession to the European Community promised in the long-term. The Customs Union was eventually established in 1995, but Ankara wanted more.

Written in the matrix of the Turkish state, is the conception of Europe as a role model (Larrabee and Lesser 2003: 46), a 'club' to which the Turks should belong. During all these years, the difficulties in the Turkish-European relationship were often caused by this one-sided view, not fully understood in Brussels[2]. After being rejected in 1990, the 1997 EU rejection caused even greater irritation for authorities in Ankara when at the Luxembourg Summit, the Council gave the green light for Central and Eastern European countries to begin their accession processes. The consequence of all this was the poor socialisation of Turkish elites, for whom the EU was mainly perceived as an economic club (Kirisci 1998: 73).

This misunderstanding eventually froze Turkish-European relations for two more years. Nevertheless, in 1999, in a clear proof of the politicized dimension of the enlargement process, the EU conceded the status of Candidate State to Turkey. The accession negotiations were, nonetheless, still dependent upon fulfilment of the Copenhagen Cri-

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[2] For Larrabee and Lesser, '[the] perception of Turks as 'other' in Europe is deeply embedded in Europeans' collective memory and colors European views of Turkey today' (2003: 46).

teria. In 2002, at the Copenhagen Summit, it was determined that not until December 2004 would Ankara would receive a definite proposal concerning the opening of negotiations, which in turn would eventually be set for October 2005.

From 1999 onwards, the conditionality, weak until then, and the constantly interrupted socialization were given a new impetus (Bilgin 2004: 37). The Copenhagen Summit decision of setting a date for the negotiations increased pressure on Turkish political actors to accelerate legal reforms (Keyman 2003: 19). Nevertheless, the security discourse was still to be compatible with demands from Brussels for fulfilment of the political criteria.

The Kurdish Question at the Core of Turkish Security Concerns

Kemalism, the ideology created by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founding father of the Turkish state, is based on two assumptions: laicism and unity (Oguzlu 2003: 291). Against the continuous over-lapping between religion and politics during the Ottoman Empire and in order to avoid European domination over its future, Atatürk developed various policies[3] which should guarantee that the two assumptions would be structural to the Turkish state's identity. In spite of the efforts and relative success during his stay in power, the Turkish founding father was not able to completely eradicate the 'threats' to those assumptions — the weight of religion in Turkish society and the secessionist movements.

It is not the aim of this essay to analyse the 'religious threat'. Nevertheless, the November 2003 attacks in Istanbul by Islamist movements[4] and the recent controversy in Turkish society about adultery, raises the question as to whether the laicism assumption is solid in Turkey.

Concerning the separatism problem, it falls, exclusively within Kurdish claims. The largest minority group in Turkey (10 to 12 million people), is spread all over Turkey, with a considerable percentage of Kurds integrated into Turkish society[5]. Nonetheless, it is in the poorly developed

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[3] The only recognized minorities are the Greeks, Jews and Armenians and all their religious symbols are forbidden in State institutions.

[4] There were many Kurds among the captured terrorists (Lesser 2004: 181).

[5] According to Cornell, 'Foreigners are startled by the discovery that a significant portion of Turkey's political and business elite is of Kurdish origin, including three of the country's nine presidents — something unthinkable for Kosovars or Chechens — and the Kurds' representation in the country's parliament is larger than their proportion of the population' (2001: 32).

South-eastern region (Barkey 1993: 52) that the Kurdish people find their ethnic base and heaviest demographic concentration.

Despite never being recognised as such until the early 1990s, the Kurdish problem dates back to the 1920s (Somer 2002: 85), when the first uprisings took place (Bozarslan 2004: 81). But only in the 1960s did those dynamics acquire some importance in Turkish society, by then marked by a deep social polarisation, a consequence of Eastern migratory movements and of the national increase in educational levels. These phenomena allowed the population to better understand the social disparities in Turkey, a feeling particularly strong among Kurds (Cornell 2001: 39). Throughout the country, various revolutionary movements were created. One of them was a group led by a young Kurd called Abdullah Öcalan — the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK).

The PKK put together a Marxist-Leninist agenda with a Kurdish separatist/autonomy[6] claim. However, the movement's radicalisation came only with the 1980 military coup, which had the aim of eradicating all political activities beyond the 'acceptable' (Barkey and Fuller 1998: 16). This radicalisation was materialised by minor attacks against Turkish security forces in 1984. In time, those actions intensified, marking the beginning of a new era in the Kurdish problem. Until then, considered as a secondary ethno-political problem, it also becomes a violent conflict with visible consequences — more than 35 thousand deaths and hundreds of thousands displaced in 15 years. The Kurdish problem acquired, as such this double dimension: not only an ethno-political dimension but also a violent one — the armed insurrection.

The Conflict's Ethno-Political Dimension

Neglected since the creation of the Turkish state, the Southeast region has a structural standard of living quite inferior to the rest of the country, be it in purchasing power, health or educational conditions (Gokcek 2002). These inequalities, over-lapped with a sense of ethnicity, only helped to exacerbate feelings of difference. The rejection and oppression of Kurdish cultural events helped the PKK to earn legitimacy,

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[6] The PKK's political agenda is not totally clear (Barkey 1993: 53). Besides, according to Cornell, in the 1990s 'the PKK toned down its Marxist rhetoric and instead emphasized Kurdish nationalism in the hopes of attracting a larger following among Turkish Kurds. Marixsm-Leninism found little resonance among the population in agricultural, rural southeastern Turkey.' (Cornell 2001: 39).

which due to the complexities of the intra-Kurdish relationships, would never have occurred in another context.

Directly related with this is the Kurdish political problem. As it was never recognised as a minority, the Kurds were never allowed to politically defend their collective rights. As a consequence, the Kurdish political parties have been persistently harassed and frequently closed down by the authorities in Ankara. This situation made the moderate Kurdish parties loose their appeal and legitimacy among Kurdish voters, leaving the radical movements free space to convert themselves into claimants for the Kurdish people's rights. It should be mentioned, nonetheless, that the weakness of the Kurdish nationalist movement, incapable of having a preponderant presence until the 1970s and incapable of surpassing the PKK's radical speech, also derives from a lack of political unity among the Kurds (Cornell 2001: 35).

The Conflict's Violent Dimension

Relatively connected to the ethno-political dimension, is the PKK's armed insurrection. Although its claims usually found feedback[7] in many Kurds affected by economic, political and cultural problems, neither was popular support significant, nor was the PKK dependant on it[8] to fight in the name of the Kurdish people (Koch 2002: 2). In fact, the conflict with the PKK is far from being a mere domestic problem.

Although they waged their war in Turkey, its bases and financial resources are placed outside the Turkish borders. The Kurdish Diaspora, itself a consequence of the poor living conditions in the Turkish Southeast (Cornell 2001: 38), was obliged to look for a better future in Western Europe. They provide financial and human resources for the PKK. However, the biggest support came from Damascus. According to Koch, 'Öcalan himself admits that Syrian[9] support was crucial to the organization's survival and development' (2002: 4). This support came as an indirect response from Damascus to the territorial disputes it has with

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[7] For Somer (2002: 90), 'many of the guerrillas reportedly decided to join the PKK as a result of socioeconomic dislocation and experiences that involved excessive use of force, or outright human rights violations, perpetrated by security forces'.

[8] According to Barkey and Fuller, 'it is difficult to ascertain exactly the extent of the PKK's support among Kurds in Turkey' (1998: 43).

[9] This support was both financial and logistic, with the establishment of a training base in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon.

Ankara and mainly to Turkey's closeness with Israel (Gokcek 2002). But it is not only Syria, also Iran[10] and Greece[11] that are said to have sponsored PKK activities, which also shows Turkish geopolitical complexity.

In spite of all this support to the PKK, Ankara has managed, after 25 years of fighting, to defeat, or at least, severely wound, the PKK's power. The reasons for this success are diverse, but according to Kocher (2002: 4), they are especially connected with the changing demographic pattern in Southeast Turkey. Whether it was the search for an improvement in their living standards or the consequence of Ankara's[12] strict displacement policy, the truth is that the region's demographic pattern changed in seven years (1990-1997), from a rural population, to a mainly urban one[13]. As guerrillas usually fight in rural environments, this change deprived PKK of its natural habitat. Besides this, Turkish security and military forces learned from their own mistakes, evolving to a higher threshold of efficiency during the nineties — and mainly during the decade's second half (Cornell 2001: 42).

The arrest of Öcalan would dictate PKK's unilateral cease-fire in August 1999 and in 2002 the official abandonment of the armed struggle, placing the conflict in the political sphere (IISS, 2002: 169). The PKK even became the Kurdistan Congress for Freedom and Democracy (KADEK). The cease-fire would, however, end in September 2003, when a PKK faction decided to resume the military struggle, in a low-intensity but still persistent tactic. In the first ten months of 2004, 150 people died, between security forces, civilians and PKK members[14], consequence of both deadly PKK incursions from Northern Iraq and Ankara's response. In fact, since the Nineties, the Turkish government stationed more than five thousand soldiers in Iraq (IISS 2002: 138).

The EU Impact on the Kurdish Conflict

The Kurdish question has always been on the Turkey-EU agenda. European public opinion considered that Ankara's accession was impossible

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[10] For whom Turkey is an opponent in the fight for influence over Central Asia.

[11] In 1994, Ankara presented proofs that some of its intelligence agents, infiltrated in the PKK had received training in Greece (Barchard 2003: 21).

[12] There is no official figure, but according to some NGOs it could be more than 1 million displaced people.

[13] Between 1990 and 1997, the urban population in Southeast Turkey grew 45% whereas the rural population diminished 11,9% (Koch 2002: 7).

[14] Human Rights Annual Report from the US State Department.

as long as the Kurdish problem remained unsolved, including its violent dimension. The problem was even raised by the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl during the Luxembourg Summit in 1997 (Barchard 1998: 20), as well as by Gunther Verheugen, the European Commissioner responsible for the enlargement process, during his visit to Ankara in March 2000 (Aydinli 2002: 212).

For the Turks, the problem is situated at another level. Besides the chronic fear of Turkey's disintegration, there is an ever present suspicion about the European attitude towards the Kurdish problem (*idem*: 219). This derives from certain concessions, made by certain European countries, concerning the realization of some Kurdish events; the broadcasting of the PKK's television channel; the absence of obstacles to financial activities of European immigrants loyal to the PKK, and finally, the permanent criticism from the European Parliament (Biscop 2002). However, this perception dates back to historical questions — the Sèvres syndrome that still affects the way Turkey looks toward Europe (Kirisci 1998: 76).

This ambiguous EU behaviour reduced its influence in Ankara. Paradoxically, the PKK military defeat made the flourishing of a propitious environment to the implementation of the reforms demanded by Brussels easier (Keyman 2003: 15). This paradox is very uncomfortable for the EU, which has always shown its discontent towards the methods put forth by Ankara (see EC, 1998: 9).

Even after 1999, the tense relationship between Ankara and Brussels has not radically changed where the Kurdish problem is concerned. In its 2000 Report, the European Commission noted that, 'the situation in the Southeast, where the population is predominantly Kurdish, has not substantially changed' (EC 2001: 13). Education in Kurdish and the right to broadcast in that language, for example, continued to be prohibited, despite the critical 2001 Commission report, which highlighted restrictions concerning freedom of expression and minority rights.

Although in August 2002 the Turkish Parliament approved some fundamental changes, such as an end to the death penalty in times of peace or the right to broadcast and learn in languages other than Turkish, the most important change would come with the election, in November, of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). This Muslim-democratic party, has not only broken the centre parties' hegemony, as it also obtained for the first time in the Turkish political system, an absolute majority, guaranteeing sufficient stability to face the measures demanded by Brussels.

The emergency zones created since 1987 to battle the PKK insurrection (emergency zones that would become the principal oppression mechanism against the Kurdish population), would be progressively dismantled

until 2003[15]. After some problems related to its implementation, the August 2002 and 2003 reforms were finally transferred into practice in 2004: the Kurdish language could finally be taught in private schools and broadcasted on television[16]. In parallel, torture, arbitrary imprisonment and persecution cases have drastically diminished; and displaced populations have, slowly, started to return to their lands, supported by a government programme especially conceived for those displaced from the Turkish southeast.

However, numerous problems remain in the still highly militarized South-eastern region. Almost 60 thousand 'village guards' — militias paid and maintained by Ankara — are still active, in spite of the numerous accusations of human rights violations, criminality and corruption. Political problems remain, since members of the Kurdish Democratic People's Party (DEHAP) are still persecuted and frequently harassed by Turkish authorities. The other major Kurdish party, the People's Democracy Party (HADEP) was closed in 2003, on Ankara's order.

In a nutshell, the EU seems to be obtaining visible results in areas concerning Kurdish cultural rights. Nonetheless, its influence in the other two ethno-political dimensions — social-economic and political areas — seems to be developing at a different pace.

Conclusion

Although a slow process, both Turkish military successes and the measures demanded by the EU seem, twenty years later, capable of drawing the Kurdish conflict to an end. The power of enlargement is evidently a positive peace promotion mechanism. Nevertheless, it also seems quite clear that Brussels lacks the capacity to achieve a more immediate negative peace. In other words, the EU has managed to obtain, in five years, some relative results in one dimension of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict — the recognition of Kurdish minority rights — removing an eventual support base to the dying PKK, divided and hidden in Northern Iraq. It has not managed, however, in a forty year bilateral relationship with Turkey, to prevent the displacement of hundreds of thousands of

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[15] However, according to the IISS (2002: 169), Ankara extended the state of emergency in four provinces, in March 2002, two and a half years after the PKK cease-fire.

[16] According to the 2004 Human Rights' Report from the US State Department, 'while there were improvements during the year, the Government maintained significant restrictions on the use of Kurdish and other minority languages in radio and television broadcasts'.

people and more than 35 thousand casualties. This proves the EU's limited capacity to impose its will outside the enlargement processes.

The EU has never assured Turkey that it would help it to overcome the Kurdish military problem (Aydinli 2002: 222), insisting only in resolution of the ethno-political dimension of the problem. As a consequence, a growing 'europeanized' Turkish society has been sceptical of the EU's approach towards the Kurdish problem. Only this explanation makes it possible to understand why a society with EU approval levels at 75% (Somer 2002: 75), does not have, in an imperfect but still democratic Turkish democracy, a more active voice in the resolution of the Kurdish problem. It seems clear that if Ankara has made the mistake of ignoring the ethno-political dimension of the conflict, Brussels has ignored its violent dimension.

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