

A Course Project on the European Union and the Question of Turkey

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The European Union (E.U.) consists of 27 countries and was founded as the European Economic Community fifty years ago, in 1957, to enhance political, economic and social cooperation among its members. Turkey has been an associate member since 1963 and an official candidate since 1999. So, why isn't it an official member? This is the question students researched recently in my Political Science 105 course for their class simulation project.

In order to analyze this issue, each student selected one of the member countries, including Turkey, as the subject for their mid-term paper. They had to define the E.U., identify its President, and outline the criteria for membership as explained in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. They also had to give a short history of the country they drew, along with a picture of the country and its flag on their cover sheet. This paper provided students with the background they need for the class simulation project.

The final exam paper, due on the last day of class, had to present the viewpoint of the students' respective member countries on whether Turkey should be admitted into the E.U. and why. They also had to identify their country's E.U. Representative and his/her background. In their discussion, they had to apply the 1993 Copenhagen Criteria in determining whether Turkey qualifies and, if not, why not, or when it might qualify in the future. (The Copenhagen Criteria define geographic, political, and economic requirements for E.U. membership.)

On the last day of class, students convened in a simulated meeting of the E.U. and sat at the table with their country's placard. Each representative had to present a persuasive speech on their country's position (protest signs were allowed). Students also brought in a food item from their country's cuisine (which went over big with Culinary Arts students). At the end of the presentations, the students voted on allowing Turkey into the "Christian Club".

This assignment enabled students to expand their perspective of government, and tied in to the textbook chapter on foreign affairs. The project is one of the ways that I have internationalized my sections of the course, satisfying the requirements of the Global Endorsement program. Students who complete a certain number of such internationalized classes are able to receive a Global Endorsement on their transcripts.

Issues Involved in E.U. Admission

Some of the major themes that came up in student papers and oral presentations were:

- that Turkey does not meet the geographic requirement of the Copenhagen Criteria, since only 3% of Turkey lies in Europe, while the other 97% is considered Asia
- that Turkey's economy is too poor and unstable to meet the E.U.'s economic requirements

- that Turkey needs to officially recognize other E.U. members and open its ports to them, such as Cyprus
- that Turkey's government needs to conform to European standards regarding freedom of press issues.

Freedom of press standards have been a real concern. Article 301 of Turkey's Criminal Code makes it a crime to insult (criticize) Turkishness or Turkish leaders. *Four* Turkish authors have been charged with this crime: Hrant Dink (an Armenian newspaper publisher in Istanbul, who was assassinated in January 2007); Orhan Pamuk (a Nobel Prize winner who mentioned Armenians in his 2002 novel *Snow*); Professor Taner Akçam (who discusses the Armenian Genocide in his recent book, *A Shameful Act*, and who spoke in Southfield, MI in March); and Professor Elif Şafak (who referred to the Armenian Genocide in her novel *The Bastard of Istanbul*, and who was a visiting scholar at the University of Michigan in 2003-4).

Students also voiced European fears:

- that Turkey's unskilled workforce would flood their countries' borders and result in an economic strain on their social welfare systems (citizens of member E.U. countries are allowed to travel freely from one country to another)
- that if this happens, then Turks might not assimilate into their host country's culture, as already seen in Germany (Turkey's ally during World War I) and France
- that Turkey's poor economy would drain the E.U.'s resources
- that in 15 years, Turkey with its large Muslim population would become the dominant voting member of the predominantly Christian E.U.

Turkey itself appears to be internally split between the government, which is pushing for E.U. membership due to the economic advantages it could provide, and the people, whose disdain for Western culture and values is reflected in Pamuk's *Snow*.

On the other hand, if Turkey is denied membership, European countries fear that Turkey will retreat into itself and become the "Terrible Turk" again. So possibly, E.U. membership could keep Turkey in line.

Either way, Turkey's admission process is likely to stretch out over 15 years before a decision is made. This time period could be cut short if Turkey becomes disgusted with the demands put on it by the European Union and pulls out of the admission process.

As part of the Focus Europe Presentation Series this Fall, I will be speaking about this topic on Sept. 13 (see Calendar, page 7). In my presentation, "Should Turkey Be Admitted into the European Union?", we will get more deeply into the issues involved. I welcome you and your students to participate. •