

The Future of Europe, differentiated integration and Turkey's role

Meltem Müftüler-Baç*



Stiftung
Mercator



IPC

ISTANBUL POLICY CENTER
SABANCI UNIVERSITY
STIFTUNG MERCATOR INITIATIVE

The future of Europe is tied to the process of integration in the European Union, and the Union's ability to transform into a new type of a polity. The European Union is often defined as a *sui generis* organization that goes beyond an intergovernmental organization but falls short of a classically-defined state since it does not possess the critical elements of statehood. Whether the EU is seen as a "superstate", "an intergovernmental organization" or "a cosmopolitan union" depending on its degree of integration has important implications for the future of Europe.¹ This degree of integration could be measured through the schemes for cooperation and harmonization concluded by the EU member states. There seem to be differences in this vision, as there are member states which envisage enhanced cooperation beyond the traditional Treaty structure, and member states which favor a strengthening of Community structures. Nonetheless, the European project is about its members' capacity to take the political initiative; this capacity, in turn, depends on the Union's ability to reconcile integration and enlargement.² It is, therefore, clear that further enlarging the Union is tied to the Union's integrative path.

We therefore need to take into account the possible trajectories of Europe to understand the conditions under which enlargement would be likely. There are three different trajectories for the future of the Union. In one possible future scenario, the EU could evolve into a federal multinational and supranational state, which seems unlikely at the moment. In the second scenario, the EU would remain largely intergovernmental, with member states' cooperating on some key policies such as trade and economic integration, but remaining largely independent on other policies. The third possible scenario involves a "core

* Meltem Müftüler-Baç is Professor of International Relations and Jean Monnet chair at Sabanci University, Istanbul. See <http://myweb.sabanciuniv.edu/muftuler>.

1 Helene Sjursen (ed.), *Questioning EU Enlargement. Europe in Search of Identity*, London and New York, Routledge, 2006.

2 Robin Hertz and Dirk Leuffen, "Too big to run? Analysing the impact of enlargement on the speed of EU decision-making"; *European Union Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (June 2011), p. 193-215.

group" of EU members transferring competencies to the supranational polity, while others pick and choose among common policies, leading to "differentiated integration". In this trajectory, the EU acquires "a single organizational and member state core, and a territorial outreach that varies by function as a system of differentiated integration."³

These different trajectories of European integration are all connected to the evolution of policy-making within the EU, as well as to the political will of its member states to deal with the multiple crisis which the EU is undergoing and which is complicating its *finalité politique*.⁴ This *finalité politique* goes hand-in-hand with the EU's enlargement process, and is tied to the overarching question "where does Europe begin and end?"

The future of the European Union in terms of its final frontiers and the political structure it will acquire lies at the epicenter of European public debate. The outcome of this debate will be particularly telling in terms of the future enlargement of the EU. The EU's enlargement policy could be seen as a key instrument for advancing the EU's foreign policy goals, such as uniting the European continent, securing the EU's borders, expanding the EU's global reach and enhancing security in Europe. According to the European Commission, "the EU has, since its inception, responded to the legitimate aspiration of the peoples of our continent to be united in a common European endeavour. It has brought nations and cultures together, enriching and injecting the EU with diversity and dynamism. More than three quarters of the EU Member States are former "enlargement" countries."⁵ An important concern here is how the natural limits of enlargement impact on the EU's cohesion, sustainability, prosperity, institutional capacity and democratic

3 Dirk Leuffen, Berthold Rittberger, Frank Schimmelfennig, *Differentiated Integration. Explaining Variation in the European Union*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

4 Paul Taggart, "Questions of Europe: the Domestic Politics of the 2005 French and Dutch Referendums and their Challenge for the Study of European Integration", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 44, Annual review (September 2006), p. 7-25.

5 European Commission, *Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2012-2013* (COM(2012) 600 final), 10 October 2012, p. 2, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=celex:52012dc0600:en:not>.

representation. In other words, the extent to which the EU can continue enlarging without jeopardizing its integration process becomes critical. This is also partly the reason why some EU member states are more hesitant both towards enlargement and towards the accession of specific countries. Then French President Nicholas Sarkozy reflected on this in 2011 as follows: "one cannot plead for federalism and at the same time for the enlargement of Europe. It's impossible. There's a contradiction."⁶

Turkey and differentiated integration

Among the current candidate countries, one deserves special mention as a result of its possible impact on the future of Europe: Turkey. Turkey has been negotiating EU accession since 2005 with relatively little progress. Turkey has been part of the European political order since the end of World War II with its membership of the Council of Europe (1949), Organization for Economic Cooperation (1948) and NATO (1952). Under its 1963 Association Agreement with the then EC, Turkey was legally eligible for accession; it signed a Customs Union Agreement with the EU in 1995, and was declared a candidate for EU membership officially in 1999. As a result, it has a significant level of integration in multiple European policies. It is an integral part of European security and defence, while the customs union for industrial products has meant that Turkey has harmonized its laws with the EU customs union *acquis*. Turkey's accession to the EU has material benefits for the EU in terms of its economic size and its security role. As regards its economic size, according to the World Bank, Turkey is the 15th largest economy in the world, and 6th largest in Europe.⁷ In terms of its military power, it is ranked as the 11th largest military power in the world in the Global Firepower index.⁸ It is clear from these figures that Turkey's integration into EU markets and European security would be to the EU's advantage, especially in an increasingly multipolar world – but the pressing question is what kind of integration.

Turkey's accession to the EU goes beyond the rather simplistic analysis of whether Turkey meets the EU's accession criteria – though it is absolutely necessary that it does – and is tied to the debates on the future of Europe. Thus, a public debate on Turkish accession needs to touch upon the possible impact that Turkey would have on the European integration process. Two factors come into the forefront here: the size of the Turkish population, and its perceived cultural differences from the current EU member states.

Turkey has a large population – around 78 million – and would be 2nd largest member after Germany if it became a member today. What is even more striking is that Turkey's population is predicted to increase to around 95 million by 2030, whereas Germany's is projected to decrease to 78 million.⁹

Since the EU decision-making structures are heavily influenced by population numbers, Turkish membership would mean that



in a union of 29 members, including itself, Turkey would have the largest group of European parliamentarians, and Turkish voting weight in the Council would be substantial under the double majority rules. To take the example of the European Parliament (EP), Turkey would have around 96 members – the maximum allowed under the terms of the Lisbon Treaty – as the Parliament will have a maximum of 751 members – 750 MEPs and a President from 2014 onwards. Since the maximum size of the EP is unlikely to change at the moment given the limitations of physical space, this would mean that, were Turkey to accede, other members would have to give up seats in order to make room for the Turkish delegation. While not only Germany would lose seats in this way, for Germany an additional loss would be to lose its primary position as the most populous member of the EU. Turkey's accession to the EU would also change the balance in the Council of Ministers under double majority voting. As the largest EU member, Turkey would have the greatest voting power, and would effectively act as a veto player in most EU legislation. This brings us to the argument that the EU's ability to function would be seriously hampered with the inclusion of another large country such as Turkey. Simply put, institutional gridlock might become harder to manage. So, is a form of membership other than accession possible?

This might be what the EU had in mind when it adopted the new "Positive Agenda" with Turkey on 17 May 2012. The Positive Agenda targets increased dialogue and harmonization between Turkey and the EU on the Schengen regime, enhanced cooperation on energy issues, foreign policy, and the fight against terrorism, and increased participation in people-to-people programs, all mutually beneficial targets for both parties. The adoption of the Positive Agenda seems to indicate that, even in the absence of full membership, Turkey's integration in the EU could be possible in multiple new policy areas, clearly indicating a path of differentiated integration with Turkey. To put it concretely, a path of differentiated integration with Turkey would include increased harmonization with regards to the single market, extension of free trade arrangements on textiles and agriculture, and increased cooperation in the financial sector, in other words a deepening of the 1995 customs union agreement. Similarly, increased cooperation between Turkey and the EU on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) – which is already substantial, with Turkish participation in almost all EU-led operations – would be necessary. This would involve Turkey's membership in the European Defence Agency and the participation of the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs in the relevant Council meetings. Increased Turkish involvement in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) without formal membership would be a clear indication of differentiated integration as the EU's future trajectory.

6 "Two Speed Europe, or Two Europes?", *The Economist*, 10 November 2011, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/charlemagne/2011/11/future-eu>.

7 World Bank, "Gross domestic product 2012, PPP", *World Development Indicators*, updated 23 September 2013, http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP_PPP.pdf.

8 Global Firepower, *Countries Ranked by Military Strength 2013*, <http://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>.

9 United Nations, *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, 2013*, <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=world+population&d=PopDiv&f=variableID%3a12%3bcrID%3a900>.

The integration process, i.e. the adoption of common rules and procedures, as well as common positions on key foreign policy issues, requires a consensus-building mechanism and the mobilisation of like-minded states around common goals and common denominators. The inclusion of an institutionally powerful, yet most probably not like-minded, Turkey in this process might hamper the likelihood of common positions. This is not to say that all EU members converge around the same ideas, the very presence of the United Kingdom being a case in point. However, if the future path of integration is one of federalism, Turkish membership might slow down the process.

Alternatively, Turkish membership could be a blessing in disguise. The evolution of the EU towards a path of differentiated integration, with a new type of membership for Turkey, could provide the Union with further opportunities to deepen integration, with different policies being adopted by different

member states. As long as all member states agree to a policy or a decision in principle, while also not requiring all member states to adopt it immediately, greater flexibility in common decisions could be possible.

This means that the very process of differentiated integration might lead to a situation where the “classical” forms of membership no longer are needed. As other European Union members have chosen to do, Turkey might adopt the EU *acquis* on key policies such as energy, transport, the common market or common security and defence, but remain outside of the EU framework for the Social Charter, or the Schengen regime. If the path of integration is differentiation, then full membership is not necessary in order to participate in it. If Turkey becomes one of the first examples of such a scheme, the future of European integration would also drastically change, transforming the EU into a new blend of an organizational core, and a system of functionally differentiated units.