European Agenda

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Turkey's Eventual Membership of the EU: Turkish Elite Perspectives on the Issue*

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I. Introduction

Relations between the European Union (EU) and Turkey have tended to waver between being semi-cordial and extremely strained. Throughout this rather long history of attempts at establishing close ties between the two parties, not much has been known about Turkish opinion regarding the EU. Thus, it is hoped that the current research can provide some insight into Turkish opinions relating to Turkey's application for full membership to the EU by interviewing Turkish elites – academics, businessmen, journalists, and government ministers. Specifically, do they favour Turkey eventually joining the EU, and are they hopeful about this happening in the near future? Also, what do these individuals perceive to be the main reason that Turkey has not been admitted into the European Union, which countries do they perceive to be against Turkey's full membership, and

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what benefits and costs do they see arising from eventual full membership? Do these perceptions reflect the opinion of EU Commission reports, or the more 'unmentionable' factors of religion and ethnicity? My findings indicate that opinion on joining the EU is still quite favourable, despite the sometimes strained relations. However, there is some degree of disconnectedness between what the Commission has argued are the problems with Turkish full membership and what elites view as the most important problem. Mostly this imbalance appears in the form of an over-emphasis on economic problems and a lack of emphasis on political problems, such as human rights violations, the lack of civilian control over the military, and the resolution of the Cyprus dispute with Greece. Ultimately, it is hoped that these interview results will be informative for the general academic community in terms of expanding on the more qualitative research being conducted by scholars writing on Turkish–EU relations, and that the results will be informative for EU leaders in their future dealings with Turkey.

II. Background to Turkish–EU Relations

Attempts to establish cordial relations between what is now the Turkish Republic and the European powers can be traced back to the Ottoman Empire's inclusion in the Concert of Europe as a counterbalance to Russia in 1856. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the founder of the new Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was quite clear about his intention to westernize, modernize and civilize Turkey, and instituted various policies to carry out this process (including the abolition of Islamic Law, the adoption of the Swiss Civil Code, abolition of Islamic dressing style, adoption of the Latin alphabet, etc.) (Redmond, 1993). Since this time, Turkish leaders have worked hard to establish that Turkey *is* western, and more specifically that it *is* European.

These leaders were given encouragement in their thinking that Turkey was European (or on its way to becoming European) when Turkey was admitted to several European and western organizations, such as the OECD (1948), Council of Europe (1949), and NATO (1952). The quest for external validation of its European credentials and a desire to participate in a community of Europeans eventually led Turkey's leaders to apply for associate membership of the European Economic Community in 1959.¹ After the signing of the Ankara Agreement (Turkey's association agreement), which included a promise of full membership of the EC at a later date, Walter Hallstein, President of the European Commission, declared that, 'Turkey is part of Europe' (cited in Redmond, 1993,

¹ Another important factor in Turkey's application for associate membership was, of course, Greece's application for associate member status – the Turkish application was lodged just 16 days after the Greek application.

p. 23). Thus, there was a great deal of reassurance that Turkey should continue on its stated path of becoming part of the community of Europe.

The Ankara Agreement was signed in 1963² and included three phases through which the EC and Turkey would pass in order to achieve full economic integration, with both sides making trade concessions and Turkey adapting its external tariff laws to match those of the EC. Because of disagreements on both sides, the Ankara Agreement was eventually modified by the Additional Protocol in 1970, which had as its ultimate goal the establishment of a customs union between Turkey and the EC by 31 December 1995.

After significant reductions in tariffs and quotas for EC products, as well as the harmonization of external tariffs, the customs union between Turkey and the EC did eventually come into being on 31 December 1995. Two years after the beginning of the operation of the customs union, Turkey's application for full membership (which had been lodged in 1987³) was still pending, and the Commission and the European Council were fairly negative about Turkish membership. At the December 1997 Luxembourg European Council summit, accession negotiations were opened to all applicant countries except Turkey, and Turkish officials believed this meant that Turkey was no longer being considered for full membership of the EU (Müftüler-Bac, 1998). Turkish authorities refused to attend the March 1998 European Conference in London because they felt Turkey had been treated unfairly at the Luxembourg Council meeting. As a result, at the June 1998 European Council meeting in Cardiff, the Council made clear efforts to bring Turkey back into the accession process. Turkey was not included in the group of eastern European countries which were being considered for accession in the near future, but the Council reaffirmed that Turkey should continue preparing for full membership, welcoming proposals from the Commission to assist Turkey. Further, the Cardiff Council proposed that Turkish–EU relations consist of bilateral negotiations and strategies, in that it recommended that Turkey's own ideas be taken into account.

The Cardiff Council also requested that the Commission prepare a report on Turkey's accession. In this report (from November 1998), the Commission's (1998) evaluation of the Turkish situation revolved around several key political and economic problems. The political problems related to three important issues: (1) the problem of human rights violations, including torture and lack of freedom of expression, mostly resulting from the conflict in the southeast part of the country; (2) military (National Security Council) independence from civilian control; and (3) Turkey's handling of the Cyprus issue (see Neill Nugent's

² A military coup and disarray in the government after the military returned power to the civilian government delayed the signing.

³ This was a time when Turkish–EC relations were particularly strained and when the EC was still in the process of adapting to the southern enlargement (see Müftüler-Bac, 1997 for a summary).

article, pp. 131–50 in this issue of the journal). The economic problems included: (1) inefficiency in the agricultural sector due to small farm holdings; (2) financial sector problems revolving around the fact that a small number of banks held a large proportion of the country's assets; (3) inflation; (4) socio-economic problems, such as illiteracy, infant mortality and poor health care; (5) regional disparities in GNP and socio-economic development; (6) price setting in agriculture, energy and transport; and (7) the domination of manufacturing by small firms which would probably have difficulty if they faced more competition from manufacturing companies in the EU.⁴ Along with a very positive statement by Commission President Romano Prodi, a more recent Commission evaluation of Turkey was issued in October 1999, which mentions most of the same problems.⁵

In a rather historic moment, Turkey was finally accepted as a candidate for full membership at the 10–11 December 1999 Helsinki meeting of the European Council. While Turkish authorities – namely Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit – were somewhat hesitant to accept the EU's offer because of disagreement over the stipulation that the Cyprus issue be resolved before Turkey can become a full member, Ecevit was won over by a last-minute visit from Javier Solana, the EU's newly-appointed High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy. Thus, Turkish authorities appear to have accepted the conditions put upon their prospects for full membership – continued improvement of the economy, the correction of the internal political problems, as well as the resolution of the Cyprus issue. It should be noted, however, that the opinion survey discussed below was conducted before this more recent evaluation and the extremely positive statement made at the Helsinki summit, and thus the respondents would have no knowledge of either of these events. Therefore, it is expected that the elites in the survey will be responding to the November 1998 evaluation.⁶

⁴ There are a few reasons why these firms have not yet faced full competition under the customs union, the most important one being macroeconomic and political instability (*Financial Times*, 10 July 1997). Investors are simply hesitant to get into the Turkish market because of domestic political instability and macroeconomic difficulties, both of which make planning new projects difficult. If these investors believed that Turkey was truly going to become a full EU Member State, it is likely that their behaviour would change considerably because of expected stability, and the Turkish companies would not survive because of their restricted access to the capital market and their poor management and administration skills. There are, of course, other problems that these companies face. For instance, child labour laws are not strictly enforced in Turkey, and small companies benefit from cheap/free child labour (for instance, the labour of family members). If these companies have to pay full salaries to all of their workers (as they would if Turkey were to join the EU as a full member), many of them are likely to fail.

⁵ In the new report, there is somewhat less emphasis on resolving the Cyprus issue (i.e. the phrasing is not as clear, and it is not repeated at several points, as was the case with the 1998 report) and on specific socio-economic problems like infant mortality and poor health care, although these latter problems appear indirectly under the rubric of 'investment in human capital'. Also, there is a somewhat ambiguous statement regarding the treatment of the imprisoned Kurdish leader, Abdullah Öcalan, in the 1999 report: the Commission hopes that the recent positive reforms to the judicial system will not be undone by carrying out the death sentence on Öcalan (Commission, 1999).

⁶ If a survey could be conducted today, the major change to be expected would be a more positive attitude towards Turkey's prospects of becoming a full member of the EU.

Various scholars have written on the nature of the problems between Turkey and the EU and, as a result of their disbelief in the validity of the Commission's stated reasons for rejecting Turkey's candidacy (until very recently), these scholars have attempted to determine the true reason for what they perceive as the cold-shoulder treatment from the EU towards Turkey. Many of these scholars argue that the heart of the problem is the overriding perception that EU leaders have of Turkey, which is that it is (a) fervently Muslim and (b) not really European. Further, they view the reasons given above by the Commission as a 'polite formula for saying "no"' (Müftüler-Bac, 1997, p. 64) rather than as real, significant reasons for not accepting the Turkish application for full membership. Determining the 'real' reason for the failed application is quite difficult, and indeed it is likely that there is no 'real' reason, as various leaders in the EU have differing perceptions of the problem. However, it is possible to determine what Turkish citizens perceive is the reason for the failed Turkish application, and to determine whether they appear to be taking cues from the Commission or tend to emphasize cultural and religious incompatibility. This is the aim of the current research.

III. The Survey

Because resources were limited, individuals were interviewed (in face-to-face interviews) who would be at least somewhat knowledgeable about Turkey's relations with the EU. Thus, within the category of business people and government ministers, lists of individuals considered likely to have some knowledge of Turkish–EU relations were compiled. Among the business people, the aim was to interview the top executives of the ten largest firms in Turkey, which was in fact possible. From government ministries, directors and assistant directors in the foreign ministry were selected, as well as executives in other ministries who acted as special liaison for EU affairs between their departments and the foreign ministry. From a list of approximately 50 potential ministers (directors and assistant directors), 20 were randomly selected to be interviewed. For the journalists, a list of all journalists who were writing on politics or economics in the major Turkish newspapers (*Sabah*, *Hürriyet*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Radikal*) was compiled, and all were interviewed.⁷ Finally, the sampling frame for academics consisted of all of the assistant professors, associate professors and full professors (excluding visiting foreign faculty, as the aim was to obtain *Turkish* opinion on this issue) from the departments of economics, political science, business management, and international relations in the capital city, Ankara. From some 120 academics, 30 were randomly selected to be inter-

⁷ Some of these people were regular employees of the newspapers; others were Turkish journalists working for Dow Jones or Associated Press; and others were freelance journalists (also Turkish).

viewed. Thus, this survey is intended to be a fairly representative sample of elites in the Ankara area.⁸

Both open-ended and closed-ended questions were included in the survey (the English or Turkish version of the survey is available from the author), and thus it was necessary to develop coding schemes for the open-ended questions once the interviews were completed. Each of the interviewers was asked to translate his or her responses (all interviewers were fluent in Turkish and English), to develop a proposed coding scheme based on the responses, and then to code his or her own surveys. All of the coding choices were then re-evaluated by the entire group of interviewers and the supervisor. The coding results, and direct translations of selected responses, are presented below.

IV. The Results

Demographics

The vast majority of the respondents (77 per cent) were male, which is not at all unusual for an elite survey. All respondents were well educated, with the lowest educational achievement being a bachelor's degree (also not unusual when interviewing elites). Approximately 58 per cent were educated in Turkey, 27 per cent in the United States or Canada, and 15 per cent in Europe. The respondents were quite wealthy by Turkish standards: the majority earned more than 400 million Turkish liras per month – roughly \$1,000 at the time of the survey. All interviews were conducted in March or April, 1999, and ranged in length from 20 to 70 minutes, with an average of 33 minutes.⁹ The following is the breakdown

⁸ The size of the samples of ministers and academics was fundamentally based on the resources available to interview these people, with the larger sample of academics reflecting the larger number of academics in the general population. The method chosen was one in which samples were taken from two of the groups (ministers and academics), and then the entire population of the other two groups was taken (journalists and businessmen – all of the business executives were indeed men). If strict random sampling had been used, the representation of the journalists and businessmen would probably have been lost because of their small numbers. Since these are both very influential groups of elites, they were nevertheless included in the general elite sample.

The size of the entire sample was constrained by the researchers' limited resources. A trade-off had to be made in terms of either interviewing a large sample from one elite group or smaller samples from several elite groups. There is certainly a risk involved in taking the latter strategy, namely that the smaller samples will not accurately represent the population from which they are drawn. However, the alternative – representing only academics, for instance – seemed less satisfactory, in that one group could not possibly represent the entirety of elite opinion. It should be added that elite samples in social science research generally tend to be quite small. Putnam (1993) is one example of reliance on small-N elite surveys.

⁹ In addition to the open-ended questions discussed below, several closed-ended questions were included in the survey. Many of these were regarded as rather useless due to poor wording, and thus are not discussed in this analysis. For instance, one of the items was, 'the Turkish human rights policy must be changed before Turkey will be admitted into the EU' (strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, strongly disagree). Similar questions were asked about resolving the Kurdish problem, and problems with Greece, etc. (All of these questions were asked *after* the open-ended questions were completed in order to prompt the respondent for important things that might have been forgotten.) Many respondents claimed that Turkey should make these

of the elites by category: 18 per cent journalists; 40 per cent academics; 17 per cent businessmen; 25 per cent government officials in the foreign ministry (or associated with the foreign ministry through the special liaison position mentioned above).

Perceptions of Reasons for Rejection by EU

Previous work points to a variety of possible responses to the question of why the respondent believed Turkey's application for full membership had not yet been accepted.¹⁰ Thus, some respondents are likely to agree with the Commission's evaluation and would argue that one or more of these reservations was at the heart of the problem with Turkey's application for full membership. Based on some of the scholarly research discussed above, however, it was expected that many individuals would perceive that the real reason for rejection by the EU revolves around cultural and religious factors – that Turkey is a Muslim country and that it is culturally different from the EU.

Table 1 displays the answers to this question.¹¹ First, only two respondents identified 'Greek opposition' as the main factor keeping Turkey out. This is a somewhat unexpected result, as the Commission continues to emphasize the importance of a peaceful resolution of the Cyprus issue as a condition for Turkey's acceptance into the EU. Even in a closed-ended item stating that 'the political problems with Greece must be resolved before Turkey is admitted into the EU', only 46 per cent of the elites agreed, while 43 per cent *disagreed* (the other 11 per cent were undecided). Furthermore, only 14 per cent *strongly* agreed with this statement. Thus, despite continuous pressure from the Commission (and indeed other major actors in the international community) to resolve disputes with Greece – particularly the Cyprus dispute) – even *elites* in Turkey

changes not necessarily for the sake of joining the EU, but because it would be good for the country. While this is an interesting response, it is virtually impossible to decide how many elites actually thought this was the case, but felt forced by the survey questions to give one of the listed responses.

Also, as discussed in Tessler *et al.* (1987), in this part of the world it is more acceptable to take one's time and give detailed responses than in most western societies. People are not accustomed to answering surveys but *are* accustomed to spending a great deal of time discussing their ideas with one another. Thus the length of the interviews (compared to the number of questions actually discussed below) is not unusual.

¹⁰ The exact question wording is: 'What do you think is the primary reason Turkey has not been admitted to the European Union as a full member? Are there any other important reasons that Turkey has not been admitted?'

¹¹ Significance tests were conducted to determine whether any of the elite groups gave significantly different answers to any of these questions. No significant differences were found between groups, however, possibly because of the small number of respondents within each elite category.

One might expect that big business elites would generally have a less favourable attitude regarding Turkey's full membership of the EU because many of them have argued (in media interviews) that Turkey already receives the benefits of free trade through the customs union. While some business leaders may take this position, many of them (based on the survey results) appear to understand that Turkey is in a weak position *vis-à-vis* the EU because it has very little control over EU decision-making.

Table 1: Perceived Reasons for Turkey's Non-Admittance to the EU

<i>Reason for Non-Admittance</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Opposition of Greece	2
Economic problems	20
Social structural problems	8
Demography/ population size	13
Issues of free movement	6
Human rights/lack of democratization	8
Political problems/political instability	10
Ethnic identity/ culture	9
Religion	16
Timing – failure to apply when Greece did, or east European countries getting the advantage now	4
Other	5
Total no. of responses	101

Note: Multiple responses were allowed.

appear to refuse to acknowledge the significance of the problem. Also of interest is that even after probing for more reasons for Turkey's non-admittance, only one more respondent said that Greek opposition (as a result of the Cyprus issue) was an important factor keeping Turkey out of the EU. Thus, Turkish elites seem to believe that there are more fundamental problems with Turkey's application than the opposition of Greece.

What are these problems? The respondents pointed primarily to economic and social structural problems. When these two categories are combined, they constitute 28 per cent of the total responses. However, other elements were also thought to be important. Roughly equal numbers of responses pointed to (a) demographic issues, including the size of Turkey's population and concerns within the EU about issues of free movement; (b) political problems, political instability, or human rights violation; and (c) religious and ethnic/cultural identity problems. On the problem of religion and cultural identity, for instance, one respondent argued, 'Turkey is a Muslim country; [the] EU is a Christian community'. Another stated in response to why Turkey had not been admitted as a full member: 'Crusades, religious reasons and we are not European'. Similarly, 'although it is not official, they perceive themselves as a Christian club'. Further, on the problem of demographics and free circulation, one quote is indicative of the perception of this problem: 'the main reason is that the young population in Turkey is more than the number of any other European country and they are reluctant about free circulation'.

Countries Against Turkey's Membership

The vast majority of the respondents (72 per cent) thought Greece was the main EU Member State that was against Turkey's full membership of the EU. When prompted to name other countries that they believed to be against Turkey's membership, respondents usually named Germany. Alternatively, people who gave Germany as the first response then gave Greece as their second response. The reasons these countries were perceived as being against Turkey's membership are obvious: Greece's historical conflicts with Turkey and Germany's fear of a flood of Turks into Germany.

Favourability Toward Full Membership/Perceived Costs and Benefits

The vast majority of the respondents were in favour of Turkey joining the EU as a full member: 32 per cent were strongly in favour, 54 per cent were in favour, and only 12 per cent were opposed (with no one being strongly opposed). Regarding hopes for Turkey joining the EU as a full member within the next ten years, respondents were evenly divided: 52 per cent said this was very or somewhat likely; 43 per cent said it was very or somewhat unlikely; and 5 per cent were undecided or did not answer the question. So, while most respondents would like to see Turkey join the EU as a full member, many of these individuals were not hopeful about its prospects of joining in the near future. Finally, when asked if EU membership is vital for Turkey, only a minority (17 per cent) said 'yes'; another 23 per cent gave a somewhat mixed response; and 60 per cent said 'no'.

When asked in an open-ended question what would be the best thing about Turkey being admitted as a full member, the general emphasis in the responses was on economic/social development (see Table 2).¹² As one bureaucrat argued, 'the regional differences within Turkey will disappear; standards will increase; the level of development will increase, including education, health, everything'. The importance of the establishment of European credentials was the second most frequent response. Several quotes illustrate this concern, for instance, 'Its benefits will be in terms of westernization, prestige, and Turkey's being considered as a European country'. Similarly, 'it will facilitate us to think like a European; our lifestyle will be more European'. Finally, 'to be within the EU, to be a member of the EU – it puts you in another class in many different dimensions'. Somewhat surprisingly, political and legal aspects of full membership were not emphasized, with a very small number of responses pointing to democratization or development of the legal system in Turkey as benefits of EU membership. This lack of emphasis on political development was unexpected,

¹² 'What would be the best thing about Turkey being admitted to the European Union? Would there be any other positive things about Turkey being admitted?'

Table 2: Perceived Benefits of Turkey's Admission into the EU

<i>Benefit</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Economic/social development	49
European credentials established	23
Democratization/human rights improvement	12
Legal system will be reorganized	5
Technological improvement	4
No benefit	4
Other	3
Total no. of responses	77

Note: Multiple responses were allowed.

primarily because it seemed likely that the elites would be looking to the models of Greece, Spain and Portugal, where it is widely believed that EC membership helped establish political stability. I expected that elites might say that EU membership would have the same stabilizing effect on the Turkish political system, but this did not appear to be their main concern.

When asked about the worst thing about being admitted,¹³ the most frequent response was that there would be no harm at all, followed closely by expressions of concern for potential economic difficulties (see Table 3): 'If we cannot catch up with the technology, we will be in the position of a market and agricultural

Table 3: Perceived Costs of Turkey's Admission into the EU

<i>Cost</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No harm at all	29
No harm beyond the customs union	3
Economic harms	27
Loss of national sovereignty	17
Deterioration of traditional values and norms	6
Deterioration of religious values	5
Other	11
Total no. of responses	63

Note: Multiple responses were allowed.

¹³ 'And what would be the worst thing about Turkey being admitted to the European Union? Would there be any other negative things about Turkey being admitted?'

collapse'. Also, a small minority expressed concern over the loss of national sovereignty and the deterioration of traditional values and norms. For instance, one of the respondents was concerned about 'the erosion of [the] family concept and marriage. Children without fathers will be common, uncontrolled education'. Similarly, 'perhaps the cultural values may be eroded. Loneliness, metropolitan people, coldness. Turkish people will experience the loneliness that western people have'. Thus, while many respondents appear to have no reservations about the problems that might result from EU membership, there was some worry about economic difficulties, the loss of sovereignty, and erosion of traditional values.

V. Discussion and Conclusions

The first point that should be made about the survey results is that despite the mixed signals that the EU often sends regarding Turkey's accession application, and despite fairly negative Commission assessments of Turkey's prospects for accession, the individuals interviewed still displayed positive attitudes about Turkey joining the EU one day – i.e. they would like to see this happen – and approximately half were hopeful that this would occur in the fairly near future. While there was a great deal of anger and hostility toward the EU after the Luxembourg summit, and even some discussion in the press of 'turning our destiny elsewhere', elites in Ankara generally do not appear to have succumbed to this view. Perhaps this is partly a result of the new Cardiff strategy, which emphasizes more positive relations between the EU and Turkey.

A second point that should be made is that while many elites in Ankara appear to hold similar views to those of the Commission on the problems in Turkey – that there are still major economic and political problems that must be resolved before Turkey can be considered a serious candidate for accession – there is also some concern that issues which are impossible to resolve are keeping Turkey out of the EU. These issues are related to the religion and culture of the country. Specifically, many of the elites interviewed believed that the EU is a 'Christian club', and that perhaps there is no place in such a club for a Muslim country. Similarly, many elites expressed concerns that EU policy-makers perceive Turkey's culture as being incompatible with European culture (which goes back to the old perception of Turks as barbarians). If relations between Turkey and the EU are going to progress, EU policy-makers must work to dispel the notion that the EU is a Christian club and that Turkish culture is incompatible with European culture. Otherwise, these perceptions on the part of Turks could eventually lead to feelings of hopelessness about their country ever joining the EU. On the other hand, perhaps the suspicion is correct. If so, this is indeed an issue that must be addressed by EU policy-makers. Turkish identity has been in limbo for quite

some time now, and if Europeans do not see the country as having any possibility of being accepted into their community, this is information that should be shared with the Turkish leadership so that they may begin the process of building Turkish identity on a different foundation.

The recent statement from the Helsinki summit has already made great headway in terms of convincing Turkish authorities and citizens that the EU does not see itself as a Christian club. This positive approach is seen in great part as being a result of the change in the German government from a Christian Democratic government which was fairly hostile towards Turkish membership in the EU to a Social Democratic government which is more favourable toward Turkey becoming a full EU member. It is difficult to know whether Germany will continue its positive approach towards Turkey or will reverse the headway made at the Helsinki summit. If the latter occurs, it could be quite devastating to Turkish–EU relations as well as to the process of identity formation within Turkey.

A third important point is related to perception of the importance of the Cyprus issue (and Greek opposition generally) in preventing Turkish membership of the EU. Why this response was not offered voluntarily in open-ended questions is unclear, but at the very least, it indicates a severe lack of emphasis on the importance of this problem. This is most probably related to perceptions regarding the source of the problem itself: it was the failure of the international community to respond to the poor treatment of Turks in Cyprus and to the 1974 Greek coup in Cyprus (as required by multilateral treaty agreements between Greece, Turkey, and Britain, see Müftüler-Bac, 1997) that originally caused the problem and now it is Greek obstinacy which perpetuates the problem. Thus, it is likely that the perception of which party is at fault prevents elites from realizing that determining who is at fault matters very little to most EU leaders. Rather, the resolution of the dispute itself is crucial to obtaining full EU membership, as it is impossible to have two Member States who often appear to be on the brink of war with one another. (This obviously would be contrary to the original goal of the EC, which was to maintain peace in Europe.)

One final point should be made regarding perceptions of the seriousness of the political situation in keeping Turkey out of the EU. Many respondents did argue that political instability and human rights violations were among the key problems, but it certainly was not an overwhelming response. This is surprising, considering that the political problems are likely to be just as important as (or more important than) the economic problems. One of the most significant of these political problems is the role the military plays in Turkish politics. As indicated by Commission reports, the military is not under civilian command, and moreover, it has the crucial task of supporting the important pillars of the Turkish state (elements outlined in the Constitution, such as secularism and

territorial integrity). It is extremely unlikely, if not impossible, that the EU would ever accept a new member which allows such power to lie in the hands of the military. At the same time, given the threats posed by Islamic fundamentalism and the Kurdish separatist movement, it is also extremely unlikely that the military will turn its power over to civilian control, nor would most Turkish citizens want this. Of all the problems outlined by the Commission report, this one seems to be the most important because it is the one that is the most intractable. Yet, none of the sampled elites pointed to this specific problem. If the most educated, most knowledgeable Turkish citizens do not understand the seriousness of this problem, then it is imperative for the EU leadership to work harder to explain it.

While this research may have shed some light on perceptions of Turkish–EU relations among Turkish elites, it also points to the paucity of information available regarding Turkish perceptions of the EU. Future research should perhaps explore similar issues (hopefulness regarding Turkey joining the EU, perceptions of why Turkey has not been accepted as a full member, etc.), but among a larger sample of elites, and also among ordinary Turkish citizens. The whole process of westernization and Europeanization has been elite driven in Turkey, and thus elite perspectives are fairly predictable. Citizen perceptions of the EU, on the other hand, are not so predictable and deserve exploration.

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