

# Chapter 34. Population, Turkey's EU Accession and Migration Crisis

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## Introduction

Turkey's European Union (EU) membership process started with its associate membership application in 1959. In 1963, Ankara Agreement was signed but because of many different reasons the process has not completed yet. There are many reasons that caused this process to be so long. Some of these reasons are; political, economic, religious and cultural and some of them are closely related to the population and geography. The process has gained speed with the 1999 Helsinki Decisions and the Negotiations started in 2005 but there are still some impediments.

One of these impediments is the population of Turkey. Turkey's population is an unofficial impediment because its membership might affect the decision-making mechanism, labour market, and cultural identity of the EU. The aim of this paper is to evaluate and explain the impact of Turkey's high population in its EU membership process. In this context to achieve this aim, it is focused on the possible effects of Turkey's population in EU decision-making, the effects of possible migration both on the labour market and the EU economy, and the increasing problems, which are caused because of cultural issues and migration crisis.

The argumentation of this paper is that Turkey's high population rate is an impediment before Turkey for its membership because of fear of migration flows. As Turkey with its high population rate will change the representation balance and Turkey's high population and the possibility of migration will also have economic and cultural effects in the EU. To confirm this claim, the paper is composed of three parts; Decision-making in the EU, Economic Issues, and Cultural Issues.

## Decision-Making in the EU

The European Parliament (EP), the Council, and the European Commission are the main institutions, which involve in decision-making in the EU. The decision-making in the EU is defined in the EU Treaties and they give the legal basis of the rules and procedures. Co-decision, consultation, and assent are three main decision-making procedures of the EU ("How the European Union Works," 2013).

Co-decision procedure, which was renamed as the ordinary legislative procedure, is central to the Community's decision-making system. In this procedure, the decisions are made with both the EP and the Council ("Legislative Powers: Ordinary Legislative Procedure", n.d.). In Consultation procedure before the adoption of the proposed legislation by the Council, the EP is asked for its opinion. It is used in some special areas such as internal market exemptions, competition law, and international agreements ("Legislative Powers: Consultation", n.d.). Lastly, in the assent procedure, which is also known as consent procedure, the EP

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has right to veto a decision (“Legislative Powers: Consent”, n.d.). As it can be seen the Council and the EP are the main actors in decision-making in the EU. Turkey’s possible membership may change the balance within these institutions and this can be evaluated as an impediment in Turkey’s membership process. Here it is focused on the Council and the EP in order to see whether the Turkey’s high population is an impediment for its EU membership or not.

The Council is the legislative body of the EU, which shares this authority with the EP. It negotiates and adopts legislative acts, helps coordinate Member States' (MSs) policies, develops the common foreign and security policy, concludes international agreements on behalf of the EU and adopts the EU's budget together with the EP (“The Council,” 2015). The Council takes its decisions using different voting systems such as simple majority voting, qualified majority voting (QMV), double majority voting and reinforced majority voting or unanimous voting (“Weighting of Votes,” n.d.).

In unanimity, Turkey will have a veto power like all other states. With this power Turkey can block a decision and initiatives, not to take action (Phare and Mangithi, 2009). It is not directly related to Turkey’s population but it should not be forgotten that the preferences and the interests of a country as big as Turkey could not be same with other smaller countries.

As another voting system, until 1 November 2014, QMV was used. In this system, the votes of the MSs were weighted and it may be still used until 31 March 2017 (“Weighting of Votes,” n.d.). Double majority voting is the new voting system, which scraps the voting weights. In this voting system, in order to adopt a proposal from the Commission or the EU’s High Representative, two conditions should be met. One of these conditions is 55% of the members of the Council, which means 16 out of 28, vote in favour and the other one is “the members of the Council voting in favour represent EU countries representing at least 65 % of the total EU population” and a blocking minority must include at least four MSs (“Weighting of Votes,” n.d.). This can be seen as a way of becoming more democratic but still smaller MSs will have difficulties in decision-making process without the support of the larger MSs. Lastly, in reinforced majority voting, in order to adopt a proposal not coming from the Commission or the High Representative, two conditions should also be met. According to these conditions, “at least 72% of Council members vote in favour” and “they represent at least 65% of the EU population” (“Weighting of Votes,” n.d.). So it is more difficult to make a decision with this system as at least 20 of the MSs must vote in favour and the total population of these MSs must represent the 65 % of the EU.

The possible membership of Turkey might imbalance the balancing of national power within the Council. Overnight Turkey would become the second most populated MS in the Council as Turkey’s population is 78.741.053 and Germany’s population is 82.162.000 (“Population on 1 January”, n.d.). Moreover, Turkey may become more populated with Syrians who may have Turkish citizenship in the near future. So the migration crisis and the Syrians in Turkey may cause an increase in Turkey’s population.

The population of Turkey would have important effects in decision-making system of the EU because the population is a need in double majority voting and in

this voting system, MSs voting in favour have to represent 65% of the total population. The blocking minority is also important when Turkey's membership is considered. Meltem Müftüler Baç (2004) notes this importance by stating "Turkey's population's main challenge to the double majority voting system is its impact on the formation of blocking minorities in the Council"(p.34). However, it should not be forgotten that Turkey will be just one of the MSs, it cannot change everything alone and in decision-making, voting is just one of the factors which can change the results. National interests, lobbying, and bargaining are also important factors, which have effects in decision-making. It should not also be forgotten that the Council is made up of the ministers of the MSs and the procedure of unanimity still applies in certain important areas and this is a situation in favour of the smaller MSs. So generally, high population will be an advantage but in some cases, high population may not mean anything.

The EP, as another decision-making body, is a directly elected EU institution and in the EP, the number of members elected in each country based roughly on population size. Therefore, Turkey would possibly have the same EP seats as Germany as its population is slightly less than Germany. But according to Robert Phare and Burcu Uçaray Mangıtlı (2009), Turkey will not be as influential as Germany even if it has the same number of seats in the EP. They state that Germany's influence is not just because of their representation in the EP but because of its political system and its interaction with EU. It is obvious that Turkey will not have the same influence but this does not change the reality that Turkey will have more seats than most of the other MSs even more than the founding members, except Germany.

### **Economic Issues**

Economic condition is one of the most important causes of migration besides with political and cultural conditions (Yenigül, 2005, p.274). Therefore, in this part, it is focused on Turkey's high population rate and the economic issues to see if the economic condition might cause migration.

One of the indicators of economic development and the most common measure of economic activity of a region or a country at a given time is the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ("Quality of Life Indicators," 2015). So GDP can be a good indicator in order to see the economic activities of the EU and Turkey. When it is looked to the Eurostat statistic it can be seen that the real GDP growth rates of the EU MSs vary. EU's real GDP growth rate was 2 in 2015. Malta had the highest real GDP growth rate which was 6.4 and Greece had the lowest which was -0.2 but it should be noted that it was provisional and Finland followed Greece with 0.2 in 2015 ("Real GDP Growth," n.d.). According to the website of TRADINGECONOMICS, GDP annual growth rate of the EU is 1.80 in 2016 while Turkey's GDP annual growth rate is 4.80 ("European Union GDP," n.d.). So it can be noted that Turkey's GDP annual growth rate is at least twice better than the EU average in 2016.

Unemployment rates are also important indicators when migration possibilities are discussed. According to the Eurostat data, which gives the unemployment rates of the EU MSs and some other countries between 2003 and 2014, the unemployment rate in Turkey was higher than the EU average rate until 2010 but

after 2010 it became lower. There, it can be seen that Greece had the highest and Germany had the lowest unemployment rate in 2014. It should be noted that unemployment rates in Turkey were less than 12 MSs some of which are Greece, Spain, Croatia, Portugal, Cyprus, Italy, and Slovakia (“Unemployment Rate,” 2016). So Turkey does not have the worst conditions according to these rates. But it should not be forgotten that Turkey is one of the most populated countries in the EU and there is always a risk of migration, as unemployment is not the only cause of migration. Turkey’s 10% unemployment rate is more important than most of the other EU members’ unemployment rate such as Slovakia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Greece as they are less populated than Turkey.

Minimum wages may be another economic indicator of migration. Because of minimum wages, citizens of a country may prefer to move to another country, which has better economic conditions. According to Eurostat statistics, Bulgaria has the lowest wages and Luxembourg has the highest. Nearly all of the Central and Eastern Europe Countries (CEECs) have lower wages than Turkey but Western Europe countries have higher wages (“Minimum Wages Statistics”, 2016). So it can be stated that there is a possibility of migration from CEECs to Turkey while there is a possibility of migration flow from Turkey to the Western Europe.

The population age structure is also one of the indicators, which should be evaluated when migration is discussed because the EU has an aging population. According to Eurostat, the 65 years old and over population rates increased between 2005 and 2015 both in Turkey and in the EU. This age group represents 18.9% of the total population in the EU and it represents only 8% of the total population in Turkey. It is clear that 65 years old and over population rates of Turkey is less than the EU’s rates in general and it is also less than all EU MSs. Turkey has a young population and its 0-14 years old population is more than all other MSs. This means there will be a young generation who can be the labour force of the future and this may have an effect on the labour market of the EU. However, it should also be noted that there was a decrease in rates of 0-14 year’s population between 2005 and 2015 (“Population Age Structure”, 2016). In addition to these rates, migration crisis and Syrians in Turkey will change the distribution of ages between the age groups.

There are many predictions about Turkish migration to EU as Seçil Paçacı Elitok (2010) notes that possible migrant numbers range between 0.5 to 4.4 million and she draws attention to the wideness of range related to the predictions and measuring the possible migration. In an Independent Commission Report, it is stated that it is difficult to forecast the possible migration when Turkey becomes EU member. Here, possible migration factors are listed as: “demographic developments in Turkey and the EU, the economic situation at home including relative income levels, prospects of employment and economic opportunities, foreign demand for labour, the development of European countries’ migration policies over the coming years” (“Turkey in Europe,” 2004). According to the estimations given in the same Report, migration potential from Turkey varies and the most frequent forecast is the migration of 2.7 million people in the long term (“Turkey in Europe,” 2004). But this may not be a danger for the EU. Because Europe has an aging population and as Joschka Fischer stated EU needs migration (Willis, 2010). Turkey can answer the purpose but the conflicts, which started in 2011, may change the situation. The

number of Syrians who seek for international protection increased in 2015 and there are also people from other countries who seek for international protection in the EU. In regard to Eurostat, in 2015 there were more than 1.2 million first time asylum applicants in the EU (“Asylum in the EU Member States”, 2016). So, this movement changes the population rates of the EU MSs even though they opened their borders to small numbers of Syrians. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are more than 4.5 million Syrian refugees and 2.7 million of them are in Turkey (“Syria Regional Response”, 2016). These numbers may have effects on the demographic structure of Turkey and the EU.

### **Cultural Issues**

Cultural issues and migration crisis have also effects on Turkey’s membership process. There are different views about Turkey’s membership in relation to cultural issues. Semih Akçomak (2010) indicates that the cultural differences between Turkey and other EU MSs are exaggerated. He supports his views with Geert Hofstede’s investigation on the work related values of people in over 50 countries and the data from the European Values Study, 1999. In his view, many of Turkey’s supposed cultural differences with the rest of Europe are in fact unsubstantiated.

Even though there are some scholars that think cultural differences are exaggerated there are also opposite views. For example, there are some statements against Turkey’s membership in connection with cultural issues. These are Herman Van Rompuy’s, Nicolas Sarkozy’s and Giscard d’Estaing’s statements. These kinds of statements cause adverse opinions, which may lead to discrimination and racism. Their statements show a political opposing for Turkey’s membership as Turkey is not evaluated as a European country and its cultural values are different than the European values. Even if Turkey is not accepted as a European country by some of the politicians there are many Turkish people living in the EU and there are many Muslims, as well. Muslims and Turkish people are minorities in the EU.

According to Luciano Scagliotti (2009), there is a continuous increase in racial incidents and crimes in Europe against minorities, faith-based groups, and immigrants. There are surveys, which conducted in 2008, and they showed the persistence of racism and racial discrimination in a number of areas and this shows that there are racism and discrimination in the EU (Scagliotti, 2009). And it became more obvious with the Brexit campaign in the UK as politicians used the fears of the citizens in order to get votes. For example, both sides in voting used Turkey’s membership. On the one side, Cameron stated that Turkey’s membership is possible in about the year 3000 (“Turkey on Course,” 2016). On the other side, Nigel Farage (2016) indicated that Turkey’s membership would be a total disaster for the UK as there would be a huge flow of unemployed people according to a survey. The survey, he mentioned, was later announced to be inaccurate. According to that survey and inaccurate news, 12 million people will move to the UK when Turkey becomes a member (Greenslade, 2016). This amount of migration will never be possible as the unemployment rate in Turkey is just about 10 % according to Eurostat and the UK is not the only EU MS. As it can be noticed both sides used Turkey’s possible membership in order to take the votes. This news is a threat for the immigrants and it does not coincide with the European values and their motto

of “unity in diversity”. Turkey’s membership may cause migration to Turkey because of this increasing racism. Turkish people who live in the EU may prefer to return back and this may also be a disincentive for possible migration to Europe. It can be stated that because of racism and discrimination Turkey’s population may not be a cultural problem for the EU.

Migration crisis, which is an outcome of the conflicts in Syria, may also have effects on Turkey’s membership in terms of cultural issues. According to the BBC news, “The conflicts in Syria has caused the world’s worst refugee crisis for 20 years, with an average of 6,000 people fleeing every day in 2013, the UN says” (“UN Says,” 2016). The situation has got worse day by day and today there are more than 4.5 million Syrians who left their country and most of them are in Turkey. And this situation makes most of the EU MSs anxious about the possible Syrian accumulation on the EU borders. Farage’s statement (2016) about the risk is a good example of this situation as he indicated, “...there is a security risk. For the UK to have total open borders with a country sharing a land border with Syria, Iraq and Iran would be madness.” There are politicians who support this view but it should not be forgotten that refugees are not terrorists they are the victims as stated many times in many news. In a nutshell, migration crisis of the recent years will have effects in Turkey’s EU accession process. It can be evaluated both as advantage and disadvantage. Turkey – EU relations got refreshed, as Angela Merkel has visited Turkey many times in the recent months. However, Syrian population in Turkey, which might become Turkish citizen, may have negative effects in this process as most of the EU MSs refused to accept Syrian people.

### **Conclusion**

As stated above, the main argumentation of this paper is that Turkey’s high population rate is an impediment before Turkey for its membership because of fear of migration. As Turkey with its high population rate will change the representation balance in the EU institutions and the possibility of migration will also have economic and cultural effects in the EU.

In the first part, Turkey’s population and its representation power in decision – making in the EU in the event of possible membership is evaluated and it is focused on two views. One of them is Turkey’s high population would not have important effects in EU decision-making and according to the second one Turkey’s population would give it voting power so it would be an important actor in the EU decision-making. The first view can be supported as Turkey will be just one of the members of the EU and there will be other members in decision-making so Turkey’s influence is exaggerated. But its population should not be forgotten because population size determines representation and voting strength in the Council and the EP, and Turkey with its population would have effects on the EU decision-making.

In the second part, there are also two views related to Turkey’s population and its economy in the event of possible membership. The possibility of migration from Turkey to the EU because of better wages and economic conditions is the first one and the possibility of migration from the EU to Turkey is the second one. These both views are possible but as Turkey’s conditions are better than Eastern Europe countries there may be a migration from these countries but they are not highly

populated so the possible labour force migration may not be more than the possible migration from Turkey to Western European countries.

In the third part, it is noted that possible membership of Turkey may cause migration to Turkey because of the increasing racism. Turkish people who live in the EU may prefer to return and this may be a disincentive for possible migration to Europe. So, Turkey's population may not be a cultural problem at least not as big as the other two may cause.

Migration crisis of the recent years may also have effects on Turkey's population as nearly 3 million Syrians may get Turkish citizenship and this will cause an increase in Turkey's population. Therefore, this will affect Turkey's membership process especially in terms of economic and cultural issues.

As it can be seen Turkey's population will be a problem if it is evaluated according to the representation power and the economic issues but it may not cause much problem according to the cultural issues. And as a conclusion, it can be said that Turkey's population is an impediment in its membership process and with this population, there may always be a possibility of migration to the EU.

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