

Book Review

Senem Aydin-Duzgit and Nathalie Tocci, 'Turkey and the European Union' (Palgrave Macmillan, London 2016), ISBN: 978-1-137-38730-1 (pbk), GBP29.99, xiv+242pp

Turkey was one of the first countries to knock on the door of, what was then, the EEC in 1959 and they have been bound ever since, as this book rightly states, by a 'curious love affair' (pg1). For whilst Turkey has had a formal accession agreement with Brussels since 1963, it remains just a candidate. This laudable volume, by Senem Aydin-Duzgit and Nathalie Tocci, is a masterful addition to the literature in this field which uses an ingenious approach to help us understand the Gordian knot of history, economics, security, democracy and human rights, culture and identity which make up the Turkey-EU relationship.

Firstly, the authors view Turkey and the EU through three 'analytical lenses': Turkey as an enlargement candidate, a neighbour and a global actor. They argue that the view of Turkey as an enlargement candidate raises different issues than if it is 'just' a neighbour or a world actor. Secondly they break the book down thematically and consider the view through all three of these analytical lenses of the Gordian knot outlined above. This gives a thorough overview for any budding student of Turkey-EU relations and would also appeal to practitioners and academics in the field. It illuminates why Turkey's path to Brussels has been so 'tortuous' (Pg 24) and why, even though Turkey may have been one of the first in the queue for Brussels, it has been spectacularly leapfrogged by several waves of enlargement since.

The first chapter looks at the history of the Turkey-EU relationship from Ankara's application for associate membership in 1959 to the present. The relationship has gone through both vicious, and virtuous, cycles depending on the wider interests of those involved as Turkish accession has always been driven by its geostrategic value. In other words, it is only an accession state at all because of its high security value to Europe since the end of World War Two and it has tended to make progress at times when its geostrategic value was highest.

After looking in detail at Turkey in each of the three analytical lenses the book concentrates very effectively on the themes of the Gordian knot. We learn that economics has 'been crucial in shaping the course and content of Turkey-EU relations' (Pg 91). Whilst the Turkish economy and the relatively low level of its GDP compared to European countries was a cause for concern for several decades Turkey has made great economic leaps forward since the IMF intervention in 2001. It is ironic perhaps that Europeanisation (or more specifically EU-isation) 'inspired' this reform first through the 1995 Customs Union and then the accession process itself. Moreover, whilst the Turkish economy may have structural weaknesses it has turned the economic tables on many of its EU member state neighbours and '...it is irrefutable that Turkey represents a European economic success story watched with keen interest in the rest of Europe particularly as the Eurozone struggles

to exit the economic crisis.’ (pg 113). Turkey now has an economy Greece and Cyprus can only dream of.

The book also skilfully explains the decisive role security in all its forms has played and takes the reader through the changing nature of Ankara’s geopolitical value. Whilst this originally lay in its role within NATO, Turkey’s security value now lies in its location as a transit route for energy and people as much as geostrategy. Aydin-Duzgit and Tocci outline that, after a slight wobble at the end of the Cold War, Turkey has re-established itself as a vital geostrategic ally of the EU and the Common Security and Defence Policy. Moreover, as the EU has become a strategic actor in its own right, with the development of the External Action Service, all of these security concerns have become enmeshed in the accession process. The need to tackle the migration issue, and to deal with the consequences of the Syrian Civil War, take centre stage in Brussels – and the need to keep Turkey ‘onside’ – is ever apparent.

The book also deals admirably and skilfully with the roles of cultural (ie: religious) identity and democracy and human rights with the Turkey-EU relationship. Both have been the cause of much opposition to the Turkish case for accession over the years. Debates over the nature of ‘Europe’ and the Turkey’s Islamic heritage have clashed both within Turkey and between Turkey and the EU. Moreover, both Ankara and Brussels know that Turkey has only ever made progress when it also began to meet the Copenhagen criteria. They also know that Turkey’s more recent move away from *liberal* democracy will make it hard for it to accede without a radical change in European identity – or catastrophic geostrategic need.

In terms of democracy and human rights the book has underplayed the recent authoritarian drift in Turkish society. It refers only in passing to the decline in liberality as seen in the *Ergenekon* and *Balyoz* investigations (pg 164) and fleetingly to the dubious role of the Gulen movement within them. It concludes that civil military relations have ‘improved’ (pg 165) in the sense the military is less influential but does not explore the implications of the illiberal way in which this was done. Another limitation is that inevitably the book has been overtaken by time. It was written before the eruption of the migration ‘issue’ in 2015 – and before the re-ignition of hostilities between the government and the Kurdish separatist movement, the PKK, after the first 2015 general election in June. Whilst no book can ever be completely up to date these events have changed the Turkey-EU landscape considerably.

Ultimately the book offers three scenarios going forward: estrangement, a half-way house framework and full membership. The authors advocate the latter option as this would enable Turkey to ‘complete its transition to a mature liberal democracy, including the resolution of the Kurdish question....’ Whilst I agree with this sentiment it increasingly looks like wishful thinking in the light of recent events. However, having said that, the value of this volume is that it lays a nuanced and detailed groundwork for readers to make their own mind up about the numerous paths which the Turkey-EU relationship could take from now on – and the variables which will affect it.

Dr Natalie Martin, Lecturer in Politics and International Relations,
Nottingham Trent University, UK.

25th March 2016