

## **EUROPEAN UNION: POLITICAL OBSERVATIONS, INTERVIEWS AND ASSESSMENT**

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### **PRESENTATION**

Our study involves the assessment of observations and interviews that have been made after an investigative visit to Brussels and Strasbourg between 25<sup>th</sup> of August and 12<sup>th</sup> of September 2001 within the frame of European Union Visitors Programme (EUVP).

Interviews have been made with members of the European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission, the Economic and Social Committee on EU-Turkey relations, Regional Committee authorities, the Women's Lobby, representatives of the Amnesty International, EU Social Observers (sociologists), members of Belgian Parliament and members of Belgian Federal Planning Bureau and Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The assessment of answers given to the questions in our interview schedule that aims to understand the points of view as to the socio-political developments around the world and as to the democratic criteria, which can be considered as the main problematic area in EU-Turkey relations, will be given here.

Contemporary socio-political phenomena; the state of ideologies, concepts of right and left, the position of the nation-states, micro-nationalism; whether the principle of majority constitutes a threat to the continuation of democracy, headscarf as a political symbol and secularism in Muslim countries-especially in Turkey; whether the banning of political parties, when they are perceived to be a threat to democracy, could be a threat to the democracy itself; and finally education in native language have been the issues included in the interview schedule.

### **ASSESSMENT OF INTERVIEWS**

1. It may be suggested that today, the opinion that the ideologies have lost their power and the concepts of right and left have become meaningless is not widely held. It is a point of attention that the anti-communist ideologies

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have lost their meaning after the collapse of the Soviets. For example, the rise of Islamic ideologies is emphasized. It is mentioned that there is a need to distinguish between democratic and anti-democratic ideologies. Equality in education, social justice, opposite positions against the *laissez-faire* policies, which lead to widening of the gaps in incomes, were the indicators for the right-left scale and still, and even more strongly, the validity of these indicators is accepted. But it is explicitly agreed that both right and left have lost their orthodox characteristics, that there have been exchanges of some elements between the two ideologies and that there have been modifications in their contexts.

Again with respect to the validity of the indicators that are used to distinguish between right and left, it is mentioned as a point of view that the right and left are still valid although there is a weakening of their power. Generally speaking, this is a left-oriented assessment that presumes the validity of leftist ideas stemming from the continuation of left and leftist indicators and which also signifies the weakening of ideologies, which in turn differs from the rightist point of view that ideologies have lost their meanings.

Small numbers of liberals in the interview environment claim that the age of ideologies has come to an end, and that it is useless to discuss right and left. But the point put forward-or the problem- is the lack of productivity of political production mechanisms.

2. The assessments about the positions of nation-states in the new world order, which is shaped by globalisation process, maintain important clues as to the opinions about globalisation.

One of the most striking assessment results is that, the attitude of every state that claims to be national in nature is in fact an indicator of debility. Traditional bureaucratic central nation-states adapt to the process of globalisation less easily than the federal states, that strengthen the process of globalization, in which most of the decision making processes are more close to people, and where the entire country would be involved in domestic competition in modernization process.

According to the European point of view, nation-states should stay, but as smaller and weaker entities. Globalisation is an economic process, however the state is a political structure and neither the EU nor other globalisation processes designed on a wider scale would kill national sentiments.

We can say it is widely accepted by most of the points of view that the nation-states are losing their power-or at least- they tend to leave their places to superior international unions. One of the supporting points for those who hold this opinion is the claim that Germany, Italy, France and

England have been losing their power since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

3. Equally weighted opposite opinion of the tendency that the functions of the nation-states would differ among the developed and developing countries, does not carry an exact contrast. It is thought that successful nation building process in a developing country might contribute to the development of common identity and it might prevent the misuse of existing resources. According to the opinions that the states will have different functions in developing countries, most of today's nation states are under-developed artificial entities including the elements of religion and nationality. Nation-states may undertake effective roles in developing countries in providing for the fundamental needs of people such as education, health and social security. As it was mentioned before, the equally weighted opposite opinions against the opinions believing in the differentiation of functions of the nation-states between developed and developing countries are not in the form of "no, there is no difference".

**Opposite opinions are radical left (Uca and Kramer) and liberal right (Sommer). Radical left objects to the idea of nationality. Liberal right gives importance to the collaborations between developed and developing countries rather than the national character of the state. Liberal right are concentrating on the idea that the governments do not have much political choice due to the closing distance between right and left policies and proposing pragmatic alternatives.**

4. We can distinguish two kinds of opinions related with micro-nationalisms: One group accepts this as natural and positive while another group agrees that -in the name of democracy- the entities of local and regional identities are "reactionary and temporary" aside from mentioning that the demands of micro-nationalisms are often unrealistic.

5. Those who believe that external intervention would be necessary for the continuation and stability of democracy, in case there exists with no doubt a vital threat to democratic regime, can support their positions with historical examples such as Germany and Austria. For them, although it may seem possible to depend on inner mechanisms of democracy in theory, this would not always be valid in practice. A democratic system may be weakened or may get worse when there exists no regulatory external intervention. Interventions should not always be considered as negative: restrictions, and bans (military interventions may be given as extreme and marginal examples for democracy) may be thought as negative intervention types, while, for example, protective institutions which would maintain external assistance for democratic structures such as those established in European Council or European Parliament may be considered as positive intervention types.

6. The number of those who explicitly approve women/girls to wear headscarf as a political symbol in public institutions remains very small. Referring to the idea of tolerance in the name of democracy, they see it possible to give permission to headscarves in Turkey because they do not believe that there is a fundamentalist religious threat.

On the other hand, there are those who oppose to headscarf given that Turkey has a secular order unlike Iran and although respect for all beliefs is a crucial principle they are not sure whether if headscarf is an obligatory requirement of religion, and moreover, they suspect that headscarf may invite a risk of distinction between “good Muslim women” and “bad Muslim women”.

It seems, as Belgian bureaucrat expresses, “context is important”. The explanatory and conditional responses of the people, whose loyalty to democracy we consider as *a priori*, are explicit indicators of the complexity of the issue. This provides clues, supporting the idea that there does not exist an exact pattern for Turkey to feel forced to adopt on such specific issues. If preference of a secular order is the base for domestic and foreign balances and headscarf has become widespread as a political symbol of counter-preference, the problem would only be solved by political initiatives.

There are both easy and difficult sides in systematizing the opinions relating to the instruments that could be used in struggle against threats to democracy such as reaction or radical nationalism. For it is clear that the struggle against challenges to democracy must be democratic, legal and constitutional in its means, and that dialog and freedom of thought are not disputable concepts in any way. Understanding democracy as an integrity of values that should be thought as positive rather than considering it negatively as a defence position or form is an idea that can be seen as an indicator to belief in democracy.

Measures such as economic development, respect for freedom of thought, debate and consultation-that is to say politics mainly-, tolerance, fighting misuse of authority, strict control of government practises, not oppressing criticizers, and punishment of criminals are enumerated in medium and long term. In short, economic development, welfare, procession of law, enhancement of democratic culture within the context of tolerance and dialog establishes the frame for fighting against threats to democracy. Naturally, more liberals consider economic development as the main, determining component and for them democracy is a natural outcome of economic development. In the ideas of those who differ from this point of view with a left-oriented nature, super-structural conditions such as procession of democracy, debate and consultation, tolerance, freedom of thought and speech, respect for constitution, procession of law, fighting misuse of authority, and peace are emphasized as conditions of successful

functioning of democracy. Great majority, either those who give priority to economic development and the improvement of living standards or those who give priority to enhancement of democratic processes and institutions can accept that they would support-although unwillingly- banning or abolishing political parties in case there exists a concrete problem directed at democracy after these preconditions are maintained. But, even these compulsory admissions have restrictions: although the issues about extreme nationalism and movements of religious fundamentalism can be considered within this frame, there are those who especially emphasize that no political party can be abolished because of the promotion of a regional identity that comprises within itself linguistic identities. Being totally opposed to the idea of abolishing political parties becomes definite on the one hand, parallel to radicalisation of left, and on the other in the ideas of those who openly define themselves as liberal. In other words, it would not be wrong to say that, it is liberals and radical leftists who totally oppose to the abolishing of political parties.

8. Overwhelming opinion about education in native language suggests that this is a democratic right. However, there are those who do not consider it as a democratic requirement while accepting that it might be beneficial. It is important that this view reflects the opinions of technical personnel (economic and social...). Because irrationality dimension in economic terms is also considered from the viewpoint of technicians following the same opinion.

## **CONCLUSION**

European Union should be thought along with the facts that radical antagonistic positions of left and right have started to change and ideologies have recessed in the domestic policies of Western societies from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

We could say, putting aside the two main approaches concerning if democracy is the basic orientation of humanity or if it depends on specific conditions, democracy, although it has generally been kept alive under a strict set of conditions, has also survived in many different circumstances. Otherwise, accepting lack of maturity in socio-economic conditions as a justification in those countries that are being criticized about democratic criteria may become one of the obstacles for the progress of democracy.

Taking into consideration that Western Europe, which has reached a convergence point today, has been through nation-state formation process early, it can be thought that in the countries that have gone through this process more lately being a nation-state would have a rational functionality at least in preventing misuse of resources. If a process which is open for

discussion has started relating to the functions of nation-states in democratic context, it would be necessary to direct dynamics of social change at supranational institutions such as EU with a powerful political will and social consensus. Of course, it is possible to think that pretending not to see micro-nationalisms and integration with supranational institutions is dichotomous, but putting democracy as a static and unreachable target for Turkey in the process of integration with supranational institutions will not be an objective approach for EU.

After the National War of Independence, Turkey has become-with the strong effects of its geographical location- the unique democratic Muslim country that has succeeded in a profound social transformation in order to be harmonious with contemporary world and a country that has an aggregated experience of 80 years of modernization project. Although rivalries inevitably occur between traditionalists and modernizing forces along the non-linear social change process and the reflexes of socio-economically weak segments of the society, in order not to be hurled in the rapid social change, partially empowers conservative actions, Enlightenment Revolution have taken its roots in Turkey. However, after all, achieving a solution to its socio-economic problems with a powerful political will is what really counts for Turkey.