

## **Turkeys proposed accession to the EU**

"Economic implications, regional relations and cultural mores are all significant questions surrounding Turkey's proposed accession to the EU, but the issue that will be the deciding factor of that state's ability to acclimatize to European political norms is the fate of the Kurdish population. The treatment of Kurds in Turkey cannot and should not be reduced simply to a question of security or of human rights, a barometer of implementation of legislative change or a threat to border security. The Kurdish question goes to the very root of Turkey's existence and will not disappear by ignoring it, despite Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's recently expressed beliefs to this effect.

From Ireland's point of view there are good arguments to support Turkey's application: the opening of a new internal market of 70 million people; the large, young, motivated and mobile population; and the strategic location of Turkey in terms of energy supply are the most frequently cited economic reasons. The fact that the sources of the water supplies that feed Iraq and Syria will be within an EU member-state's territory is also of relevance. Socially, the debate that must inevitably take place about the nature of the EU itself with regard to secularism, cultural standards, issues of interculturalism and integration will ultimately strengthen the democracy that we value. The provision of a new perspective on what our Union means will enrich our own self-understanding and give a necessary sense of ownership of the institutions that govern our lives.

Just as this re-evaluation is taking place within Europe, it must be permitted to happen in Turkey too. The appalling mistreatment of the Kurdish population, which has only served to weaken the Turkish state since its foundation, must be acknowledged and corrected without fear. Kurdish leaders stress that Kurds cannot be described as a minority within Turkey, but rather that they are a constituent element of the state, which would never have gained the influence or strength to make a claim for independent statehood from the ruins of the Ottoman empire had Kurds not thrown their weight behind Ataturk's efforts in return for the promise of equal recognition within the new nation. The Kurdish representative at Lausanne, Ismet Pasha, declared: "The Kurds and the Turks are the essential components of the Republic of Turkey. The Kurds are not a minority but a nation." However, after the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) Ankara's policy rapidly changed. The structures of the new state were designed wholly in accordance with ethnic Turkish interests. The Kurds' existence was denied. The Kurdish language, the practice of Kurdish culture, even the concepts of Kurd and Kurdistan were forbidden. The constitution as well as official ideology was based closely on the model of Mussolini's Italy.

Being European was then identified with abandoning traditional attire and donning a suit. This cosmetic adaptation is still evident in the much-lauded but little implemented legislative changes that took place in line with the Copenhagen political criteria for accession. The same official denial of fact is seen also in the unwillingness of Turkish negotiators to recognize Cyprus. This is typical of Turkish

officialdom's alternative perception of reality. After more than forty years of striving for a solid commitment to accession the Turkish representatives were willing to risk the ground gained in this manner. Can we really cope with leaders who refuse to recognize the current political reality of the Union by denying the legitimacy of a member-state? The rights of the Kurdish population, without the protection of statehood and EU membership, or indeed representation of any kind at national level, continue to be likewise denied.

The ethno-centric focus of the Turkish state is not conducive to a functioning democracy. Since the time of Ataturk European leaders have paid lip service to the modernisation without examining the reality of that top-down revolution which was enforced through brutality and state-terror, which served to drive a wedge between the ruling elite and the masses, which provided the retrospective legitimization of the genocide of Armenians and the extermination or displacement of other minorities and the legacy of which continues today in the omnipresent reminders of the single legitimate ethnicity of the state. Such ubiquitous slogans as 'Happy is he who can call himself a Turk' and the image of Ataturk, 'the father of the Turks', are visibly increasing instead of fading away the closer that Turkey gets to EU membership.

Enforcing secularism should not be confused with introducing democracy. Religion is a hugely divisive issue today in Turkey as it was after the introduction of forced secularisation. Sunni Islam remains as the religion of the majority and is increasingly supported by the State to the detriment of other faiths. It is estimated that the Christian population, including Greeks and Armenians, in Turkey has diminished from 4,500,000 at the beginning of the twentieth century to just about 150,000. Persecution against the Islamic sect of Alewis, and against those Kurds who profess the syncretic, dualist faith of Yezidism is well documented.

President Woodrow Wilson understood the Kurds' right to self-determination, and the Treaty of Sevres paved the way for the creation of an independent Kurdish state. This was later superseded by the Treaty of Lausanne, which created Syria, Iraq and Turkey. Kurds understand the historical imperative on European leaders to ensure that the rights that have been trampled for the last seventy-four years as a result of these negotiations are honoured.

Irish people must ask of our leaders what economic and social implications Turkey's accession will have on the union, how it will impinge on us as farmers, as workers, as entrepreneurs and as company directors. We must understand the implications for trade, for the labour force, for security, for oil and water resources and for geopolitical standing. But we must also ask how it will affect us as European citizens to admit a country which has not yet begun to address the inequalities and paradoxes of its historical and social reality, which continues to disenfranchise one third of its population (the Kurds), which uses its economy to ensure the sustained underdevelopment of a specific ethnic group (the Kurds)

within its population. Our leaders must ensure that the Turkish administration has fulfilled the Kurdish criteria which aim to enshrine equality and democracy in Turkey. Ultimately if the Kurdish question is not satisfactorily addressed before accession negotiations are begun then Turkey's problem becomes our problem too."

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