

## HOW COMPATIBLE IS THE TURKISH POPULATION STRUCTURE WITH EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES?

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The governments of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey always turned towards the West when they wanted to modernise the state and the society. The roots of this perspective can be found in the reformation programmes Tanzimat of Sultan Abdülmecit, dating from 3 November, 1839, which in themselves, were the culmination of historical reformist needs developing in the sociological roots of the region. Since then, Westernization was the mainstream of development policies. The latest of the moves within this mainstream was the formal application for membership to the European Union (EU) on 14 April, 1987. Developing social norms and governance mechanisms which are compatible with Europe, obviously, are among the primary requirements for the coalescence of Turkey with Europe. The coalescing process should accredit this historical perspective its due respect.

Population factors are considered to be among the primary factors in tuning the differences out of the two societies. More often, than not, those against the admission of Turkey to the Union cite the incompatibility of population factors. These arguments need a closer look to separate those that can be justified from those which do not have an empirical base and stem from false beliefs or myths.

In the recent decade, Turkey made important developments in economic and social areas. With the strengthening of family planning and mother and child care services and the influence of socio-economic development, the rapid increase in population slowed to some extent in the period 1985-90, falling still further to 1.68 per cent in 1996. According to the latest population census, carried out in 1990, the total population of Turkey was 56,473,035, while in 1996, it was estimated to be 62,697,000. The total population of EU countries is estimated at 368.5 million. If Turkey joins the European Union, she will rank second after Germany and her population would constitute 14.4 per cent of the Union's overall population. By the year 2025, this percentage is projected to increase to 18.9 per cent.

The growth rate of GNP, which was 9.2 per cent in 1990, remained at 0.3 per cent in 1991. The growth rate of GNP is estimated to be 5.4 per cent for 1992, and targeted between 5.5 to 7.1 per cent for 1997. Population growth is slowing down and, per capita income, which was US\$2423 in 1995 (\$2700 according to UN), is expected to increase to \$3530 by the year 2000. According to the UN national estimates, the EU average rounds up to \$22,580. Merging the Turkish average with the Union's would reduce the overall per capita income to \$19,720. Raising Turkish GNP to the Union's average would require an additional \$1.3 trillion<sup>1</sup> worth of business.

According to the Turkish Population Projections, prepared for the Seventh Five-Year Development Plan by the State Planning Organisation, the total population of Turkey in 1996 was 62.7 million and the rate of natural increase (crude birth rate (CBR)-crude death rate (CDR) was 1.55 per cent. The CBR was estimated at 22 per thousand and the CDR at 6.5 per thousand. Infant mortality rate (IMR) is still rather high (42.2 per thousand) for a country with considerable development, though there is a marked decline when compared with the previous rates. The average of IMR in the EU countries is 6.9 per thousand. Admittance of Turkey would double this average to about 12 per thousand.

This level of IMR is considered to be medium-high and constitutes a strong bottleneck for increasing life expectancy at birth. Recent estimates place overall life expectancy at birth at 68.2 years for 1995. The value for female life expectancy at birth is higher than males. That difference is almost five years in contemporary Turkey, presenting a pattern quite similar to those observed in developed countries. For instance, in the EU countries, currently, the male-female life expectancy at birth variation is 6.5 years (74.3 and 80.8 years respectively); a difference which is more profound than the difference in the modern Turkish society.

The total fertility rate has declined from 3.76 children per woman in 1988 to 2.7 in 1993 and 2.55 in 1996. The total fertility rate shows regional as well as urban-rural differences. The EU average is 1.45, the highest being in Finland (1.83) and lowest being Italy (1.19).

Fertility rates are not homogeneous across Turkey. According to the results of the 1993 Turkish Demographic and Health Survey,<sup>2</sup> total fertility rates in rural and urban areas were 3.1 and 2.4 children, respectively. Among the regions, the western region had the lowest fertility rate, averaging on 2.0 children per woman. The eastern region had the highest average, 4.4 children per women. Like the fertility rate, differences in infant mortality rates also exist among the regions. The highest infant mortality rate was 60.0 per thousand in the eastern part of Turkey. The difference, which is particularly

apparent between the eastern and the western regions, is primarily due to the effects of socio-economic and cultural differences.

The high fertility rate experienced in the past made Turkey a fairly youthful nation. However, in recent years, the decrease in fertility has influenced the age composition of the population and, thus, in 1996, the percentage of young population (0-14) within the total has declined to 31.7 per cent and the percentage of the 15-64 age group, which constitute labour supply, has increased to 63.5. In line with this, a significant increase has not been observed in the percentage of the age group 65 and over. Unlike Western societies, the proportion of old age persons is low in Turkey, being 4.8 in 1996. Eventually this percentage is expected to increase and stabilise between 25 and 30 per cent. The difference between the percentage of child in the populations of Turkey and the EU countries, narrows at the upper portion of the young ages. The proportion of those aged 15-24 is 15.0 per cent in EU and 20.3 in Turkey.

As a consequence of high male mortality, not only has the number of elderly females has increased both absolutely and relative to the increase in the number of males, but also the higher male mortality has induced a significant increase in the number of those females who have remained alone, ie those without a spouse or generally without a household member or any other family relations. The increase in the number of those living alone—especially in the number of elderly living alone—primarily in metropolitan areas, places heavy burdens on society in terms of health and social care, while demand for other services also increases. While the family delegates some of its functions to societal institutions and observe changes in its structure, the number, composition, geographical distribution of the population and its cultural values change accordingly.

Urbanisation is strongly associated with changes in cultural values and social institutions. In Turkey, rural to urban migration reached observable levels at the beginning of the 1950s and it still continues at a significant rate due to the prevailing regional disparities, both in terms of socio-economic and geographical conditions. The major flow of migration is from the less developed eastern regions to the western region's concentrated industrial and metropolitan centres. Negative growth rates are observed in rural areas especially in the eastern Black Sea provinces. In the eastern regions, the total fertility rate is relatively high (over four children per woman), and employment, security, health and higher education opportunities are not as high as in the western regions, where the total fertility rate is low (under two children per woman). While there was some decrease in the population growth rate in rural areas, the average growth rate of the urban population reached a high of 5.5 per cent between 1960-1990. Currently, the urban population growth rate is about 3.5 per cent in Turkey. This rate is considerably faster than the average rate observed in the EU countries (0.4 percent). However, the EU countries are not homogeneous with respect to urban population growth rate. The general EU average is an average of heterogeneous rates ranging from 0.2 per cent in Italy to 1.4 per cent in Luxembourg, implying a ratio of almost one to seven.

Consequently, the proportion of the urban population in the total increased steadily, reaching 65 per cent in 1995. High urbanisation increases the problems of settlement, urban infrastructure, security, labour supply, health, education and the environment in the cities. The way to reduce migration pressures over the long-term is to stimulate economic growth and job creation, both in urban and rural settlements. According to the existing information gathered from population censuses, about 4.5 million people change their permanent residence in quinquennial intervals. In

the EU countries, the proportion of the population living in urban areas averages 77.8 per cent. In Turkey this figure is 69 per cent and higher than the proportions in Italy, Greece, Finland, Austria and Portugal.

Structural changes have been taking place within Turkish families

recently. During the last decades, the proportion of nuclear families has increased to 73 per cent and 58.1 per cent in urban and rural areas, respectively. The average size of households is 4.8 persons increasing to 6.2 in the eastern areas. Average age at first marriage is 18.2 years for females and higher for males. The proportion of divorced and widowed is higher in the female population, being 0.79 per cent and 8.05 per cent, respectively. In Turkey, one out of five marriages is consanguineous. Because of traditional and religious values, sexual relationships and extra-marital births are very rare in rural areas, but they have been increasing in urban areas. Although polygamy is illegal in Turkey, it is practised in 1.6 per cent of all marriages. Another problem in marriages is that of purely religious rite, which confers not legal rights on the woman. Marriages by religious rite make up 8.3 per cent on average, but they increase to 20.8 per cent in the eastern parts of the country.

Improvements in family planning are associated with structural changes within the family. The Turkish government gives special importance to the family in Turkey. Article 41 of the Turkish Constitution states that the state takes the necessary measures and establishes the organisational network for securing the peace and welfare of the family, especially the protection of mothers and children, and of education and the provision of the family planning methods.

I would like to compare the population size, structure and growth components of Turkey with those of EU countries. The general belief is that the two societies are incompatibly different. In fact, some variables indicate striking differences between the two groups, but some do not. A general comprehensive observation is that although there are some differences between the two societies, merging Turkish figures with those of the EU do not change averages drastically. The following observations deserve special attention

Fertility differences are not as high as the birth rates indicate. A common concern for EU members is how to cope with the high fertility rates in Turkey. This is often based on CBR differences between the EU countries and Turkey. However, looking into the fertility rates a bit more closely, one easily observes that actual fertility differences are not as high as the differences that the birth rates indicate. Total fertility rates imply a smaller difference.

The level of fertility is not only the consequence but also the cause of a way of life. Therefore, values and norms are as important as (if not more than) the actual levels, in integrating the two societies. Normative values of the two groups are more similar than the actual levels. Desired fertility differences between Turkish families and EU families are smaller than actual fertility differences. This situation might be improved by better services which might be provided more easily after Turkey becomes a part of EU.

Turkey often is taken as a country of origin for vast numbers of migrants into Europe. The fact that the migration policy of Turkey should also include policies addressing the rights and well-being of the immigrants, like many EU members, is quite often overlooked. Turkey, like EU countries, has to take into consideration the recommendations made in international platforms like Cairo 1994 to develop mechanisms and revise her own legislation to empower newcomers to live a democratic life, where human rights are respected to their fullest. With respect to migration, Turkey is a country of destination as well as a country of origin.

Acceptance of Turkey into the Union will improve the overall sex ratio, making it more balanced. In Europe there is an excess of females over males. In its broadest sense, family formation, family life, social insurance and other institutions might be affected by this surplus of females. If social policies in Europe target the mixing of the society, then the inclusion of Turkey in the Union will help narrow this gap.

The proportion of the urban population in Turkey is at the same level as that of EU countries, and better than some. Social values and norms are determined to a great extent by living in urban areas or in rural areas. The merging of two societies, one being heavily urbanised and the other remaining mainly rural, can be more difficult than the merging of two societies which are similar in their proportions of urban populations.

The educational gap between Turkey and EU countries is narrowing. The existing differences between Turkey and the EU countries with respect to educational attainment are the remnants of the past and do not reflect the achievements of the contemporary Turkey. The educational system in Turkey is adequate and would easily comply with European standards.

The admittance of Turkey into the European Union and employing aged population at EU levels would provide a social security infrastructure for supporting six million elderly now and ten million elderly thirty years from now. The Turkish age structure is proportionally more heavily concentrated in the working age groups compared with the EU age structure. The EU age structure is expected to face problems in the future in providing adequate revenue to meet social security demands. This new labour force constitutes a pool sufficient to support an additional six million elderly now and ten million elderly thirty years from now.

The major observation at the macro level, ie the chapeau, is that the current members of the European Union are not homogeneous on many of the population variables. Since there are marked differences on many of the population variables of the EU countries, it is not possible to talk about a common European population pattern. The addition of a new member to the Union would only increase or decrease the already existing variances.