

TURKISH IMMIGRANTS: THEIR INTEGRATION WITHIN THE EU AND MIGRATION TO TURKEY¹

According to the authors many Europeans believe that if Turkey were to become an EU member state there would be large numbers of Turks immigrating to EU. It is estimated that there are approximately 3,6 million Turkish nationals living abroad of which about 3,2 million are in European countries. Some studies predict a flow of migrants (between 1.3 to 2.7 million) from Turkey to the EU until 2030. The authors argue that prospects of EU accession will not eliminate immigration from Turkey; however, the context, the number and the composition of Turkish immigration will be very different than what it has been so far. Given the importance of the EU as an anchor in Turkish politics and for the economy, it is quite likely that migration might be greater and of a more difficult sort if the prospects of membership is lost.

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¹This is a brief on the continuing Bogaziçi University-OSIAF joint projects on *Employment and Immigration Issues in Turkish-EU relations* – by Refik Erzan, Kemal Kirişçi, Cem Behar and Gökhan Özertan.

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As December 2004, the date when the EU will decide whether to start negotiations for accession with Turkey, approaches one of the hotly contested issues is the prospect of Turkish immigration to the EU. Today, it is estimated that there are approximately 3,6 million Turkish nationals living abroad of which about 3,2 million are in European countries, a substantial increase from 600,000 in 1972. Turkey's population is approximately 70 million. Given the present situation, there are many in Europe who believe that if Turkey were to become a member state there would be large numbers of Turks immigrating to EU.

This fear is coupled with the widespread belief in Europe that Turkish immigrants have failed to integrate into their host communities. This perception has exacerbated anti-immigrant feelings in a number of EU member countries and fuels concerns about further immigration.

This debate does not recognize the fact that Turkey itself has always been a country of immigration receiving a large number of permanent and transitory immigrants and refugees. A Turkey that is actively engaged by the EU for eventual membership will most likely emulate the experience of Spain, Portugal and Greece in that it would attract immigrants that otherwise could be going to Western Europe.

Prospects of Turkish Immigration to the EU

There are even those who speak of Turks "flooding" Western Europe when membership is granted and free movement of labor is allowed. The numbers being bantered about range from 2.5 million to 10 and even 15 million. A column in the Belgian paper, *De Standard* (30 March 2004,) written by Dirk Jacob Niewboer, argued that 25 percent of Turks, roughly 17 million, would migrate to Europe if they could.

More serious studies predict a flow of migrants from Turkey to the EU of between 1.3 to 2.7 million until 2030.² A key input in any such prediction is the long-term growth scenario in the EU and more particularly in Turkey. Currently Turkey's purchasing power in adjusted GNP per capita is about 30 percent of that in the EU 15. A key question in making predictions is how that is going to evolve in the coming 10-20 years.

Turkey's economic record shows that an annual per capita income growth of 4 percent is possible, which is currently about double that of the EU 15. However, there have been periods, especially in the 1990s, when crisis-ridden Turkey barely grew. During 2002-2003, when the prospects of obtaining a negotiation date for accession talks brightened, the Turkish economy once again demonstrated its potential for significant growth. As a small open economy plagued with debt, positive expectations and a road map are crucial for sustainable growth. In this respect, the EU is the only credible anchor for Turkey's concept of progress.

In neo-classical theory, income disparity is the main economic determinant of migration. Keynesian analysis adds to this the unemployment gap. In empirical studies, both factors appear highly significant. Growth in the economy, particularly growth that exceeds population

² See, e.g., H. Flam, (2003) "Turkey and the EU: Politics and Economics of Accession," Seminar Papers, Institute for International Economic Studies, Stockholm University, Seminar Paper No. 718; and, A.M Lejour, De Mooij R.A and C.H. Capel (2004) "Assessing the Economic Implications of Turkish Accession to the EU," CPB Document No.56, Netherlands.

increase, reduces unemployment. However this relationship need not be very strong or very stable.

In Turkey, the open unemployment rate is about 11 percent. However, labor participation is only 50 percent. Furthermore, over 35 percent of the labor force is in the rural sector. The good news is that Turkey has a young population and the population growth rate has been steadily decreasing. The ratio of working adults to the total population is currently 65 percent. This ratio will approach 70 percent in 2025 before starting to decline – a phenomenon called “the population window of opportunity.”

Robust and steady growth of the economy is necessary to make good use of this opportunity. The demography provides a major advantage for high growth. However, reducing unemployment also requires a smooth urbanization process. The prerequisite is a stable political and macro environment where long-term structural reforms are implemented.

Cohesion countries – Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain – have benefited from a “medium term growth bonus” upon entering the EU. These countries experienced return migration as a result of accession. It is highly unlikely that Turkey will receive the kind of structural and cohesion funds that these countries received. Nevertheless, given the impact that the mere prospect of getting a date for the negotiations is having, the positive impact of membership on growth and dynamism in Turkey can be expected to be very significant.

The impact of any postponement in the initiation of negotiations for accession, let alone the prospect of denied membership, could have a detrimental effect on Turkey’s political stability and economy. Turkey may again become a source of immigration due to asylum, family reunification and irregular migration. Without the prospect of accession, immigration is more likely to increase in the short and medium term. Prospects of accession will not eliminate immigration from Turkey. Immigration will undoubtedly continue, but the context, the number and the composition of Turkish immigration will be very different than what it has been so far or what could be the case if Turkey were to be deprived of the prospect of EU membership. The new context would be one that would generate more employment prospects in Turkey. This would be accompanied by a long transition period for free movement of persons.

In the mean time, due to population decline and aging, the EU will be experiencing labor shortages. More specifically, the proportion of working age adults to the general population will decline. The EU is responding to this development by trying to increase labor force participation, particularly among the elderly, but it is hard to imagine a scenario that does not use controlled migration as one of the policy solutions. It is true that immigration cannot be a permanent remedy for aging – unless it is continual. However, while the socioeconomic system in the EU adjusts to the reality of aging, immigration can provide some relief and reduce adjustment costs. In this context, a balanced immigration where demand for migrant skills also plays a role is certainly preferable to irregular immigration and immigration through family reunions.

Lastly, the immigration literature and empirical studies tell us that people prefer to stay “put.” People prefer to stay where they are rather than move unless there are pressing economic, environmental or political pressures to move. In spite of the decision to create the Single Market and all the measures that have been adopted to encourage people within the EU to move, people still continue to prefer home. Similarly, as the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union

were collapsing, there was great concern and panic that millions of Russians and East Europeans were going to flood Western Europe. It did not happen. What occurred, excluding refugee movements resulting from the violence in the former Yugoslavia, remained at manageable levels. In the end approximately 1.2 million mostly Germans and Jews emigrated in the first three years to Germany and Israel. Furthermore, most of the Russians (22-25 million) left outside of Russia in the Baltic States and former Soviet Republics by and large stayed “put” too. Hence, barring an economic and political derailment scenario, Turks will overwhelmingly decide to stay “put” as well.

Integration of Turkish Immigrants in EU Countries

These remarks are based on an ongoing and incomplete research project focusing on “Immigration issues in EU-Turkish relations” and two international conferences, in February and March 2004, on the integration of Turkish immigrants in Europe.³

Many in Europe believe that large numbers of Turkish immigrants have failed to integrate into their host communities. This is seen as a factor that has exacerbated anti-immigrant feelings in a number of EU member countries and fuels concerns about further immigration. At the same time, there are also those who recognize that many Turkish nationals have actually integrated well and even joined the ranks of elected politicians at the local and national levels as well as being elected to the European Parliament. Turkish immigrants are also seen as contributing to employment creation as many run their own businesses. Nevertheless, there are many in Europe who continue to complain about the failure of an important section of the Turkish immigrant community to integrate into their host societies. There are even claims that their integration often lags behind that of the North Africans. The complaints include poor educational performance, high levels of unemployment, alienation from the larger society, isolation of the women not to mention of course honor killings and forced marriages. There are also those in Europe who attribute this to Muslim religious beliefs. The resentment toward Turkish immigrants has become particularly aggravated since 9/11 and the accompanying increase in Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. This naturally is fueling xenophobia and anti-immigrant feelings in Europe undermining values that are normally associated with European integration. Coming at a time when there is general public discomfort with the current enlargement process, there are concerns that this problem may adversely affect Turkey’s prospects of accession to the EU.

This picture may be partly true, but it only reflects part of the picture, in fact the empty part of the proverbial glass. There is also a need to recognize that all members of an immigrant society are not going to integrate at the same pace and in a linear fashion. There are large numbers of immigrants to Turkey that have actually integrated into the ranks of their host communities. Among them are individuals that have reached important positions in their host societies. An increasing number of Turks are getting elected to local as well as national parliaments. On the other hand, there are also large numbers of Turks who are indeed failing to integrate. Integration is a complicated process and distinguishing integration from assimilation can become difficult and is far too subtle a distinction for the average observer to make. European societies are still debating the issue.

Undoubtedly, some of the measures adopted impact favorably on integration while others complicate it. Granting citizenship and political rights seems to facilitate integration. On the

³ The papers presented at these conferences can be accessed at www.ces.boun.edu.tr.

other hand, measures that emphasize the temporary nature of the presence of immigrants in a host society or measures that are perceived as assimilationist or discriminatory aggravate it. A case in point is the emphasis put on encouraging immigrants to return to their home countries when the Christian Democrats came to power in the mid-1970s in Germany, in contrast to Social Democrat policies that were more willing to recognize that immigrants were not simply *guest workers* certain to return one day. Just as some of the host countries refused to accept that these *guest workers* were there to stay, until very lately the Turkish government too based its policies on the idea that these people one day would actually return to Turkey and hence until very, very recently did not consider policies that could help integration. Currently, various Turkish agencies such as the Ministry of Education and the Directorate for Religious Affairs are introducing programs to encourage their personnel who are sent to serve in Europe to learn local languages in an effort to assist the integration of the immigrants they serve.

Integration cannot be a one-way street. There is a growing recognition that just as immigrants have to make an effort to integrate, host governments have to adopt policies to help their integration. Yet, this in itself is not enough either. The host society has to change and adapt too by reconsidering attitudes and perceptions which border on xenophobia if not outright racism. It is not good for governments to adopt integrationist policies while the society's expectations from such policies are that immigrants will simply become like them, in other words assimilate. The notion of integration has to be much better understood and much better explained to host societies. Integration is inevitably about adopting common universal values while some of the cultural rituals and characteristics of immigrants can continue to be observed. Individuals in the long run are going to define themselves in relation to how the larger society defines them. Constant discrimination and constant exclusion is inevitably going to complicate integration. Hence increasingly host governments have to adopt policies that help integrate immigrants but also help local people adjust their expectations in favor of integration as opposed to outright assimilation. Furthermore, the governments of countries of origin, as well as civil societies, have to be more involved in the process. Hence, the process of integration and the notion itself is a difficult one. It is very important to try to understand these processes first rather than to simply characterize the situation as a "defect" with respect to integration of immigrants from Turkey on the basis of religion or ethnicity.

Lastly, Turkish membership in the EU may also in itself have a positive effect on the integration of Turkish immigrants into their host societies. Turkish accession is going to be a process that is going to challenge established patterns of thinking about Turkey and Turks as the "other." Slowly and surely many in Europe that have regarded Turkey as culturally, socially and politically different will revise their perceptions, prejudices and images of Turkey and Turks. This in turn is likely to help alleviate some of the alienation that Turkish immigrants experience. As the day-to-day discrimination is gradually replaced by a more balanced and less hostile environment, the so called "ghetto effect" on the immigrants will diminish. A Turkish immigrant observing this change and the gradual integration of the country of Turkey into Europe will be more forthcoming in terms of integration. The two processes are likely to feed on each other and gradually transform the current vicious cycle of mutual alienation to a beneficial process of mutual integration. Even if these processes are not all encompassing, a good portion of the host society and the immigrant community will be affected by it.

Turkey as an Immigration Country

A Turkey that is actively engaged by the EU for eventual membership is highly likely to emulate the experience of Spain, Portugal and Greece in respect to becoming an immigration country itself. In other words Turkey will attract some of the immigration that otherwise could be going to Western Europe. Actually, Turkey has always been an immigration country though it has received little recognition for it. Between 1923-1996, Turkey admitted more than 1,6 million immigrants mostly from the Balkans. Turkey has also not been recognized as a country of refuge. Between 1988-1999 Turkey extended temporary protection to more than 850,000 persons, including Albanians, Assyrians, Bosnians, Bulgarian Turks, Chechens, Iraqis, Kurds, Pomaks and Turkmen. In addition, the number of Iranians who have sought informal temporary protection in Turkey throughout the 1980s and even 1990s is unknown. Furthermore, the late Turgut Özal, former prime minister and president of Turkey enabled hundreds of thousands of nationals from these countries to engage in petty trading (suitcase trade) with Turkey by adopting a very liberal visa policy towards countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Many of these people were able to cushion to a certain extent the tough economic consequences of the transition from command economies to liberal market economies. Had Turkey not played this role, it is just possible that these people would have been forced to migrate to Western Europe. Today Turkey continues to attract such petty trading as well as workers from countries ranging from Armenia to Russia entering the country to take up temporary “commuting” jobs.

Ironically, if Turkey does proceed down the path toward membership, it will have to increasingly think about how to integrate its own immigrants. Turkey is already in the process of becoming an immigrant country; however there has not yet been a debate about what it will mean to become an immigration country and the impact this will have on Turkish national identity and laws that govern immigration into Turkey. Furthermore, Turkey will and is already receiving EU nationals for permanent residency in Turkey. This is going to have an impact on Turkey. One concrete manifestation of this is that Turkish authorities have granted the right to open a church for EU retirees in Alanya and have granted a work permit for its priest. On the other hand, during the run up to the local elections on March 28th, some permanent residents from EU countries in Marmaris complained, when asked by radio/TV stations, that they paid local taxes but did not have the right to vote locally. Furthermore, just as has been the case with Spain, Portugal and Greece it is likely that there will be more and more third and fourth generation Turkish immigrants from Europe that will come to seek employment and settlement. This is actually already happening in the domain of tourism and Turkish authorities need to adjust to this and possibly further encourage it.

Conclusion

The answer to the question of whether large numbers of Turkish nationals would actually flood the EU in case of accession needs to be taken out of populist rhetoric. There certainly will be a movement of people from Turkey to the EU. However, we need to understand much better the demographic and economic dynamics behind it as well as what the composition of that movement would be. Given the importance of the EU as an anchor in Turkish politics and for the economy, it is quite likely that migration might be greater and of a more difficult sort if the prospects of membership is lost.

It would be wrong to make sweeping observations that Turkish immigrants fail to integrate across the board. Some do and some do not. It is much more important to understand the dynamics that bring about these outcomes rather than make simplistic observations attributing the problem to religion or “genetics.”

Integration is inevitably a two way process if not a four way one: one between the immigrant and the host government, one between the immigrant and the host society, one among immigrants themselves and finally one between the immigrants and the government and society of the country of origin. It would be healthier to take this kind of holistic approach rather than lay the responsibility of integration solely on the shoulders of the immigrants or for that matter the host government.

The notion of integration and inclusion versus assimilation needs to be better understood. Here many EU countries need to go through a painful process of readjusting their conception of their national identities from one that emphasizes a mythical national homogeneity and culture to one that is diverse and multi-cultural. The value of European integration allows for this and ironically it might be possible to argue that Turkish membership to the EU might help to erode a common tendency of many Europeans to see Turkey and the Turks as the “other.” This in turn might help the process of integrating those Turkish immigrants who are left behind.

Lastly, Turkey has always been an immigration country. However, recently the nature of this immigration is changing and EU membership is likely to have an effect on Turkey similar to one it had on Spain, Portugal and Greece, as more and more people from EU countries but also the surrounding region will come to Turkey to reside, to work and to settle. Turkey too will need to address the consequences of this development in relation to its laws and policies in the realm of asylum, work and residence permits, and political rights, not to mention its bearing on national identity.