

## IS THE EU COMPLETE WITHOUT TURKEY? OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR EUROPE'S IDENTITY AND THE FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE UNITED STATES

Symposium at the GHI, October 20, 2003. Co-sponsored by the GHI and the Heinrich Böll Foundation. Conveners: Dirk Schumann (GHI), Sören Haffer (Heinrich Böll Foundation). Moderator: Fiona Hill (Brookings Institution). Panelists: Henri Barkey (Lehigh University), Cem Özdemir (German Marshall Fund), Claus Schönig (Orient Institute, Istanbul), Omer Taspinar (Brookings Institution).

The expansion of the European Union (EU) has been a widely discussed issue in Germany and Europe in recent years. The possible inclusion of Turkey seems to pose a particular challenge. Turkey would be one of the largest members, and it would add a very substantial Islamic element to a Europe that so far has defined itself as based on cultural foundations of primarily Christian origin. The issue of Turkey's membership in the EU thus includes political as well as historical aspects.

Following a well-established tradition of cooperating with German political foundations, the GHI co-organized and co-hosted a panel discussion on Turkey's relationship with Europe together with the Heinrich-Böll Foundation. This was also the first event involving cooperation between the GHI and the Orient Institute of the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft (German Oriental Society) at Beirut/Istanbul, one of the GHI's partner institutions in the new foundation Deutsche Geisteswissenschaftliche Institute im Ausland (German Humanities Institutes Abroad).

Cem Özdemir, the son of Turkish immigrants and a popular former member of the Bundestag for the Green Party, addressed the concerns that many Germans have articulated with respect to Turkey's possible membership. He also drew attention to the differing views about the issue in Turkey itself. Özdemir warned that the debate could only move forward if popular attitudes were taken seriously. Many Germans feared that Turkey's joining the EU would exacerbate the problems of integrating an Islamic minority, import terrorism, and fail to turn Turkey into a democratic state that would live up to European standards. While many Turks welcomed joining the EU, others opposed it, fearing that it would jeopardize their Islamic identity. On balance, Özdemir regarded the hopes that Turkey's potential membership has created as outweighing the fears it has raised. Pointing to the many reforms that had been started by the Turkish government in recent years, he was convinced that if the EU were to offer Turkey the prospect of becoming a

member and began serious negotiations about it, this momentum would gain further strength and substantially change Turkish politics and society.

Claus Schönig pointed out that history did not provide an unequivocal lesson as to whether or not Turkey should join the European Union. Turkey had been a player in the European system of great powers, and had been linked to Europe by processes of cultural exchange since the late Middle Ages. After the First World War, Turkey had its first experiences with democracy and a secular society. Schönig wondered however to what extent this had led to comprehensive changes of Turkish institutions and values, citing stark differences between some profoundly westernized areas and large parts of the countryside. He also called into question the concept of Turkey serving as a bridge between Europe and the Islamic world. In contrast to the Arab states, Turkey had a tradition of integrating substantial Christian and Jewish minorities; it had not been subject to colonial rule; and it had won its statehood after 1918 by mobilizing its population as citizens, not as subjects of a feudal regime. Even though Islamists were now gaining influence in Turkey, they seemed to operate within the Kemalist framework and not to strive for a theocratic state. Hence, the issue of Turkey's membership in the EU had to be decided strictly on political grounds, Schönig concluded.

Henri J. Barkey stressed that the revolutionary character of the European Union called for including Turkey. He also saw a close link between the Cyprus conflict and Turkey's membership. Europeans should not make unification of Cyprus the necessary precondition of Turkey's membership. Instead, Turkey's joining the EU could bring closure to the conflict on the island. The prospect of this outcome could serve as a strong incentive for Turkey to bring its legal and institutional framework in line with European standards once negotiations about membership begin.

Omer Taspinar also emphasized the positive results that Turkey's joining the EU would have for Europe, for Turkey itself, and for the Middle East. Dismissing the concept of a "clash of civilizations," he pointed out how multiculturalism had become a key feature of both the present European member states and of Turkey. This made Turkey's EU membership the logical next step. It would give a major boost to democratic forces in Turkey, further contributing to their reconciliation with moderate Islamists and thus enhancing Turkey's chances to serve as a model for Arab states. If Europeans were to reject Turkey's bid, however, Taspinar warned, the consequences might be disastrous for all sides.

Not all members of the audience were convinced by the general

optimism the panelists expressed. Audience members asked critical questions about the Turkish military's commitment to democracy and human rights, although Cem Özdemir and Omer Taspinar in particular were convinced that this commitment would be strengthened by membership negotiations. There was a general feeling that the panelists had addressed the manifold aspects of Turkey's relationship with (the rest of) Europe in a comprehensive fashion.

*Dirk Schumann*