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# THE PATTERNS AND IMPACTS OF TURKISH IMMIGRATION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

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**ABSTRACT**

Since the early 1960s, Turkish nationals have immigrated to the European Union in large numbers. Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium have the highest Turkish populations in the European Union and have managed differing models of incorporation. A number of motivating factors have contributed to the unflagging numbers of Turks such as the implementation of guest-worker programs, the reunification of families, and micro-structures within migratory chains. Though the likelihood of Turkey gaining membership to the European Union has dimmed as of late, the mere possibility of its joining warrants the analysis of Turkish immigration to the EU, as it could shed light on the social and economic changes that could occur with Turkish membership to the EU. This analytical paper will detail the impacts of the varying methods of incorporation employed by the receiving countries and examine the historical patterns and impacts of Turkish immigration in the European Union.

**KEYWORDS**

Turkey, immigration, EU membership, incorporation

## INTRODUCTION

Since the end of World War II, Turkey has been one of the largest providers of labor migration and undocumented migration to Europe. Comprising a tri-border region are Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium, nations that encouraged, accepted, and shouldered their roles as receiving countries of Turkish immigrants and guest workers at various points in time. Germany's "bilateral labor recruitment agreements" with Turkey in the early 1960s started a pattern of temporary immigration of guest workers that later morphed into a pattern of permanent immigration of guest workers (Sari, 2003, 1). While guest workers came to define the sending and receiving relationship between Turkey and Germany, other varieties of Turkish immigrants such as asylees and undocumented persons constitute the high numbers of Turkish nationals in this tri-border region.

In this essay, I will examine the push and pull factors of Turkish immigration to the European Union, looking at the circumstances in Turkey over the second half of the twentieth century that motivated Turks to traverse continents. Additionally, I will detail and compare the models of incorporation employed by Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. Because the majority of academic literature on Turkish immigration in Europe focuses on Germany specifically, my focus will also weigh disproportionately towards Germany. With a thorough comparison of these incorporation models, I aim to identify the most successful integration strategies and hypothesize potential integration-policy approaches for the future. Over the past few years, the possibility of Turkey gaining membership to the European Union has appeared to diminish. Between the EU officials who claim that Turkey cannot meet the membership criteria and an increasingly conservative Turkish government, the once dizzyingly possibility seems rather distant. I will briefly look at how Turkey might become a more attractive candidate for membership and how immigration patterns could evolve if that were the case.

## DRIVING FORCES OF IMMIGRATION

After World War II, Europe entered a period of "postwar economic expansion" in which a variety of low-skilled jobs proliferated and the consistent availability of workers became a necessity (Sari, 2003, 6). The creation of guest-worker programs provided legal employment for an easy flow of workers who could withstand "seasonal or temporary characteristics of the job" (Sari, 2003, 3). Leaving Turkey to be a migrant worker in Europe meant low wages, loneliness, unattractive working conditions, and the near-guaranteed potential for overt discrimination. Native citizens of the receiving countries considered Turkish guest workers to be members of the lowest class in society. Despite the obvious hardships of immigrating, migrant workers remained undeterred from their goal of coming to work and live in Europe. This is because despite their low socioeconomic status as workers in European countries, Turkish workers from abroad experienced upward mobility back in Turkey, "being among the wealthiest in their communities, with their children hav(ing) much better educational opportunities than they did" (Sari, 2003, 14). In the 1960s and '70s, residents in Turkish urban areas experienced job, housing, and service shortages, which increasingly drove them to seek employment opportunities in Western Europe.

In their initial stages, the guest-worker programs sought to bring over workers for a period of one to two years after which a new round of workers would come. Both Turkish and European officials believed that this system would allow workers to benefit economically without major changes to the national status quo. Turkey would receive remittances from

their citizens working overseas and receiving countries such as those in the Tri-Border region could avoid the complications of integrating the Turks and creating overarching social-support systems. Despite the timed residency permits for guest workers, receiving countries began to notice that the recruited laborers were not leaving after their permits expired. In 1973, the German government ended their guest-worker program and started to offer immigrant laborers incentives in exchange for returning home (Mueller, 2006, 426). Despite the ban on labor recruitment, the number of Turks living in Europe continued to rise due to family reunification policies and employers who did not want to send their guest workers home after paying recruitment, transportation, and training fees, and integrating them into the workplace (Martin, 1991, 40). Acknowledging the growing numbers of Turkish workers that remained after the terminus of their work permits, new agreements arose that led to the establishment of “councils and ombudsmen for migrant affairs that deal with bilingual education, school busing, remedial employment programs, and affirmative action policies” (Martin, 1991, 41) by all six original members of the European Union (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg). These programs were created with the hope of incorporating a potentially troubled population that many Europeans deemed a looming threat.

#### **TURKISH IMMIGRATION TO GERMANY**

Germany has the highest population of Turkish immigrants in Europe with three million residents having at least one Turkish parent, according to a January 2015 BBC News report. Turks came to Germany through guest-worker programs in the 1960s and '70s before a second period of immigration began, driven by the reunification of families which greatly heightened the number of Turks in the country. The “third and current phase is characterized by German-born members among Turkish families” as well as “the importing of spouses by young Turks from rural areas in Turkey because Turkish women from local German communities are considered to be too Western” (Mueller, 2006, 420). For the past 45 years, Germany has employed a segregationist model of incorporation for immigrants. This model is characterized by a limiting of citizenship only to those who are members of the dominant ethnicity of the host nation (Gurowitz, 2015). This presented problems to a number of ethnic groups over the course of the twentieth century, most notably Jews and later on, Turks. In the case of the Turks, Germany had not anticipated the guest workers’ widespread decision to permanently relocate. Thus, we see that their incorporation model began to shift more out of necessity than empathy. The segregationist model was marked by the unavoidable presence of an assimilationist model in which immigrants are expected to disregard or downplay their former identity and adopt the political, social, and cultural traits of their new state of residence. A segregationist/assimilationist receiving state such as Germany wants to uphold certain ideals of the nation and expects immigrants to conform to German traditions and patterns of living. If the immigrants are unable or unwilling to conform, they are prevented *de facto* from joining German society. Therefore, it is generally easier if the dominant culture of an assimilationist nation is similar to that of the entering migrant groups (Gurowitz, 2015). Turkish culture greatly differs from German culture and this has led to major integration issues over the past 50 years.

Before delving into the details of the social, cultural, and economic organization of Turks in Germany, I will provide a short overview of Germany’s citizenship policy. Formerly, Germany upheld *jus sanguinis*, a policy that maintained that a person could only

hold German citizenship if they were ethnically German. In 1999, Germany modified their citizenship laws to “bestow citizenship without proof of German ancestry by the applicant, though there are significant bureaucratic rules that individuals must navigate in order to become citizens” (Mueller, 2006, 421). While many Turks wish to maintain dual citizenship, Germany does not allow its citizens to hold two passports and forces them to choose by the age of 23. While a majority of Turkish Germans decides to keep their EU passports, they cling to Turkey through less tangible means, i.e. cultural and ethnic devotion.

Most of the Turk-Germans and Turks residing in Germany live in ethnic enclaves either with or near their extended family. The notoriously high fertility rates of Turkish immigrants have helped Germany and other European nations manage their variable demographics and aging populations. The largesse of Turk-German families has also allowed these ethnic neighborhoods to flourish, as “the needs of the group and their businesses are concerned with preserving both customs and other aspects of the culture in the region of origin” (Kesteloot & Mistiaen, 1997, 326). These neighborhoods act as sanctuaries and ersatz homes for Turkish immigrants who often find themselves unable to participate in Germany’s larger society. Claus Mueller’s 2005 paper “Integrating Turkish Communities: a German Dilemma” sharply criticizes Germany’s assimilationist model, arguing that “the Turkish minority is becoming part of a ‘parallel society’ reinforced by discrimination, restricted educational achievements, and a low socioeconomic status.” This “parallel society” often leaves immigrants and their families feeling isolated, alienated, and lost. Because of this, many Turks have turned to the Muslim faith with a renewed fervor, finding support through the mosque as well as an opportunity to shed their outsider status. As in many countries around the world, a majority of Germans feel that too many foreigners live in the country. The lack of a dual citizenship system as well as the push for assimilation by German nationals has culminated in a Germany in which Turkish Germans find themselves at a systematic disadvantage both economically and socially. The rise of far-right parties touting anti-immigration platforms and grassroots movements such as Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West) have cast new fears into the minds of Turkish Germans and their allies.

#### **TURKISH IMMIGRATION THE NETHERLANDS**

According to a January 2014 estimate by the Gatestone Institute, Turkish immigrants make up six percent of the total population in the Netherlands. The history of Turkish immigration flows to the Netherlands resembles that of Germany, with three main “partially overlapping” periods (Bolt, 2002, 271). The labor shortages of the 1960s and ’70s warranted the entry of guest workers; coupled with family reunification policies, the result was a jump in immigration numbers. In the 1980s, family formation, defined as a person immigrating to marry a person in the receiving country, also contributed to the increasing numbers of Turks in Europe. As Gideon Bolt notes, “from 1989 onwards, family formation exceeded family reunification” (Bolt, 2002, pg. 271).

A country famous for its tolerant political and social policies, the Netherlands exemplifies the multicultural model of incorporation. Under this model, a state promotes the value of diversity as a part of the national identity. Cultural pluralism allows for the equal status and preservation of all cultures. Over time, documented immigrants receive greater rights and even undocumented immigrants are provided with basic rights such as education. In 1983, the Dutch government made an official statement declaring the Netherlands to be a

multicultural society and they created a “two-track” minorities policy “aim[ed] at the integration as well as the preservation of cultural identity” (Eldering, 1997, 334).

The segregationist/assimilationist model of Germany bears a sharp relief against the multicultural model of the Netherlands, but one could argue that Dutch citizenship policies retain a conservative bent. Turkish immigrants to the Netherlands can apply for citizenship but, as in Germany, dual citizenship is not an option. Many Turks choose not to become Dutch nationals because they would lose their legal position in Turkey and would be unable to own real estate and operate businesses there (Eldering, 1997, 336). In her 1997 paper entitled “Ethnic Minority Students in the Netherlands from a Cultural-Ecological Perspective,” Lotty Eldering details how “the children of foreigners take the nationality of their parents” and can choose to become a Dutch national at 18 years of age. The liberal twist lies in the fact that foreigners legally residing in the Netherlands “have the same social rights as Dutch citizens and they can vote in municipal elections and be elected to municipal councils after a legal stay of five years” (Eldering, 1997, 337). The political rights extended to permanent residents equate to the rights of citizenship in other countries and offer immigrants a valuable opportunity to participate in and shape their communities.

#### **TURKISH IMMIGRATION TO BELGIUM**

The 200,000 Turkish immigrants living in Belgium make up six percent of the total population. Interestingly, the same percentage of Turkish immigrants live in the Netherlands. Even though Belgium placed a moratorium on immigration in 1974, Belgium has one of the fastest growing Muslim populations in Europe, with immigrants flowing into Brussels and other urban areas (Timmerman, 2003, 1068). Family reunification accounts for a majority of the entrants while asylees (particularly the Kurds) and undocumented immigrants also supply the immigration flow. The citizenship policy of Belgium is *jus soli*, the Latin translation being “right of the soil,” which allows “those who were born in Belgium or who arrive here at pre-school age and whose parents or grandparents are of foreign origin...[to be] Belgian citizens irrespective of their nationality” (Timmerman, 2003, 1068). Belgium’s *jus soli* policy reveals a liberal perspective within the government, and the nation becomes particularly interesting when I identify their model of incorporation. The province of Wallonia, which constitutes the southern half of Belgium, has taken on the segregationist/assimilationist model of Germany. However, the northern half of Belgium, the province of Flanders, has employed many aspects of the multicultural model we see in the Netherlands. The integration strategy of Flanders has been vastly more successful than that of Wallonia. Turkish immigrants living in Flanders are more likely to graduate from high school and earn gainful employment than their counterparts in Wallonia, though substantial wage and education gaps persist between the native-generation (second-generation Turks) and their non-immigrant counterparts (Baert, 2014, 9). While the segregationist/assimilationist model isolates and marginalizes minority populations—as we see in the case of Germany—the multicultural model encourages immigrants to participate in larger society and interact with others outside their ethnic identity while retaining their traditions and core values.

#### **THE BIG IF: TURKISH MEMBERSHIP TO THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Over the past few years, the European Union has strategically distanced itself from the possibility of mentoring Turkey through the membership process. Turkey’s conservative government, headed by Sharia-law advocate Recep Erdoğan has also veered away from the

idea of seeking membership. While these actions indicate that membership is not currently a viable option, future events could rapidly change the possibility of Turkish EU membership. The current economic crisis faced by Greece and thus, the European Union as a whole, has resulted in a situation in which Greece could default on its debt and be stripped of EU membership. If this happens, the European Union will lose strategic presence in the southeast Mediterranean region. Russia will rush to Greece's aid and generate a presence on the west side of the Ukraine and in the Middle East. Russia represents a major threat to the European Union should Greece fall, and Turkey could be groomed for membership if a major shift in power dynamics occurs in that region.

If the situation should shift in a manner radical enough to allow for Turkey to join the European Union, immigration flows from Turkey to other EU countries would likely return to those of guest-worker program era in the 1960s. Shorter residency stints could become more popular as traversing between the nations became easier. Infrastructure and other economic improvements mandated through the membership process would make Turkey more attractive to those who left for the amenities of Western Europe long ago. Speculation aside, integration concerns of current EU member countries would be best addressed through a multicultural incorporation model. Unfortunately, multiculturalism seems to be a far cry for many European countries shaken by economic troubles and the rise of anti-immigration far-right parties (and the rise of nationalism that often accompanies recessions!).

## **CONCLUSION**

Turkish immigrants have become one of the largest non-EU minority populations in Europe and they compose substantial numbers in individual countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium. The segregationist/assimilationist and multiculturalist models adopted by these countries have indicated varying levels of success in integration. The Netherlands has been relatively successful in their integration attempts due to the implementation of social and cultural support programs. However, the Dutch political scene has seen a rise in the popularity of far-right parties, as have many other countries in Europe. While the possibility of Turkey gaining membership to the European Union seems far-fetched, the idea must still be considered. Turkish membership would create major change within the current climate of the EU, much like the addition of ten Eastern European countries in 2004's enlargement. To maintain the egalitarian principles of the European Union, all ten additions needed to be treated as equals by the nations who were already members. In the same vein, Europe needs to remember that all cultures and peoples should be viewed and treated equally.

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