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Will Europe Have Turkey?



As is well known, the European Union (EU) is expanding rapidly. Now comprised of 25 nations, this collective entity now exceeds America in almost every respect, with the notable exception of military might. Its economy is larger, its population greater, its finances healthier. Many countries want to join the club. Eight more entrants are in varying stages in the queue to join and others are likely to follow. While many Anglo-Saxon observers continue to mock the “European experiment” and have predicted that it would fail from the beginning, progress has continued. Of course, setbacks must be expected from time to time. But so far, new entrants to the EU are content. For example, a recent poll showed that more than three-quarters of the citizens of Poland — a recent new member — is happy with EU membership.

But what is next for Europe? The outer reaches of its region now about Russia on the eastern front — there only Belarus and Ukraine remain non-members — and Islamic-dominated states on the south and south-eastern fronts. Further European expansion on either front will be of great significance. But developments on the southern front will be most interesting. Here lies the historically significant region that today is straddled by the Republic of Turkey. This stub of the great Ottoman Empire, after long effort, has finally

won terms to begin the official accession process to becoming part of the EU.

Christians, who get excited as they witness God being faithful to His Word, are certainly sitting up and taking notice, pondering the significance of events involving Turkey. Seeing prophecy fulfilled, as unlikely and unpredictable as it may once have seemed, is not only fascinating, but also a confirmation of God's Word. Who would have believed only a century ago that Israel would once again become a sovereign country

of the Jews? Yet, just as Scripture said would happen, a reconstituted Israel again exists. A similar incredulity may apply with respect to events concerning Turkey. Who would ever have believed a century ago that the region of Turkey today would be standing at Europe's door? The last time the Turks were at Europe's entrance was under completely different circumstances. The armies of Suleyman the Magnificent and later Ottoman rulers nearly captured Vienna in the 16th and 17th centuries. What



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would have happened to Christian Europe if they had succeeded?

The Importance of Turkey

Even though we cannot predict the exact course of events in the Middle East or Turkey, we can most certainly identify that a prophetically significant process is underway. At least two pointers direct us to that line of inquiry: Literal Bible prophecy and the seeming improbability of events. More often than not it is "improbability" that is a sign of God's workings as He is the God of the impossible (Genesis 18:14). Nothing is impossible with Him (Matthew 19:26).

Consider these "improbable" points about Turkey, both scriptural and anecdotal. Are they all circumstantial?

1. The Dispensational Church. All seven of the churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 were located in modern-day Turkey. Why didn't the Lord provide words of admonition to the churches in Rome, Alexandria or others outside of this region that already existed late in the first century? There are a number of possible reasons. But, surely this fact also raises the significance of this region to God's plan for the Church, both for the beginning

and end periods of this dispensational "times of the Gentiles." From this perspective alone we can conclude that developments in Turkey today are worth watching.

2. The Unlikely Rise of Secularism. Of all of the regions and nations that were once a part of the Islamic Ottoman Empire, why was it Turkey that witnessed the rise of Mustafa Kemal early in the 20th century? Later popularly called Ataturk, he was a unique person of history. Was he just a random accident of history? Following World War I, as the Turkish Ottoman Empire was being parceled out to the victors, amazingly, he organized a successful resistance that led to the establishment of an independent state, the modern-day Republic of Turkey. An unlikely turn of events as that was, even more significant were the political measures that Ataturk pursued. Crucially, he chose to make it a secular country, separating religion from the state. He immediately began efforts to align with Europe, even promoting European clothes and banning the public from wearing Muslim religious attire.

Consider the degree of change he brought long ago beginning

the preparations for such a time as this. For example, in 1925, law banned the activities of religious sects and the Western calendar was adopted. Later, the Roman alphabet, surnames, the metric system, international numerics and women's rights were introduced. These are no small changes to be forced upon a society. Of all of the independent countries that came out of the final Ottoman region — Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Syria and others — it was only Turkey that adopted secularism and democracy. History will provide the exact answers to our questions someday. But, it will not have involved simple chance.

3. Strategic Geography. The location of Turkey is most strategically significant, and always has been. A look at its location on the map makes this clear. Turkey's landmass, historically known as Anatolia or the "sunrise" to the East, is the land bridge between Europe and Asia. Formerly, all East-West, land-based trade routes had to wind their way through this region. On the north lies the Black Sea, on the south the Mediterranean. It is not without reason that Turkey calls itself the "Crossroad



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of Civilization” (See the Turkish embassy's website in the United States.) It is the land-bridge between Europe and Asia, the link between the East and West regions of the Roman Empire, and the capital of the Eastern orthodox branch of early Christianity, which was centered in Constantinople (now called Istanbul). Even today, this region is significant from a trade perspective, its landmass being criss-crossed with oil pipelines transshipping Caspian and Middle East oil — a strategic factor certainly not overlooked by an oil-poor Europe.

4. Ebb and Flow. In Turkey are found the sources of two significant rivers in the Bible, the Euphrates and Tigris. These are the two rivers that bounded the cradle of civilization, Mesopotamia. One of these, the Euphrates, figures prominently in Bible prophecy that yet lies in the future and is specifically mentioned twice in Revelation (Revelation 9:14 and 16:12). The latter reference reads: “The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East.” While the interpretation of this verse is debated, those who take a literal perspective of the water being “dried up” will note modern-day developments along

the course of this river. In recent years, Turkey (from which 98 percent of the Euphrates water originates) has been planning its enormous Southeastern Anatolia Development Project, comprising potentially 22 more dams and 19 hydro-electric plants. The usage rights of the river have generated much conflict, mainly for the countries of Turkey, Syria and Iraq.

5. Muslims in Europe. While Europe has been gradually warming up to Turkey's accession from without, it has also been gradually acclimatized from within. Islam is the fastest growing religion in Europe. Muslims also represent the fastest growing population group. Approximately 12 million Muslims now live in Europe, representing significant minorities in France, Germany, Britain and Italy. For instance, many of the *Gastarbeiters* (meaning guest workers in German) invited from Turkey to work in Germany when labor supply was short in the 1960s and early 1970s have since chosen to remain. France has the largest number of Muslim citizens — around 4 million. Britain is even considering the formation of Shari'a courts to appease its teeming Muslim population who are much more religious than the diminishing church-going Chris-

tians. The significance of these developments is that Muslims as a group are vocal while at the same time do not generally integrate well into existing European societies, tending to remain separate.

At the current growth rate of Turkey's population, it will overtake Germany as the largest in population size by the time it joins the EU 15 years from now.

6. Re-Religion to Islam. While Turkey is officially a secular country, it is nonetheless peopled and ruled by a Muslim majority. Its current president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is an accomplished politician. He is the head of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) which was formed from earlier banned Islamist parties. While these factions once openly promoted the idea of an Islamic state, under the AKP this movement changed its posture as of the mid-1990s, downplaying its religious connections. Mr. Erdogan, who once wore a beard, today appears as any Western politician or executive — clean-shaven and attired in a sharp suit. Nevertheless, he is a devout Muslim, clearly documented to having expressed Islamist beliefs in the past. His wife continues to cover her head in Islamic tradition, and therefore cannot even attend state



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functions. The same orthodoxy applies to Ali Babacan (and his wife), a close friend of Erdogan. Also an able politician (an English-speaker, he is the current Minister of the Economy) he very likely will be appointed to the position of chief negotiator with the EU in the near future.

Though Turkey's leaders may be successfully portraying themselves as secular, the truth is that they are devout Islamists. Is it reasonable to believe that their true colors will one day be revealed? Even now, domestic dynamics seem to be heading back to the "re-religion" of Turkey — the return to the historical moral roots of devout Islam.

Surely all of the above-mentioned notable facts, though far from complete, are not entirely circumstantial or insignificant.

Europe and America Rivals Over Turkey

Turkey's potential membership, viewed strictly from an economic perspective, has strong attractions for Europe. While some commentators of the rich EU countries may turn up their noses at Turkey's low-income status, this country actually holds a strategic economic opportunity.

To see this, it must first be recognized that the EU and America are engaged in a calculated economic contest. The EU, whether

openly stated or not, has been striving to organize a counterweight to America's world supremacy. These motivations have been at the root of Europe's re-emergence right from the close of World War II. Today, this rivalry has emerged more clearly for all to see. But in our day of globalization and worldwide Mammonism, this competitive engagement is now mainly economic and financial, not militarily as many may still think. In this regard, both the EU and America have their strategies. Though very different, both sets of tactics lead to dangerous outcomes for an endtime world.

For its part, the US in recent decades has relied upon monetary tricks, debt-based finance and the creation of fictitious wealth to project its influence upon the world. While these tactics are not sustainable strategies by any means, they have nonetheless been very effective over the near-term. The deceptive spirits behind Wall Street and Madison Avenue, after all, runs America. This nation, the one-time evangelist of the true gospel to the world (and still largest Christian-professing nation) may have been mortally compromised by the tantalizing golden goblet filled with false apparitions of wealth and promises of easy living. Europe, on the other hand, has no interests in such short-term strategies and

fleeting falsehoods. They instead pursue long-term measures. While their game plan may seem plodding and low-key, it is very effective under the cover of time. Its rulers and leading strategists take little delight in openly trumpeting their strengths or supremacies. In the meantime, they are playing the lethal game of the Fabians — the strategy of the turtle versus the hare.

The European turtle, openly ridiculed and mocked (still today by many Anglo-Saxon politicians despite Europe's obvious but unlikely success) as already mentioned, is now 25-countries strong and at the very door of the Middle-East — the gates of the old Muslim Ottoman Empire ... the borders of the old eastern Christian capital of Byzantium ... the very region that could provide a gateway to re-emerging Babylon ... the area that may include that geographic portion of historic Rome out of which the final world ruler arises. Time will tell. And, of course, many of these questions are more significant for the Jews in their time of "Jacob's trouble" than for Christians.

In conclusion, while America attempts to stride the world in the name of God and "freedom," it is compromised by the false gods of materialism, sexual immorality and the love of money. Organizational Europe, on the other hand, makes no pretense

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of any faith in God, even choosing to specifically omit any mention of Christianity or God in its newly proposed Constitution. Yet, it has steadily labored to erect a new empire under the emblems of the Madonna and 13 stars.

Succulent Turkey on the Bargaining Table

Seen from an economic perspective, Turkey is a delectable morsel. Let me put on my economist's hat for a moment and explain why. Turkey has a population of 71 million people versus the 453 million of the current 25-nation EU. The population of the EU will jump by some 15 percent once Turkey joins. This will be a good economic stimulant for Europe ... a strategic plus against America.

A major problem for Europe economically is that it has very low population growth. In fact, many of its countries — Germany and Italy, for example — have negative population growth and a fast-aging society. That means that Europe's economy will appear to be slower growing than other countries and regions where populations are growing faster. Actually, this is one of the main reasons it appears that America has a stronger, more dy-

namic economy than that of Europe. America, with its faster-growing ethnic societies, has an annual population growth of 0.9 percent versus 0.3 percent for the EU overall.

Of course, differences in population growth indicate little about actual economic dynamism — though many may be confused on this point. For example, Europe as a whole has enjoyed higher economic growth and productivity than America when viewed over the past few decades on a per-capita basis. Whatever the case, this “optical” problem of slow economic growth can be solved in two ways: Either by promoting immigration; or as the case in Europe, by expanding its borders to include populous countries that have much lower income levels (per person). As these countries join the same monetary bloc of the euro-zone, they are spurred to hyper-growth as they catch up with the rest of Europe in terms of economic productivity and levels of financial intensity. While that process may take many decades, it will be very effective in boosting the overall growth, and apparent economic dynamism of Europe.

And indeed this is and will be happening in Europe over the next few decades. Turkey

will give this strategy a big boost given the size of its population and low-income levels. By conventional economic accounting, Turkey is the 23rd largest economy in the world with an economic output per person of only 29 percent of the average of Europe. As Turkey's EU membership becomes ever more certain, this country will boom economically, strongly pulling up Europe's economic growth rate. Indeed, that would already be the case even now.

Seen in terms of the global economic battle, Europe's geographic expansion eastward is a much more durable and sustainable process than the one America has pursued — over-consumption driven by massive debt-growth and bubble wealth. And, if a guess may be ventured, the new Europe will likely eventually end up the victor in terms of clear, global economic and financial supremacy. This could occur much sooner than many might imagine. It also could take a few more decades.

Points to Ponder

Will Turkey be accepted into the European Union and could it be prophetically significant? Only the latter part of this question can be answered with any



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certainty. Yes, the region represented by Turkey today is prophetically significant. It already has been. What also can be said with certainty is that Turkey must eventually be a working part of the revived Roman Empire as it was a strategic part of the original. How and exactly when is open to question, though developments to date already provide confirmation of the broader direction. Yet, God’s plans are detailed and specific with perfect timing. After all, it is not as if Turkey has wanted to become part of Europe only recently. It had already applied for membership as early as 1963. Only now, some 40 years later, do we see further strides being taken in this direction.

Some European leaders are against Turkey joining the Christian Club, as Europe is sometimes called. However, few any longer consider Europe a region defined by its Christianity. Understandably, the Vatican’s Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has argued that there is no place for Turkey in Europe. The prevailing view is different. “There is no place in this argument for religious cant and bigotry” says the editor of one prominent publication, echoing the sentiment of other so-called enlightened commentators. Of course, “religion” in the

very sense that this word is meant in the previous quote, is indeed at the very root of Europe’s enticement into the Middle East regions.

Though the Turkey of today touches or borders upon the regions of the ancient Medes, Babylonia, Persia, Assyria and others, it doesn’t seem to be mentioned specifically in the Bible. Only some of the regions of antiquity that it may straddle today seem to be referenced in prophecy that has yet to occur.

“Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords: Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet: Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee” (Ezekiel 38:2–6).

Though expert opinion varies, Gomer and Togarmah probably

refer to regions within Turkey today, Assyria could be another of these ancient regions that has yet to play a prophesied role (See Micah 5). Turkey today includes a small part of the original area of Assyria.

Will Turkey become part of the new Europe today? Most probably “yes.” Developments have moved so far that if Europe decides to refuse, the damage to its international relations in the Middle East will be irreparable. The EU’s own Muslim citizens will rise up. And Turkey is more pro-European than it is pro-American. We must remember that a crucial competition is underway. Europe, true to its method, is playing for keeps, not distracted by greed, not living for the moment but in the stealthful objectives that clearly have an endtime finale in sight. (MC)

ENDNOTES

- 1 At the height of the Ottoman Empire, after defeating the Kingdom of Hungary at the Battle of Mohacs in 1526, Suleyman the Magnificent advanced upon Vienna. This began a long period of struggle with Europe until the final defeat of the Turks in 1683 at the last siege of Vienna.
- 2 CIA database estimate for 2004 of \$458 billion US.
- 3 *Financial Times*, editor comment. “Decision on Turkey looms for Europe,” July 12, 2004.