



TURKISH DELIGHT OR TURKISH DILEMMA?

Turkey and the European Union A Non-rapprochement Of Cultures?

There are two bridges spanning the Bosphorus strait in Istanbul thus connecting Europe and Asia. Two symbols of potential *interculturality* if not *transculturality* at its very best.

Thousands of Turkish government supporters have streamed across them to protest against the coup that sought to unseat President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Bosphorus Bridge – renamed by Erdogan *15 July Martyrs Bridge* – was one of the key battlegrounds in Friday night's coup attempt, as rebel soldiers descended in tanks to block it to traffic only to be countered by protesters who descended in force.

Many were carrying lit torches and nationalist signs like “*Our flag, our nation*” and brandishing slogans denouncing the U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Ankara blames for the coup. Turkish nationalism is flamboyant and frightfully alive, not the least in the European Turkish diaspora in Germany, Belgium, France...

The demonstrators marched from the district of Kisikli on the Asian side — where Erdogan has a home and regularly spoke to supporters in the aftermath of the coup — to the European side of the city.

The bridge is a metaphor for a two-faced Turkey, one is facing Europe and modernity, the other looking towards Asia and a brilliant Islamic past: the Ottoman Empire. Erdogan dreams of a Turkish Renaissance and wants to become not the new Mustapha Kemal but the new calif- sultan. Like Hitler's in the late thirties, there are no limits to his ambition.

Erdogan's Turkey is a nation drifting apart (the Kurds issue, the Kemalist un-religious army, the Gulen's movement) haunted by ghosts of the past, torn between secularized Europe and Islamised Orient, obsessed by a constant struggle between the sword (the anti-religious army) and the turban (the religion identity), inverting right now the Young Turk republican movement of Mustapha Kemal into a religious quest, an Islamic backlash crushing a bunch of rebellious *kemalist* generals who are advocating a secularized republic. As an ambitious *would be Sultan* -another word for Führer- Erdogan is fighting on two fronts : against the remains of what used to be the kemalist army and Fethullah Gulen's movement that tends to match fundamentalism and modernism. The Islam-conservative Gulen used to be Erdogan's ally until 2013 but he lives in exile in the States now.



MODERNIZATION OF ISLAM VERSUS ISLAMIZATION OF MODERNITY.

The struggle for power illustrates Mohammeds Arkouns dilemma: *modernization of islam versus islamization of modernity.*

Erdogan is dramatically trying to control the press (closing of more than 100 media outlets, shutdown of 45 newspapers, three news agencies, 16 television channels, 15 magazines and 29 publishers, detention warrants have been issued for at least 80 journalists suspected of having ties to Mr. Gulen) the army (more than 1,000 members of the Turkish military, including 127 generals and 32 admirals, were also dismissed as a result of the decree published under the state of emergency late Wednesday. They have been accused of having connections to Mr. Gulen.) in its traditional role of keeper of the Kemalist inheritance and it looks as if he was winning the decisive battle towards presidential dictatorship by urging the Turkish folk to join him in his endeavor. It seems to work wonders (the government has purged tens of thousands of soldiers, police officers, journalists, teachers and government employees accused of having ties to the Gulen organization. More than 9,000 people have been arrested in connection with the coup attempt, and thousands more have been detained). *Human rights groups have criticized Turkey for detaining so many journalists and have accused the government of using the failed coup as a pretext to silence critical journalists.*

"Journalists should not pay the price for military officers' unlawful attempt to overthrow the government," Nina Ognianov (NYT), "We call on Turkish authorities to stop imprisoning journalists for their views."

Mr. Erdogan declared a three-month state of emergency, allowing the Turkish authorities to detain suspects without charges for up to 30 days. Under Article 25 of the state of emergency act, journalists who spread or convey "false or exaggerated news with intent to create panic among the public" can face punishments of three months to a year in jail. (from the NYT)

Washington, and Berlin appear to have no choice but backing the dictator's apprentice putting the fox in charge of the henhouse. (read : the refugee camps)

Merkel's, moral *angelism* motivated by a dramatic demographic deficit has in fact urged Brussels to offer Erdogan the keys of Europe.

The liberalization of visas requested by Erdogan may eventually lead to a new Turkish diaspora towards Germany and Western Europe.

What about the Turkish commitment towards NATO : the Turkish army is the second strongest after the US army...

It seems that Edogan is somehow repeating Hitler's 1933 strategy to conquer power democratically. Trump, Le Pen, Wilders, Orban are dying to follow suit...

It is high time we asked ourselves whether the democratic cycle is perhaps drawing to a close in Turkey and beyond. Erdogan wishes to take advantage of the coup to get rid of all his challengers and opponents.



Let us face it : isn't Europe actually drifting apart as well, in its total incapacity to tackle major issues such as failing political elites, soaring unemployment, jihadist terror and, more than anything: massive immigration?

Whereas Europe is falling fast asleep, all kinds of nationalisms are awakening again; Turkish nationalism is unquestionably the most visible of them all.

We mustn't trivialize such ominous facts.

IS A RAPPROCHEMENT OF CULTURES STILL POSSIBLE?

Orhan Pamuk, best known Turkish writer beyond the Turkish borders definitely stands for a *rapprochement* of cultures.

Yet, in a recent interview to Der Spiegel he was alluding to the "*crippled Turkish democracy*," and he criticized that *there is no freedom of expression in Turkey*. He was, by no surprise, mentioning *an imprisoned journalist friend*, and he pointed out *how the government exerts pressure on newspaper editors and on all critical journalists*. He complained that *there should be no such thing as a separation of powers in Turkey today* and said, with a laugh: "*The doctrines of Montesquieu are not popular here.*" "*I have the Nobel Prize, so I can say what I please.*" But *my country is in such bad shape*, he explained.

Orhan Pamuk is a courageous man, a great writer and a distinguished cosmopolite. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature on behalf of *his quest for the melancholic soul of his native city*. More than anything, *he has discovered new symbols for the clash and interlacing of cultures.*"

His books don't obviously bang the drum for either side in the great debate over secularism and the role of Islam. *The idea of the good old Ottoman years as some kind of a model for contemporary Turkey has arisen recently*, he argues, *under the current Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan*.

He admits that if Turkey has now energy for reform, *it should be directed inwards, at human rights, the question of free speech and respect for minorities*. He added : *that would make Turkey a decent ally and partner for Europe* which it is not under the present circumstances. That was before the coup.

Cohn-Bendit once said that Pamuk "*was one of the intellectuals who made him understand the importance of Turkey joining the European Union. It is so important for democrats in that country. Orhan is not only one of the most important modern writers in Europe, he is one of the examples of the possible modernity of Turkey.*" Modernizing Islam or Islamizing modernity: that is the eternal question.



The central and crucial question today is whether it still makes sense to share Cohn-Bendit's enthusiasm about accepting Turkey in the European Union?

Pamuk and his brother attended the American school in Istanbul. *"That sort of education makes you too secular and too westernised to properly stay in touch with traditional voters,"* said Pamuk which makes him an intellectual exception rather than an average Turk. How about the man on the street waving his national flag proudly? Is he sharing Pamuk's cosmopolitan views?

The ruling westernized elite thought religion was one of the reasons for our glorious Ottoman empire's decline. But from the 60s they also saw it had an immense political power. If you showed the voters you were religious you got more votes and since then the upper classes have been scared of the lower classes and urban Turkey has been more religious.

"BEWARE AN ELECTED DICTATORSHIP" (The Guardian)

'THE BELLY IS STILL FERTILE FROM WHICH THE FOUL BEAST SPRANG' (BRECHT, ARTURO UI)

The people who spilled on to the streets to defeat the coup forces with their red flags with white crescents were not all there to defend Mr Erdoğan. Many were there to defend democracy itself. All of the political parties, even the predominantly Kurdish HDP, rallied behind democracy without any hesitation. It was a cause bigger than the president. The question for the future is whether he understands that it is. (The Guardian)

Undeniably, the coup attempt will further complicate Turkey's relations with Europe and the US. *For the first time in recent memory, there is serious discussion of Turkey's Nato membership in Ankara, with some questioning whether it should move instead to becoming a "friend" of Russia.*

In short, Turkish foreign policy now stands at a crossroads. If Washington does not convince Turkey of its commitment to a thorough review of Ankara's request for Gulen's extradition, Ankara may turn definitely to Russia. And should Ankara bring back capital punishment, which looks highly likely, the EU-Turkey ties and refugee deal are likely to fail. (Soner Cagaptay a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, ibid)

WHAT TO DO THEN ABOUT TURKEY?

Erdogan wants a political model that is based on two pillars a moderate Sunnite Islam and a liberal economic model no longer inspired by Kemal Ataturk's ideas.

How can we cope with that as we know, from a geopolitical standpoint that Turkey is of outstanding strategic importance to the west?



Those are indeed questions for all of us and not only for the minds of politicians and diplomats in Europe and the US, following the failed military coup and last week's subsequent, sweeping nationwide crackdown ordered by its president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

As it stands, Turkey remains a country of essential strategic, economic and regional importance: its internal upheavals may indeed herald very serious trouble.

Turkey is not a part of the Arab Middle East. Nor is it, mostly, a part of Europe, despite its broadly western orientation and alliances. Yet it is a bit of both because of its unique position. It straddles the divide, geographically, culturally and mentally. It has a foot and a hand in both camps. And this is one reason why there are no easy answers to its current, worrying predicament or to questions about its longer-term future.

Basically , Erdoğan has become an increasingly controversial and divisive figure. His popularity with the mass of conservative, working-class, provincial and rural voters, with whom he closely identifies, is not matched among middle-class, better-educated, better-off city dwellers.

Rightly or wrongly, many of them see the neo-Islamist AKP as a threat to Turkey's secular tradition and the liberal, democratic values symbolized by Europe and the EU that they are longing to join. Erdoğan's active promotion of religious beliefs in everyday public life, and his regressive attitude to the role of Muslim women in society, has combined with growing and worrying political authoritarianism, intolerance and dissent.

Yet we must bear in mind that he has managed to hold together a country that has a relatively recent acquaintance with democracy and a long intimacy with internal and external strife. He is the elected leader of an elected government. He has presided over a broad improvement in living standards and economic wellbeing, which helps explain his grassroots support. (The Guardian)

More importantly, he has also co-operated, imperfectly and at a very high price, with European efforts to control the destabilizing flow of Syrian and other refugees into the EU. What is basically needed now are ground rules to reboot a relationship that has got badly out of sync.

THE HEAVIEST MORAL DEFEAT OF THE EU EVER.

Willy Claes, former Nato Chairman reminded (in De Morgen) that *The refugee-deal between Merkel-Europe and Erdogan's Turkey is the heaviest moral defeat of the EU ever. For it isn't about migrants but it involves political refugees, kids, women who are fleeing war and destruction.*



We are bound hand and foot by a state of which the United States have always feared that Erdogan 's Turkey might evolve into a, extreme Islamic regime. It is therefore essential that we may develop a constructive dialogue with the reformers of Islam in Turkey and across the world. Not a Salafist Islam financed by the Saudis.

The one million dollar question remains: should the EU countries offer a genuine partnership to Ankara based on enhanced co-operation over security and counter-terrorism, assisting refugees, addressing the potential problems of a post-conflict Syria and achieving a lasting, internationally underwritten Kurdish settlement that recognizes Ankara's concerns?

Should they encourage deeper Turkey-EU integration? Shouldn't we at any cost try to prevent Turkey from plunging into civil strife? Wouldn't Turkey otherwise descent into the unknown destabilizing the Middle East further?

Wouldn't the return of the military to Turkish politics have been music to the ears of strongmen in Syria and Egypt, and to anti-Islamist governments in the region and beyond?

More importantly, wouldn't the 2,7 million Syrian refugees in Turkey have been the first casualty of the coup?

Cutting a deal with Assad, wouldn't the rebel generals have sent the refugees home? Wouldn't we have found it difficult to collaborate with a regime that had toppled a democratically elected government?

Fair enough, but isn't Erdoğan appearing to be drawing the wrong lessons, seeing the uprising as a "gift from God" to "cleanse our army"? If the coup had succeeded, wouldn't Turkey have descended into a prolonged period of chaos?

But as Turkey is becoming more repressive isn't the AKP government actually waging war against democracy? Aren't our own rulers and everyone of us somehow complicit?

We really have to face the fact that Turkey has long been a serial violator of human rights, enduring all too little criticism from its western allies. In the war with Kurdish guerrillas fighting for independence in the 1990s, the country's security forces destroyed up to 4,000 villages and settlements – often by burning them to the ground. Hundreds of thousands of civilians were displaced, and an estimated 30,000 people died. The country is one of the worst jailers of journalists. *"Since 2013, the AKP government has become increasingly authoritarian, increasingly intolerant of dissent, and has resorted to extreme measures such as silencing the press,"* says Andrew Gardner, Amnesty International's Turkey researcher.

"Last September, British lawyers wrote a damning report about Turkey's human rights record, citing the rigging of the judiciary, internet censorship, restrictions of freedom of



expression, and degrading treatment for detainees. "Turkey's allies have been remarkably silent in calling upon Turkey to cease these violations," says Gardner.

According to Hisyar Özsoy, a senior spokesperson for Turkey's leftist opposition People's Democratic party (HDP): *"Europe has been so nice about President Erdoğan's authoritarian tendencies because they think it can help temporarily stop the flow of refugees."*

All in all, there was no justification for last week's failed coup. *"Opposing the coup was a matter of principle for us,"* says Özsoy, *"even though there are so many severe problems about the functioning of democratic institutions."* *"It's turning into collective punishment,"* says Özsoy. *"They will expand this repression and will include all dissents in this country."*

"THE COUNTRY IS ON THE BRINK OF CIVIL WAR," warns Özsoy.

Turkey's western allies have a responsibility to stand against the curtailing of basic rights and freedoms, and to support democratization. To fail to do so risks peace and security for all of us. These might be febrile times, and many injustices are being committed. But if you believe in democracy and human rights, you have a responsibility to demand that our governments stand for both.

Turkey is in no position to become a European Union member any time soon and all negotiations for it to join will stop immediately if it reintroduces the death penalty, EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said on Monday.

"I believe that Turkey, in its current state, is not in a position to become a member any time soon and not even over a longer period," Juncker said on French television. He was suggesting that a country that included the death penalty in its legislative arsenal had no place in the European Union.

Last week Recep Tayyip Erdogan blamed the European Union for having a *"biased and prejudiced"* stance on Turkey, following stinging EU criticism over a crackdown in the wake of the failed coup.

"For the past 53 years Europe has been making us wait," he concluded.

"We are in a better condition than countries that have become members... No (EU candidate country) has had to suffer like we have had to suffer."

Turkey's membership bid dates back to 1963, with its formal application made in 1987 and negotiations starting in 2005.

It's not just a matter of criticizing the Turkish folk or its authoritarian leader, the important thing is basically to open new ways in order to facilitate a possible coexistence between religions and cultures, thereby ignoring the fields and realm of politics but which reminds and warns policy makers that a return to the middle age has absolutely no future.



NEW MIDDLE AGE?

Europe has fallen asleep, nationalisms of all kinds are waking up all over and the middle ages are threatening us. (Alain Minc 1993)

As Minc was already suggesting then : *everything is possible in this new era of which we may fear everything, but at the same time expect all possible things.*

It is of paramount importance that we Europeans demand that Erdogan reestablishes the rule of law in the Turkish society and all its ramifications and that he reestablishes the democratic principles which implies:

- A full respect of the Human Right and the Copenhagen criteria
- A full respect of the independence of judges and justice
- The immediate liberation of all those who were arrested arbitrarily
- The full respect of the Kurd and other minorities

The second bridges spanning the Bosphorus strait in Istanbul connecting Europe and Asia should be called *Intercultural Dialogue*.

We'd better realize once and for all that we live in a very complex (Turkey is complexity *par excellence*) world and that complexity is the paradigm we must learn to understand and mastermind if we want to become its masters, not its slaves.

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