

# European Political Union and Turkey

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**"Relations Between the European Union and Turkey" Seminar  
Seminar Opening Speech  
CBRT Conference Hall  
March 23, 1998**

Relations with Europe have always been important for Turkey. For the past 40 years, membership in a European union has sporadically been discussed. In the last several years, it has been continuously debated from several points of view, and since the Ankara Treaty it has again been at the head of the agenda. Now, following the rejection of Turkey's bid for membership at the EU summit last December, Turkey's relations with the European Union remain on the agenda.

The world is undergoing several rapid developments as the end of the century approaches, one of which is the acceleration of technological change. This process has made national borders meaningless, has put the instantaneous transmission of information to any place on the globe within the reach of anyone, and has radically redefined our conceptions of time and place. The globalization that springs from technological progress imposes new dimensions on social institutions, relationships, and democracy.

As we have seen, the world today is undergoing a process of globalization and amalgamation wherein countries with similar characteristics which are in close geographical proximity have been showing an increasing tendency to join forces and enter into close regional relationships. We have entered an era of increased financial competition in an environment of advanced, complex financial mechanisms.

New relationships, new individuals, and new societies are emerging. The production and allocation problems of societies will also be evaluated in light of the advancing information technology.

The idea of economic solidarity that emerged from the structural differences of societies at the beginning of the 20th century flourished first on a bilateral basis, before leading countries to establish larger supranational economic organizations whose goal was cooperation with one another.

Political cooperation is one of the most important aspects of regional integration. It contributes to economic development by supporting mutual removal of trade barriers, by reaching wider markets under conditions of stability and confidence, and by efficiently utilizing resources.

The European Union has gone far beyond being just a customs union today. The following points illustrate this truth:

- From the economic standpoint, the EU is an economic federation.
- From the political standpoint, the EU follows a "unified" common policy in the United Nations and other forums.
- The EU has established its own defence umbrella in cooperation with the Western European Union.
- From the cultural standpoint, the EU appears to be heading toward a common basis for cultural policy in spite of the differences that exist between member countries. The end of the cold war has increased the importance of European culture and religion, both of which were of secondary importance in the 1950s and 1960s.

Generally speaking, there has not been much discussion of the European Union from the political perspective, either within or outside the Union. Traditionally, discussions and exchanges of views have revolved around economic issues. The Union has directed its energies more toward economic issues than toward political ones.

But although Turkey did focus on the economic dimension for a while after signing the partnership agreement in 1963, political views and political debates have since come to dominate EU-Turkey relations. Such political issues as Cyprus, the Aegean Sea, Turkish-Greek relations, and problems in Southeastern Turkey have dominated the agenda with respect to Turkey's relations with the EU.

Although the items for discussion are determined by the EU members, economic issues have traditionally taken second place in Turkey-EU relations. Indeed, such subjects as inflation, its deleterious effects, and how EU can help Turkey combat inflation, have received very little attention as agenda items. And Turkey's economic relations with the EU have only been considered in a limited way, being largely confined to matters related to the balance of payments, such as export-imports and Customs Union.

In other words, the agenda of Turkey-EU relations has always moved in the opposite direction from the EU's own agenda. While the EU was focusing on economic subjects, we were focusing on political issues, and when they began to concern

themselves with the idea of political union, we preferred to focus on dimensions of the relationship that were not connected with politics.

The first thing to remember is that the EU is a monetary and economic organization. As this organization evolves into a political union, a very strong structure will be formed. This much is clear, although it is still debatable whether this structure should have limitations.

There can be no doubt that it would be very beneficial for Turkey to be part of such a structure. Before this can be, however, we must first solve the inflation problem, and redirect the Turkey-EU agenda toward economic issues.

We must also not forget that if Turkey had an inflation rate below 10 percent today, she could have been the strongest, most dynamic, and most distinctive member of the EU.

All these factors lead us to believe that the reasons Turkey's candidacy was not accepted at the Luxembourg summit, and the reasons Turkey's involvement was limited to an invitation to the European Conference, are not what we believed them to be, but something different.

In these circumstances, it is an important duty of the Central Bank, and of other civil organizations, to contribute to the formation of public opinion by enlightening the public.

In accordance with this understanding of our duties, the Central Bank has sponsored seminars covering the economic, legal, cultural, and historical aspects of Turkey-EU relations.

This time, the issue will be covered from a different perspective. The history, present state, and future prospects of the idea of a European political union will be examined in its political and cultural dimensions in the course of this seminar.

And in a similar framework, distinguished professors will examine Turkey's role in the past, and the question of her adjustment in the future.

I appreciate your participation in this seminar, which I hope will be interesting and beneficial. Thank you.