

AGNES BATORY

The European Future of
Turkey and Ukraine:
The Policy Debate in Hungary

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to paint a more robust understanding of the future of EU enlargement, this paper explores EU expansion to Turkey and Ukraine by focusing on policy debates in Hungary as of mid-2005. Drawing primarily from qualitative analyses of political party and policy documents, the media, and interviews, the report shows that public opinion in Hungary was moderately supportive of enlargement to include both Turkey and Ukraine. While the prospect of Turkish membership in the EU was subject to some discussion among opinion-formers, in general, the issue was not prominent; Ukrainian EU membership, meanwhile, was seen as a distant possibility and therefore subject to little controversy. Though two smaller political parties took strong stances either for or against enlargement, two larger parties were less forthright in their positions. Among political parties, developments on the EU-level appeared to have an important influence. However, for the general public, the salience of the question of further enlargement remained low.

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Key points

- As of late 2005, public opinion in Hungary was moderately supportive of further enlargement to include both Turkey and Ukraine;
- the prospect of Turkish EU membership was subject to some discussion among opinion formers, but the issue was not salient for the public;
- the two smaller parliamentary parties explicitly supported or rejected Turkish membership, while the two major parties (the Socialists in government and Fidesz in opposition) had not politicized the issue;
- opinion formation within the parties was driven by developments on the European level;
- Ukrainian EU membership was seen as a distant possibility at best and therefore subject to little controversy.

1. Introduction

Towards the end of 2004, two events took place that had the potential to change fundamentally the European Union. The first of these was the decision by the European Council in December 2004 to open accession negotiations with Turkey, a country that applied for full membership in 1987, but had no realistic prospect or timetable for actually being allowed to join until this time. The other event became known as the ‘Orange Revolution’ in Ukraine, leading to a new government with an explicit European commitment taking office in January 2005. While the prospect of Ukrainian EU membership was a relatively distant one, these changes presented European policy-makers with both an opportunity and a challenge to help stabilizing the EU’s immediate neighborhood by offering some sort of European perspective to Ukraine.

Common to the question of both Turkey’s and Ukraine’s future relationship with the Union is that their incorporation is unlikely to be feasible without altering radically the shape and course of European integration for the visible future. Integrating the ten new member states – mostly small countries in the immediate geographical proximity of the pre-2004 EU, with strong political and economic ties and cultural affinities with Western Europe – was already a strain for both EU institutions and (Western) European public opinion. Yet, the challenge of making the 2004 enlargement work paled into insignificance when compared with the difficulties involved in, and the long-term opportunities presented by, the accession of either Turkey or, most likely following a number of South East European countries, Ukraine. Both Turkey and Ukraine are large and relatively poor and populous countries: Turkey currently has a population of 70 million, with approximately 36% of the labor force employed in agriculture, and a GDP per capita (ppp) only slightly above one-quarter of the EU average. Ukraine, a country of 47 million, with 24% of employees in the agricultural sector, is even less prosperous. In terms of the demographic forecasts, while Ukraine’s population has been contracting sharply since the early 1990s, Turkey is set to expand rapidly and is expected to overtake Germany – currently the most populous member state - by 2025.

Where do Europe’s boundaries lie? And what holds the community of EU member states together? Answers to these questions are inextricably linked with further expansion to Turkey and/or Ukraine. While Turkey is a NATO member and long-standing ally of the US and Western Europe, it is situated largely outside of Europe in geographical terms, and is also the first secularized Muslim country to seek to enter the EU, thus calling into question the very notion of a European identity. Ukrainian membership, meanwhile, would expand the EU into the heart of the former Soviet Union – presenting a far greater challenge than the incorporation of the Baltic countries (also former Soviet republics) – highlighting the question of common political values underlying European integration. Added to this – although certainly not independent of the question of Turkey in particular – is the Union’s own internal impasse.

The Constitutional Treaty, intended to reinforce the EU's legitimacy, has suffered a perhaps fatal blow by the French and Dutch electorates' refusal to endorse it in recent referendums. This outcome was due, at least in part, to perceived linkages between the constitutional process and enlargement, highlighting the absence of any consensus regarding the future direction of Europe.

Against this background, the importance of deliberations on the future of European integration that find ways to combine or contrast the vision of ever closer Union with that of an ever-expanding Europe can hardly be overstated. It is with this in mind that a consortium of four research institutes in four new EU member states (Slovenia, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland) set out to analyze the domestic discourse in these countries on the future further EU enlargement to Turkey and Ukraine. Ukraine was selected alongside Turkey – undoubtedly the single most important country on the current enlargement agenda – due to its geopolitical importance for the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe, and its particular significance to Poland and Hungary, as neighboring countries.

This report is a preliminary and limited exploration of the subject with regards to the policy debate in Hungary in 2005. The report is limited, firstly, as it serves as merely one contribution, alongside with similar reports from Polish, Czech and Slovenian researchers, towards a comparative study compiled by the Institute of Public Affairs in Warsaw. Secondly, the timeframe and methodology of the fieldwork – based on a qualitative analysis of party and policy statements reported in the (quality) press, a review of on-line sources, and a small number of interviews – only allowed for a sketchy mapping of the most significant strands of the discourse. Any conclusions the report puts forward are therefore likely to be tentative. Finally, the findings of this report are preliminary, reflecting the state of affairs as of summer 2005, when both potential Ukrainian and, to a lesser extent, Turkish accession were seen to be far away prospects in Hungary. In the absence of any specific issue or event focusing the attention of public opinion or the political class on these questions, the discourse was of low intensity and general in nature, with some of the principal actors failing to voice any definite position on either Turkey or Ukraine.

2. Public opinion

As in the ten new member states (NMS) generally, Hungarian public opinion was more supportive of further enlargement than the public in the EU15. According to Eurobarometer 63 (July 2003), 66% of Hungarian respondents were in favor of this, well above the EU average at 50%, but somewhat below an average of 72% in the NMS. Hungarians were, for instance, less supportive than Poles or Slovenes (79% and 76%, respectively), but considerably more enthusiastic than the public in neighboring Austria, where less than one-third of respondents (31%) said they were in favor of further enlargement.

As for support for individual countries' future EU membership, neighboring Croatia was the most accepted among Hungarians, with almost three out of four respondents (73%) welcoming the idea of that country joining the Union. Romania and Bulgaria, next in line for EU membership according to the official EU enlargement agenda, scored considerably less at 59% and 55% in favor, respectively. The relatively small majority for Romanian membership is especially remarkable given the large Hungarian-speaking minority in northern Romania and strong support from the Hungarian government for this country's accession. These differences between levels of support for neighboring countries likely relate to the sharp contrast between widespread positive experiences of Croatia, as a popular holiday destination, and pervasive negative perceptions of Romania and Ukraine as economically 'backward' countries. Moreover, historical and cultural affinities, going back to the times of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, together with the fact Croatia is a predominantly Catholic country, may have resonated with Hungarian public opinion.

Finally, only a slight majority (51%) of Hungarian respondents was for Turkish accession, with 38% against and 11% undecided. This puts Hungary on par with the EU average at 52%, considerably above levels of support in the old member states (32%) and somewhat below that of the NMSs (48%). Ukraine's EU membership was supported by 50%, and opposed by 40%, which are remarkably similar proportions to those expressed about Turkey – a country considerably further away from Hungary, in geographical terms, than Ukraine.

In the absence of previous comparable Eurobarometer data, trends in Hungarian public opinion are unfortunately difficult to determine. However, a February national poll found considerably higher support for Turkish membership than Eurobarometer fieldwork undertaken in May-June 1995, in fact higher than the corresponding proportion for Romania (58%). The winner of that popularity contest was also Croatia. Ukraine was not included in the poll.

It is difficult to indicate how informed public opinion on further enlargement and the accession of particular countries is. It is reasonable to assume that the electorate is more knowledgeable about countries in Hungary's immediate geographical proximity, such as Romania, Croatia and Ukraine, in relation to which they are more likely to have personal experiences (family ties with Hungarian minorities in the neighboring countries, tourism, business contacts, etc.), than about Turkey. However, support for any of the neighboring countries' accession is also likely to have as much, or more, to do with national stereotypes, historical enmities, or personal commercial interests than the given country's perceived preparedness or suitability for EU membership, of which the public may not be particularly well-informed.

In relation to Turkey, even this basic knowledge is likely to be limited. Anecdotal evidence (in the absence of suitable polling data) suggests that the public has very little information on Turkey's aspirations to join the EU, and that perceptions of whether this is desirable are therefore far from stable. Activists of the Hungarian member of the transnational CSO coalition 'Voice for Europe' (see below) reported that the most common comments they encountered while collecting signatures for a petition included references to the Ottoman occupation of medieval Hungary and shopping trips to Istanbul, rather than anything to do with contemporary Turkish politics or Turkish-EU relations. The same NGO activists found that providing relatively basic information on this resulted in a shift of perceptions and positions on Turkish membership. Cultural/historical reference points – primarily the Ottoman occupation – have faded and therefore are unlikely to invoke strong reactions of any kind. Overall, public opinion on Turkey in Europe is perhaps best characterized as shallow (uninformed) and in a state of flux, while the possibility of future Ukrainian EU membership has not even appeared on people's political radars.

3. The Hungarian Government's position

The Hungarian government, in office from 2002 to the end of the research period in 2005, was made up of the Hungarian Socialist Party and the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats as the junior coalition partner. The Socialists had a far greater weight in Parliament, and consequently influence within the coalition, than the latter, as key actors shaping Hungarian EU and foreign policy also belonged to this party: the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the Minister for European Union Affairs. Both coalition partners were strong supporters of EU accession and a policy of extending the benefits of European integration to countries of political significance to Hungary. The track record of Hungary as an EU member state presented the government as a reliable if somewhat passive player on the European level, one tending to rely on EU frameworks and the Europeanization of foreign policy. The perception was of Hungary as a medium-sized or small country, with correspondingly limited influence in the EU, at least in comparison with the 'big players' that were expected, and accepted, to take the lead. There was consequently little sign, apart from a few isolated incidents, of

strong governmental ambitions to leave a mark on the Union's foreign policy agenda.

With regards to enlargement as a policy area, there were some exceptions to this pattern. The Hungarian government had been a vocal proponent of Croatia's accession, and was also a champion of Ukraine's European aspirations. Unlike Poland, which took a pro-active bilateral approach, the Hungarian government relied almost exclusively on the EU framework for the resolution of the Ukrainian electoral impasse and subsequent events culminating in the 'Orange Revolution' and the administration of President Viktor Yushchenko coming to power in January 2005. However, the policy of 'wait and see' then quickly gave way to an enthusiastic endorsement of the new Ukrainian government, with a January 2005 meeting between the Hungarian foreign minister and his Ukrainian counterpart, and Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány visiting Kiev in February of that year as the first head of government from an EU member state. As a result of this meeting, the Prime Minister declared his strong support for Ukraine's aspirations for European integration, stating that the country 'only needs 24 more votes' in the EU. With this the Hungarian government in fact joined earlier support and a more pro-active approach from the Polish government's side (although no reference was made to this fact). Indicative of close diplomatic ties between the two Prime Ministers at this time are also reports of an 'unscheduled' and informal visit by Prime Minister Julia Timosenko at Prime Minister Gyurcsány's office in Parliament a few weeks later.

With regards to Turkey, the government's approach had been even more reactive than in the case of Ukraine. Prior to the European Commission's recommendation in October 2004 to open accession negotiations with the country, the Hungarian government had no formal position on Turkish entry, merely a general policy that no country that meets the Copenhagen criteria can be denied membership. Subsequently, the government endorsed EU-level decisions giving Turkey a green light without any apparent reservation, or in fact without any sign that the issue would (or could) be controversial for Hungary. On the occasion of the Turkish Prime Minister's May 2005 visit to Budapest, Prime Minister Gyurcsány confirmed that Turkey could count on Hungary's support. It remains to be seen whether this support, as well as verbal support for Ukraine in spring 2005, would be expressed in practical terms or stays on the level of diplomatic rhetoric in the future.

4. Supporters and opponents of Turkish and/or Ukrainian EU membership

4.1. Civil society and the media

Further enlargement, i.e whether to include Turkey, Ukraine or any other country, did not visibly polarize civil society, apart from a number of small groupings (described below). Media coverage of the issue (in the quality press) tended to be factual, subject to little comment or analysis, and largely confined to a reporting of EU level decisions or controversy in the larger member states in Western Europe. For instance, the question of Turkish membership often featured a focus not on Turkey per se, but on skepticism or opposition to the country's entry in Germany or France, presented as relatively reasonable concerns. Opening accession negotiations with Turkey in October 2005 similarly received ostensibly neutral, factual coverage, mainly in connection with neighboring Austria's efforts to derail the process. Coverage of the French and Dutch referendums, rejecting the Constitutional Treaty, followed this pattern earlier in the year. Diplomatic events, such as the Turkish Prime Minister's visit to Budapest, or that of the Hungarian Prime Minister to Kiev, received some attention in the press, but any discussion of related issues diminished again as the news-value of the event decreased. The appearance of op-eds on Turkey in the comment and analysis sections of some of the broadsheets is relatively recent, but seemed to be gaining momentum

gradually. Whether Turkey should be allowed to join was also debated at a number of academic conferences and open forums organized by universities, and think tanks and youth organizations associated with political parties.

Turkey and Europe was an issue that seemed to have mobilized a small but vocal part of civil society that campaigns against Turkey's entry (there was no corresponding mobilization in relation to Ukraine, or for or against any other issue of further enlargement). Perhaps the most active group was the Foundation for European Values, the Hungarian member organization of the international CSO coalition Voice for Europe. Formed by a small group of activists, this coalition had a website with content updated in several European languages, and launched a campaign involving a tour of several EU countries for mobilizing public support against opening accession negotiations with Turkey. Campaigning with the general slogan 'Be tolerant but not naïve', the group argued that the country's membership would 'burst' the EU and is therefore irresponsible. At the same time, the Hungarian CSO emphasized that it did not object to a 'special partnership' with Turkey, and that its campaign – which, according to its website, continued even after accession negotiations with Turkey were opened – was against Turkey as an EU member but not 'Turkish people'.

The group employed sophisticated political marketing methods and has been successful in securing media coverage on a number of occasions, thereby influencing the public discourse perhaps more than its mere size would suggest. The Foundation also had the potential to spearhead a broader Turkey-skeptic CSO coalition in the future as it actively, although selectively, sought to build contacts with like-minded organizations in Hungary. One example of such activity was the Foundation's securing of formal support from the Armenian Self-Government (the organization of the Armenian minority in Hungary) for a petition delivered in the name of Voice for Europe to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Until 13 July 2005, the petition was signed by 4,600 people in Hungary – a small, but not insignificant number given the limited resources at the group's disposal for engaging the electorate in direct, face-to-face discussions.

Other Turko-skeptic voices include: i) Movement for a Better Hungary (a small extreme-right grouping), that demanded that the foreign minister vetoes the accession of this 'Muslim Asian country' (to no avail), ii) an on-line group, 'European Women for Liberty' that claimed that the country's track record in gender equality disqualified it for EU membership, and iii) a website, 'Islam in Europe' that warned against Turkey by describing it as a nominally secular but in practice Islamic country. While 'European Women' did at least once achieve some publicity through a campaign in which they dressed statues in public places in burkas on International Women's Day, others remained practically unnoticeable. It is generally difficult to assess the real size and organization of groupings of this kind. Their existence may be indicative of a potential for the further politicization of Turkish accession, but to date their impact on the public discourse was limited.

4.2. Political parties

Political parties had a far greater potential for engaging the public in a discussion on the future of Europe than any of the civil society organizations described above. However, by 2005, only the two smaller parliamentary parties, the Alliance of Free Democrats and the Hungarian Democratic Forum, attempted to communicate principled positions, and these attempts could be linked to a small number of politicians – most often Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) – taking a personal interest in the subject.

The Socialist Party's official line was that of the government – i.e., supporting both Turkish membership and Ukraine's European aspirations. At the same time, there was some indication that opinion was divided in the party or at least among the 9 Socialist MEPs. In a December 2004 op-ed, Gyula Hegyi MEP, for instance, argued that while Turkey was too important a country to say 'no' to, the creation of a special partnership category (falling short of full membership) would be a more

appropriate response on the EU's behalf. Hegyi made it clear in the article that he believed that 'the integration of populous and underdeveloped countries into the Union in the visible future [was] not in Hungary's interest,' as they would create competitors for EU transfers to the NMSs. Hegyi also warned that Turkish membership would create a dangerous precedent, which would then make it difficult to put a stop to further enlargement to Ukraine or even Russia. In the European Parliament (EP) debate of 13 December 2004 on Turkey's progress towards accession, another Socialist MEP made the party's support for the country's membership conditional on the creation by Turkey of territorial autonomy for the Kurds. The Socialists' other politicians in Brussels/Strasbourg or Budapest, however have, remained largely silent on the issue, and the party line remained a lackluster pro-Turkey position.

The position of Fidesz Hungarian Civic Alliance, the main national-conservative opposition party, was the most ambivalent of the four parliamentary parties. In a January interview, the head of the Fidesz delegation in the EP, as members of the European People's Party (EPP), argued that Turkish membership would present 'enormous, almost insurmountable problems' for the Union, and that Fidesz consequently 'would have preferred' a special partnership with the country. The indication was, nonetheless, that the party accepted the Commission recommendation and Council decision to open membership talks in the hope that the negotiations would take very long. Another Fidesz MEP, political scientist György Schöpflin, also voiced reservations, questioning whether Turkey's political system was sufficiently democratic to qualify the country for membership, without actually ruling out the possibility. Given the secret ballot in the EP on the resolution on Turkey, there is no information as to how Fidesz MEPs actually voted. However, Fidesz's reluctant support for official EU policy on Turkey may well be a policy of 'wait and see'. As a party that had a reasonable chance to win the elections of 2006, it needed to balance its inclination towards a Turko-skeptic position with that of the role it may play on the European level if it returned to office.

The two smaller parliamentary parties, the junior coalition partner Alliance of Free Democrats and the conservative, Christian-Democratic Hungarian Democratic Forum in opposition, took clear positions: the former strongly for Turkey's accession, the latter strongly against Turkey's membership. István Szent-Iványi, one of the two Free Democrat MEPs, was a vocal proponent in the domestic debate. He was also the only Hungarian MEP, other than the Socialist Csaba Tabajdi, who contributed to the EP debate in December 2004, arguing that the EU has an 'indispensable need' for Turkey. In contrast, the Democratic Forum's Presidium issued a formal statement in December 2004, explicitly declaring its opposition to Turkish EU membership, but not excluding the possibility of the creation of an (unspecified) 'special status' for the country. This position seems largely to have been a reflection of influential sister parties' stance on the issue, particularly that of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

5. Arguments for and against Turkish and/or Ukrainian EU membership

5.1. Turkey

As many of the same facts/arguments were used both to support and to reject Turkish membership by several actors in the debate, it may be useful to present them in a schematic form:

Turkey's political system

Opponents commonly argued that Turkey was not sufficiently democratic for EU membership. They pointed to the country's human rights record, the situation of women, the Kurdish question, and the influence of the army in the Turkish political regime. The EU's influence, in contrast, was seen to be insufficient for counterbalancing these tendencies and keeping the Turkish government 'in line'. Propo-

nents felt that, while the country did have problems in this respect, the government was genuinely committed to dealing with them and meeting the Copenhagen political criteria. They argued that the EU's role would be partly to help anchor Turkish democracy rather than watch from the sidelines. The allure of membership was seen to be strong enough to pull Turkey towards and through structural reforms.

Turkey, Islam and the cohesion of Europe

Opponents, most notably the Democratic Forum, argued that secularization in Turkey was pushed through by anti-democratic means, and constituted nothing more than a thin veil of 'modernity' on a society still governed by Islamic laws and values, including the subordinate situation of women. They also pointed to the fact that the Turkish government's leading force was an 'Islamic party organized on religious grounds', implying that the separation of state and church in the country was somewhat tenuous. Islam, in turn, was perhaps the most important – but by no means the only – factor suggesting that Turkey was culturally 'too different' from, and incompatible with, Europe. In the case of the Democratic Forum this was reinforced by the Vatican's lack of enthusiasm for Turkey's entry. The party's statement explicitly refers to Joseph Ratzinger's warning that Turkey's 'whole existence contradicts Europe' and that tying the country to 'us' – a community based on common Christian roots and cultural heritage in Europe – would be a grave mistake.

In contrast, proponents claimed that Turkey was a secular state and a working parliamentary democracy. The Free Democrats' most vocal spokesperson on the issue also argued that, irrespective of Turkey, the EU was evolving into a 'community of common political objectives', and has already ceased to be exclusively defined by a common past, cultural or religious traditions. Turkish accession therefore would not present a threat to the EU's cohesion. Turkey's Islamic traditions would, on the other hand, represent a great opportunity for bridging the schism, accentuated by 11 September 2001, between 'Islam and the West' by signaling that the division is not between 'civilizations' but between 'good' and 'bad' regimes.

Turkey and the boundaries of Europe

A common objection to Turkish entry was the fact that only a small part of the country is, geographically-speaking, located on the European continent. A concern in this respect, as mentioned above, was that the inclusion of Turkey into the EU would create a precedent for (other) non-European countries to seek membership, and therefore that the EU would face pressure to expand until it becomes obsolete. Proponents argued that no country meeting the Copenhagen criteria could be refused entry. In other words, the Union should not apply double standards. What was acceptable in relation to the new entrants of Central and Eastern Europe should also be considered sufficient in relation to Turkey.

Turkey and the European economy

Proponents pointed to the enormous potential Turkey would add to the European economy, and the fact that the Turkish economy was growing very dynamically in contrast with sluggish performance in some of the current member states. Turkey's most important trade partner was already the EU. Opponents argued that Turkey was a large and underdeveloped country, the incorporation of which would put a strain on the current EU budget. Turkey would also increase regional disparities within the EU, it being considerably poorer than any of the NMS, not to mention the EU25.

Turkey and financial transfers within the EU

A variation of the argument above was that the EU should first focus on absorbing and assisting the NMS before it accepted any further burdens, particularly one of the magnitude of a poor country of nearly 80 million. It was argued that the current system of agricultural and cohesion/regional policy payments would be impossible to maintain with Turkey's entry, and that it was not in the interest of

NMSs like Hungary to increase competition for available funds. Proponents agreed on the potential impact, but viewed Turkey's entry as providing welcome and productive pressure on the EU for reforming its current inefficient and wasteful re-distributive policies – reforms they consider necessary in any case. As it was unforeseeable how Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), structural and cohesion funds would be reformed, it was also impossible to see whether Hungary and other NMSs would fare better or worse.. Equally importantly, there was a sense that as the NMSs had benefited, and were likely to continue to benefit, from EU support. Solidarity dictated that, as their own need for this assistance decreases, other countries like Turkey should be given a chance.

Turkish accession and migration to the EU

A commonly perceived threat was that of Turkish migrant workers flooding the EU in general, including Hungary. Opponents pointed to the costs and social tensions they believed this would generate, and referred to (perceived) difficulties in Germany dealing with its Turkish community as an illustration of a situation to be avoided. Proponents, in contrast, argued that the volume of expected economic migration was vastly overestimated, pointing to earlier, unfounded fears of cheap Eastern European labor flooding Western Europe. Moreover, they argued that ageing European societies should welcome migrant workers to help them finance expensive social security systems by increasing the proportion of the active population. They viewed the EU's (and by extension, Hungary's) access to cheap labor markets, such as that of Turkey, were essential for competitiveness vis-à-vis the US.

Turkey and European security

Opponents argued that Turkish EU membership would not contribute to European security, but rather threaten it by upsetting the status quo near the EU's borders and by bringing the Union into closer contact with various hot spots in the Middle East and potentially unstable countries in Central Asia. While they recognized the importance of Turkey's geo-strategic position, they believed that the country is already firmly anchored in the Euro-Atlantic security system by its membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In other words, Turkish accession could import conflicts, but not necessarily help deal with them. In contrast, those supporting Turkey's membership argued that the country is crucial for the EU's ability to deal effectively with threats that would most likely come from the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Turkey was seen as a key to the EU's ability to develop a more assertive foreign and security policy – one which could establish the Union as a counterweight to US influence in regions around Europe, and therefore as a global actor with political might that would correspond to its economic power.

Turkey as a member state

A common argument against Turkey's entry was that the country, if given representation proportional to its population, would become very influential within the EU's decision-making bodies and institutions. They pointed out that Turkey would become a key player in the EU, which they objected to on the grounds listed above: that it is not Christian; that it does not have a European identity; that it is too poor to contribute to common resources; and that it is unfamiliar with the internal workings of the EU. Proponents did not voice corresponding views of this kind.

5.2. Ukraine

Ukraine tended to be discussed in the context of: 'if yes to Turkey, why not Ukraine?'. The general position seemed to be that, while it would be desirable to anchor Ukraine in Europe, particularly given the interest in forging closer links with the Hungarian minority in Ukraine, the country had a long way to go in terms of domestic reforms before membership was seriously considered. Comments and analyses

dealing with Ukraine in the Hungarian press generally portrayed a country where public services did not work, a large part of the population lived below the poverty line, corruption and organised crime were rife, and the legal system and government were barely able to contain local 'barons'. From this point of view, the EU's reluctance to offer the perspective of membership to Ukraine was seen to be reasonable.

The Hungarian Prime Minister's (at least verbal) commitment to support the Ukrainian government's European aspirations was, at the time of writing, relatively uncontroversial. It seems reasonable to expect that no mainstream Hungarian political party would rule out Ukraine's membership given the benefits that European integration could bring to the Hungarian minority in that country. At the same time, arguments put forward to suggest that further enlargement to include large and poor countries was not in Hungary's interest (presumably) also pertained to Ukraine. However, Ukraine was not considered as a serious candidate for membership before Turkey's entry, and since the latter was also seen to be a long-term prospect, there was no urgency in dealing with the issue. This also meant that opinion had not crystallized as to whether membership of Ukraine would be more beneficial for Hungary than that of Turkey, or what Hungary's policy would be in case Brussels' agenda were to change regarding the time order of candidates and accessions.

6. Analysis and outlook

Incentives from a 'national' point of view – focusing on Hungary and Hungary's interests only – were weak for investing a large amount of political capital in the issue of Turkey's accession. The volume of trade and investment between the two countries was relatively low (albeit increasing) and trade in industrial products was already subject to a customs-free regime (given the Turkish-EU customs union in this area). Migration from Turkey to Hungary was insignificant, and there was a number of EU-aspirant countries, primarily in South East Europe, with which Hungary had considerably stronger links. Turkish accession, meanwhile, might result in Hungary and other NMSs getting a smaller slice of the EU 'pie'. Dissenting voices within the Socialist Party seemed to be taking this position, without readily apparent divisions, at least in 2005. With the party in government, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Socialists would continue to follow what they consider 'Brussels' lead' in the matter.

In contrast, Ukraine is a neighboring country with a Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia and a potentially important market for Hungary. Political instability in the country would have immediate consequences for both Hungary and the Central Eastern European region as a whole. These factors explain the government's efforts to maintain close relations with the new Ukrainian administration and support it in its European aspirations. However, Ukraine was lagging behind other potential candidate countries on the Union's political agenda, and the consensus in Hungary seemed also to be that the country needed to undertake comprehensive reforms to reinforce political institutions and the rule of law, and generate a market economy before membership becomes a serious prospect.

The (more) controversial of the two issues was clearly Turkey's membership, the resolution of which was likely to keep Ukraine's accession at bay. As an interviewee from the Democratic Forum put it: 'Ukraine is not timely now. Turkey never will be.' This is also to say that positions on Turkey were inextricably linked with different ideas of Europe and visions of the future of the EU, in a way in which Ukraine – a Christian European country, albeit a large and underdeveloped one – was unlikely to be.

Where does Europe end, both geographically and culturally? And what degree of heterogeneity can the EU tolerate? The EU, seen as an entity culturally defined by a common heritage, religious roots, and a 'European identity', is fundamentally challenged by Turkish entry. This is accentuated, in the case of Hungary, by historical experiences. While it was recognized that modern Turkey

was distinct from the Ottoman Empire, historical parallels were drawn with Hungary (and earlier other countries in South East Europe) as ‘the last bastion of (Western) Christendom’, seen as the equivalent to medieval European civilization, vis-à-vis invading armies from the South/East. From this perspective, Turkey was the historical ‘other’ in relation to which European identity was construed. This idea of a civilizational fault-line was strongly held by political forces of a national-Christian ideological coloring.

This was already apparent in the position taken by the Democratic Forum, and might find resonance with Fidesz at a later stage. The latter party was vocal in demanding a reference in the Constitutional Treaty to Europe’s Christian roots, and it seems only a question of time that a connection with the accession of Turkey is made. Paradoxically, from this point of view, Turkey could be objectionable both as a secular country and as a religious one. On the first count, Turkish membership could reinforce a tendency of European identity slowly divorcing, or drifting away from, its cultural and religious roots, which conservatives do not welcome. On the latter, Turkey would fall prey to a history of conflict between Islam and Christianity (or Islam and Christian states) played out on the boundaries of Europe. However, the assumption that Fidesz, as (potentially) a future government party, would take part in EU policy formation had counteracted these ideological considerations and confined the party to a rather ambiguous stance.

For supporters, like Hungary’s Free Democrats – a consistently Europhile party - this issue was something to be seen from a European, rather than narrowly-defined Hungarian, perspective. For this strand of the debate, the EU was (or should be) an ‘open political and economic community that rests on common ideals and objectives, and not a closed club organized along cultural or religious roots’. With this vision the accession of Turkey was perfectly acceptable and in fact presented an opportunity for, and healthy pressure on, the EU to become more competitive economically and more assertive in global politics. In other words, the prospect of Turkish accession was seen as a stimulus for reforms that anyway needed to be undertaken. This camp also felt that the EU had a responsibility towards its less fortunate neighbors and needed to encourage internal processes pushing countries like Turkey towards prosperity and liberal democratic political systems. The same strategy was dictated by enlightened self-interest: the EU can only remain secure and prosperous if its neighborhood is stable and neighboring countries are given strong incentives to maintain friendly relations with Europe. This approach, however, left open the questions of where the boundaries of Europe lie and how far the EU could enlarge without losing its essential ‘Europeanness’ – both key to opponents of Turkey’s EU membership.

The crux of the matter for Turko-skeptics, like Voice for Europe, was that if Turkey joins, the EU may cease to be the entity to which they wish to belong. They feared that Turkey would bring too much cultural heterogeneity for the Union to absorb successfully without losing its cohesion and a sense of solidarity among its members, and therefore put an end to further, or reverse, integration itself. Principled or ideological opponents thus believed the Union must be saved from its own mistaken, or even suicidal, policy of ‘limitless’ further enlargement. As the Voice for Europe campaign claimed, if blown any further the EU balloon will explode. On these grounds, there was little room for compromise: the question was Turkey or Europe.

As for Hungary, there was little sign that the debate would intensify in the foreseeable future. European integration was seen as too abstract and too far removed from people’s everyday concerns to spark any real controversy involving the public. This was perhaps best seen in the relative ease, and corresponding lack of engagement with the issue by the public, with which the Constitutional Treaty was ratified in the country. The situation may change if one or both of the major parties decide to politicize the issue. This was more likely on the political right, if Fidesz strategists were to ‘package’ Turkey together with an anti-immigration card, combined with a religious antagonism along the lines of ‘Christianity (or more specifically, Catholicism) vs. Islam’. While ideologically this would fit with the party’s profile – as with that of the Democratic Forum – politicization in

this manner would need to be balanced with the party's need to remain accepted as a governing alternative. The Socialists may have had stronger incentives to remain silent on the issue, particularly as opinion within the party had not crystallized and internal divisions may emerge with time. On both the political left and right, and on the level of public opinion, considerations of a geopolitical and cultural nature may well prove to be the decisive influence on attitudes to further enlargement in the future.