

TURKISH MIGRANTS IN EUROPE

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THE BACKGROUND

After the collapse of the Ottoman state and before the 1950s there were very few Turkish migrations. Most of those who came to Europe before the latter date were not migrants. Since the end of the sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries, Ottoman ambassadors, their staff and servants, some Ottoman merchants, travellers, and others, came to Europe mainly on official business and for trade. Probably some of them did settle in Europe, particularly in Britain. British diarist Samuel Pepys recorded in 1662 how the Earl of Sandwich brought “a little Turke and a Negro for his daughters as presents, in addition to a parrot and other novelties”¹ It is also known that the first Turkish bath was opened in London in 1679,² which means that probably some Turks did settle in the British capital as early as that date or even earlier.

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1 Greater London Council, *A History of the Black Presence in London*, London, 1986, p. 10.

2 Ismail Soysal and Mihin Eren, *Türk İncelemeleri Yapan Kuruluşlar (Research Organisations in Turkish Studies)*, Ankara, 1977, p. 137.

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The first Turkish influx into Europe seems to have been political refugees and asylum-seekers, such as Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha, Ali Suavi, Şinasi and others – Ottoman intellectuals who had established, in 1865, a secret organisation called *Yeni Osmanlılar* (*New, or Young Ottomans*) in order to oppose the absolutism of Sultan Abdülaziz. They escaped to Paris and London in June 1867, where they published newspapers criticising the regime. Their successors, the Young Turks (*Genç Türkler*), also took refuge in some European capitals, including London, this time in order to escape the absolutism of Sultan Abdülhamit II. More political refugees found their way to Europe after the Young Turk revolution of July 1908. The First World War and its aftermath saw another wave of Turkish refugees, fleeing from the nationalist forces of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) for having compromised themselves by the nationalists' enemies. The mid-1980s also saw the arrival of a few political refugees fleeing from the emergency situation then prevalent in Turkey.³

Like the Turks from the Turkish mainland, who had emigrated from rural areas and a few towns, Turkish Cypriots emigrated from their small island. A number of them began to come to Europe, mainly to the UK, after 1878, when Britain occupied Cyprus under the Cyprus Convention of 4 June 1878.⁴ They went as students, some of whom married and settled there. Others went as tourists and still others migrated in order to escape the harsh economic and political life in the British Colony of Cyprus. But, the mass exodus did not take place until after the Second World War, for social, economic and political reasons. The mid-1950s saw the arrival of a number of Turkish Cypriot political refugees, fleeing the Greek EOKA terrorism unleashed on the island. Whilst, in the mid-1960s, many Turkish Cypriots emigrated because of Greek Cypriot oppression.⁵

3 S.R. Sonyel, 'The Silent Minority', *Turkish Muslim Children in British Schools*, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 913.

4 For the Cyprus Convention, see S.R. Sonyel, *Cyprus: the Destruction of a Republic*, Huntingdon, 1997, p. 2; see also British Parliamentary Papers, *Accounts and Papers*, CIX, 1899, Command 9088.

5 See also Eric Butterworth and Donald Kinniburgh, *The Social Background of Immigrant Children from India, Pakistan and Cyprus*, London, 1970, p. 70.

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THE *GASTARBEITER*

After the 1950s, Europe began to receive its first wave of Turkish migrant workers (the *gastarbeiter*). First came the men, on work permits, renewable periodically, followed by their wives and children. Some of the single ones married and settled in Europe, whilst married couples had their children born in the host countries. Those who arrived after the 1950s were keen to preserve and further develop their culture and traditions. They continued their family customs and preserved their links with their relations and friends in Turkey and Cyprus.⁶

BETWEEN TWO CULTURES

The first Turkish migrants to Europe were mostly mature adults, who had brought with them their own morals, beliefs and traditions. They had experienced their socialisation in their homeland, hence, in a different country with a contra-culture, they found themselves faced with the necessity of having to adapt and modify their own culture. They had to learn a new language, to get used to a new life and to earn money urgently to maintain their families. The transition from one culture to another created many difficulties for them, their wives and children, including those who were born in Europe. They had to face the strain of living between two cultures and many underwent identity crises.⁷ They had to learn to adapt to two cultures, and sometimes, for their children, the transition between home and school resulted in mental distortions and mismatches, as they had to adopt a dual role. As a result, children became alienated from their own culture. This gave rise to serious psychological conflicts between parents and children.⁸

6 Mehmet Manavoğlu, *İngiltere'deki Türk Toplumu (Turkish Community in England)*, unpublished report, Lefkoşa, TRNC, 1982, p. 2.

7 Talip Küçükcan in Veysi Güngör (ed.), *Batı Avrupa Türkleri (Turks of Western Europe)*, Amsterdam, 1992, pp. 103-109.

8 Füsün Uluğ, 'A Study of Conflicting Cultural Pressures With Particular Attention to the Turkish Cypriot Community...', B. Ed. dissertation, Middlesex Polytechnic, May 1981, pp. 33-34.

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As they could not maintain their own culture owing to differences in language, morals and religion, they had to develop a dynamism of their own and gradually to adopt a new version of their Turkish culture. Nevertheless, according to British sociologists Geoff Dench and James L. Watson, it would be wrong to assume that they were totally immersed in their host culture or lost their group identity, which had been the fate of the Maltese. The culture they identified with was a recycled one, which resembled their homeland culture.⁹

THE MYTH OF RETURN

The first Turkish migrants came to Europe with the intention of ultimately returning home. In fact, few of them have done so.¹⁰ Their aspirations were directed mainly towards self-improvement in economic terms before returning home. Many of them have fulfilled their main ambition, but in the process they have settled down, married and produced children who now constitute the second and even the third generation. Hence they are reluctant to uproot their families in order to return home. Besides, they have become accustomed to the European way of life, although they do believe that integration and not assimilation by the host society is their best hope for survival.¹¹ However, some of the elderly ones with no close relatives in Europe are still under the spell of the 'myth of return', and dream of the day when they will go back home.¹²

OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE

Many of the Turks in Europe are self-sustained and financially independent of their relatives in Turkey and Cyprus. A large number of them work in factories, catering and other service industries.

9 Geoff Dench, *Maltese in London: a Case Study in the Erosion of Ethnic Consciousness*, London, 1975; James L. Watson (ed.), *Between Two Cultures: Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, Bristol, 1977, p. 3.

10 Vic George and Geoffrey Millerson, 'The Cypriot Community in London', *Race*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1976, pp. 277-92.

11 See also Ali Kılıçarslan in Güngör (ed.), op.cit., p. 25.

12 Ulug, op.cit., pp. 30-31; see also Muhammad Anwar, *Between Two Cultures*, CRE, London, 1981.

Some of them are self-employed, running their own corner shops, groceries, restaurants, etc. They also work in dressmaking, hair-dressing, shoemaking and various other industries. A number of them are employed in small-scale enterprises, in the import and export of Turkish products, and some of them have been successful as businessmen. There are many trained professionals, such as teachers, lawyers, economists, accountants, doctors, dentists, engineers and scientists, and artisans such as builders, plumbers and electricians.¹³ On the whole, they contribute to the economy and national wealth of the host countries.

TURKISH MIGRANTS' ANXIETIES

On a continent where intolerance, sectarianism and various extremist ideologies have caused many conflicts in the past, including two world wars and the extermination of millions of people,¹⁴ the life of Turkish immigrants cannot be an easy one. The more so because they adhere to their own culture, language and religion, they tend to conglomerate in certain areas and they adamantly refuse to be assimilated, although they are not against integration. In fact, many of them have integrated with their host societies. Nevertheless, in certain places they tend to form a target for racism, intolerance, discrimination and all kinds of xenophobia, especially at a time when racism and extremism seem to be resurfacing in some parts of Europe.¹⁵

The recent events in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, where thousands of Muslims were subjected to Serbian ethnic cleansing, have further added to their feeling of insecurity. They believe that they are confronted with resurgent racism and that only lip service is paid to their rights as citizens of host countries. Even in a liberal

13 UK Home Office research bulletins.

14 See Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile - the Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1995.

15 Güngör, *op.cit.*, p. 15 and Kadri Akkaya in *ibid.*, p. 40.

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country such as the UK they think that they are not treated as equal citizens. The rather negative role of the UK and the EU over the Cyprus question and the imposition of an embargo and visa restrictions on Turkish Cypriots have worsened their fears.¹⁶

The UK-based Runnymede Trust confirmed in its 1997 report¹⁷ that all over Europe racism is on the increase. Another report by the committee of experts appointed by the EU expressed concern and fear about displays of racism, which are increasing in number and seriousness. "Racism and xenophobia have become commonplace, not only in day to day neighbour disputes, but also in the pronouncements of certain extremist organisations, and within certain political parties. There is evidence of supra-national racist networks whose main targets are foreigners", commented the report.¹⁸

Moreover, the 1998 annual report of the UK Commission for Racial Equality shows a rise in the number of racist incidents. There was a 60 percent rise in complaints about racist behaviour. Recently, the David Copeland case in the UK has further alarmed the Turks. On 30 June 2000, David Copeland, who the British press described as a "self-proclaimed fascist", was led away from the British criminal court, the Old Bailey, after the jury had found him guilty of murdering three people and maiming 139. He was given six life sentences. Among his targets during a thirteen-day terror of bombings in London in April 1999, were ethnic and religious minority people. His aim, according to the *Daily Mail* newspaper of 1 July 2000, was to carry out ethnic cleansing. He disclosed that he wanted to spark "a race war".

Despite the good intentions of the Labour Party government to improve race relations, attacks on ethnic minorities in a number of

16 Sonyel, op.cit., *passim*, and also the paper he submitted to the Istanbul NGO Conference of the OSCE, in September 1999, entitled 'The Plight of Turkish Cypriots Living in the U.K.'

17 The Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia: a Challenge for Us All*, report dated 1997.

18 *Guardian* newspaper, London, 17 November 1994.

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areas, mainly in the East End of London, are on the increase. In some parts of Europe, members of minority communities live in fear of their lives.¹⁹ The EU is so worried about the spread of racism that, on 2 June 1998, a conference was held in Manchester (UK), under the title 'Europe Against Racism', with the participation of delegates from fifteen EU member states, in order to discuss the issue.

CONCLUSION

In view of this rather disturbing situation, Turks and other minority members are pondering how they can defend themselves and their families against the racists – who, we are told, are a tiny extremist minority – without antagonising the majority of their European neighbours or hosts. Many discussions are being held and research is being carried out in order to deal with this situation. Whatever the outcome, Turks and other minorities and governments need to take drastic action in order to address the problem.

It goes without saying that the immigrants need to project their communities as moderate, peaceful and law-abiding and that, as individuals, they are contributing to the economy and wellbeing of their host countries. Wide publicity needs to be given to the fact that Turks and other minority people, many of whom were born in Europe, have much to contribute to the solution of many, if not all, of the social and economic problems facing Europe, including the most important point, that they are providing a ready, young and strong work force to a continent where the population is ageing.

European governments, too, need to implement multicultural and multi-ethnic policies at every level so that the younger generation may grow up in a liberal Europe that really stands for tolerance, mutual respect, human rights, democracy and all the other cherished ideals of modern times. Turkey's prospective EU

¹⁹ *The Independent* newspaper, London, 11 May 1993.

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membership may also contribute to the pacification of Turkish migrants' anxieties and smooth over their relationship with host governments and people. Such membership can contribute tremendously to the improvement of race relations on the continent and may pave the way for a *rapprochement* between the three main religions of Europe: Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

If Turkey is admitted to the EU, the periodic claims that the EU is a 'Christian brotherhood' will be disproved; Turkish and Muslim minorities on the continent will feel safer and double their efforts for integration and harmonisation with host communities. This will also give the lie to those who advance unfounded theories, such as the 'clash of civilisations'.²⁰

²⁰ P. Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, summer 1993, p. 22; See also Yüksel Sezgin, 'Does Islam Pose a Threat to the West?', *Perceptions*, Vol. V, No. 2, June-August 2000, pp. 63 ff.