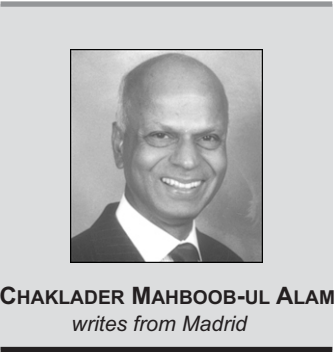


# Turkey, the EU, and an alliance between civilisations



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM  
writes from Madrid

ON October 6, 2004, the European Commission, the executive organ of the 25-member EU, made a momentous decision on Turkey's application to join the EU. After 45 years of procrastination, it finally recommended that Turkey should be allowed to start accession talks. In any case, in the words of Romano Prodi, the outgoing president of the European Commission, it was "a qualified yes." That Turkey will have to meet very high standards before it is admitted to membership was confirmed by what Prodi said immediately afterwards: "The path to tread is still a long one."

Although this recommendation will still have to be approved unanimously by the leaders of the EU in a summit meeting on December 17, it is highly unlikely that any of them will challenge it. According to experts, these accession talks may easily last between ten and fifteen years. In its recommendation, the European Commission also made it clear in writing that the EU negotiators may suspend or stop these talks at any time if they are not satisfied with the progress of the negotiations.

While in the past, in a couple of cases the EU negotiators had to resort to such threats in the middle of the negotiating process, this is the first time, the EU has laid down this special condition in advance. In many countries of Europe, specially

in France, Germany, Holland, and Austria, there have been pronouncements and demonstrations against Turkey's proposed entry to the EU.

One of the EU commissioners called Frits Bolkestien from the Netherlands warned of the "Islamisation" of Europe. Helmut Schmidt of Germany and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing of France have spoken out against it. President Chirac, although personally in favour of Turkey's entry, is thinking of holding a referendum on this issue. Germany's CDU and CHU are against Turkey's entry in the EU. Instead, they have recommended a "special associate status" for Turkey.

Turkey's journey towards full membership of the EU has indeed been a very slow, painful, and frustrating one. It started in 1959, when Turkey filed its application to sign the European association agreement as the first step to become a full member. Four years later, in 1963, it signed the agreement with the European Community, which at that time had only the six original members, Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. While the Community kept on expanding, Turkey was kept at bay.

Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom joined in 1973, Greece in 1981, and Portugal and Spain in 1986. By the way, Ireland was not required to loosen its marriage, contraception, and abortion laws before entry, and few, if any, ruminated darkly about the imminent "Catholicisation" of the EU when Spain and Portugal joined. After all, Europe's Catholics and Protestants had killed each other and devastated the continent for more than a century. By then, the Community had become a twelve-member club. Turkey's application to be formally considered as a candidate was not

accepted until 1987.

But in 1989, the European Commission rejected the application, stating that Turkey was not fit to be considered as a candidate. Turkey kept insisting. Meanwhile in 1995, Austria, Finland, and Sweden joined the EU, making it a 15-member bloc. Finally in 1999, the EU formally accepted Turkey as a candidate.

In 2000, the Treaty of Nice provided for the extension of EU membership to 12 East European (former enemies of the West Europeans) and Mediterranean

consider Turkey's application to become a member and kept it hanging outside the club door. Why?

Instead of beating about the bush, if one wants to give a straight answer to this question, then I am afraid, the answer is: Europe's hypocrisy and double standards. The first excuse that is put forward is that Turkey does not really belong to Europe. Turkey has been a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation since 1952 (even a few years before the European Economic Community itself was

by 2030 will become the most populous member of the club. It is anathema to them to think that a country with a different cultural and religious background may have the largest representation in Brussels and thus control the decision-making process. This fear is borne out by the fact that no protests were heard in 1990 when East Germany joined the EU as part of reunified Germany, thus converting Germany into the most populous country of the Union with maximum representation. In my opinion, this fear has no logical foundation either. Under the

Many Euro-sceptics are also afraid of possible Turkish immigration -- that the Turks would take Europe's scarce jobs. Already there are three million Turks living in EU. Given Turkey's huge population and poor economic condition, many fear that if Turkey is allowed in, massive immigration will take place causing serious economic and social problems in the host countries. This is a natural fear. The same fear was expressed when Spain and Portugal applied for membership. But after their admission, nothing akin to a massive

Kurdish minority has contributed to this image. But over the last two years, Turkey has made sweeping legal reforms and enormous progress in the fields of human rights, women's rights, and freedom of expression, to bring them in line with EU standards, although in some cases actual implementation of the new rules will take some time.

Many prisoners have been released, systematic torture under police custody has been banned. The judicial system has undergone major reforms and the death penalty has been abolished. And the government is working on a project to accommodate the legitimate aspirations of the Kurdish minority. The use of Kurdish language is no longer prohibited in schools, and on radio and television. The special position occupied by the army as the ultimate guardian of Turkey's secularism is indeed a serious obstacle on its path to eventual entry, but considerable progress has already been made in this field. A law has recently been passed by the government to bring the army under civilian control although, in practice, it seems it is still not subordinate to the Grand National Assembly.

Finally, religion and culture are the most important reasons why many Europeans are against Turkey's membership in the EU. Although the constitution of the EU provides for religious freedom, most Europeans (of course with notable exceptions) and some American intellectuals consider the EU as a Christian club and not as a "community of values" as the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan would like it to be. Prof. Bernard Lewis of Princeton University, a neo-con intellectual has gone so far as to predict that at the end of the 21st century, "Europe will be a part of the Arab West or Maghreb."

On this issue, I tend to agree with Josep Borrell, the current president of the European parliament when he

says: "Our religions may be different but the values are the same." As far as culture is concerned, is European (Christian) culture that different? Can anyone from Greece, Cyprus, Malta, southern Italy, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, former Yugoslavia, etc. sincerely state that his country's present culture has not been influenced by Islamic culture? It would be equally preposterous to think that the current Muslim culture across the world has not been influenced by the Western Christian culture. Instead of insisting on differences -- some real and some imaginary -- the EU should be "an address where civilisations harmonise" as the Turkish Prime Minister wants it to be.

There are big geo-strategic and security reasons to welcome Turkey into the fold. In the words of Joschka Fischer, the German Foreign minister: "To close the door now, at this moment of tension between Islam and the West, would be a disaster."

Europe has to reassure an alienated Islamic world that it is not in agreement with Bush's so-called war on terrorism, which has so far been directed against the Muslims. The EU, which was born to eliminate the disastrous Franco-German rivalry, to confront the totalitarian Soviet empire, to bring uniform economic progress to the continent, and to give new meaning to the term civilisation, by allowing Turkey within its fold, will contribute positively to the current Spanish Prime Minister Rodriguez Zapatero's idea of "an alliance between civilisations" and go a long way to prove that the "clash of civilisations" theory is doomed to failure.

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LETTER FROM EUROPE

The EU, which was born to eliminate the disastrous Franco-German rivalry, to confront the totalitarian Soviet empire, to bring uniform economic progress to the continent, and to give new meaning to the term civilisation, by allowing Turkey within its fold, will contribute positively to the current Spanish Prime Minister Rodriguez Zapatero's idea of "an alliance between civilisations" and go a long way to prove that the "clash of civilisations" theory is doomed to failure.

countries by 2007 -- Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Malta, Cyprus (only the Greek part), and Slovakia by 2004, and Romania and Bulgaria by 2007. In 2005, Croatia will start negotiations for EU membership.

In December 2002, the leaders of the Union agreed to open formal negotiations with Turkey in December 2004, provided Turkey made the necessary legal, fiscal, and economic reforms recommended by the EU. A quick look at the map of Europe will show that during the last fifty years or so, the original 6-member European Community has expanded to the west, north, east, and even to the south (Malta and Cyprus) to become a huge economic bloc and a potentially powerful political entity. But it has so far rejected even to

founded), militarily defending the eastern flank of Europe against the Soviet Union, and it has also been a member of the Council of Europe since its inception. No one then bothered to mention that Turkey was not European. Again, geographically, if Turkey is not considered European, how have Cyprus and Malta been accepted as members of the European Union? I agree with President Vaclav Klaus of the Czech Republic when he says: "It is arrogant to think that any one country or a group of countries owns the proprietorship of a trademark called Europe."

The fact that Turkey is big is often held against it. Turkey is indeed a huge country of approximately 780,000 square kilometres where 71 million people live. The conservative Europeans fear that given its high birth rate, Turkey, if allowed in,

double majority voting system proposed in the new constitution, Turkey alone will be unable to influence the decision-making process in a club with close to 30 members.

The next excuse is that it is a poor agricultural country and will need large transfers from the EU for its development. While this is true that Turkey at present is a poor country, the way its economy is growing (average GDP growth of over 8 percent), with further foreign investment from abroad and help from the EU, it may soon become a showcase success story for the EU. When Ireland became a member in 1973, no one could imagine the progress it would make in the next 30 years. Poland's large and backward agricultural economy has not been a hindrance to its joining the EU.

emigration took place. In fact, in the case of Spain, there was a reverse immigration. As the Spanish economy prospered, many Spaniards, who had migrated to other parts of Europe started coming back. In any case free movement of labour can be introduced on a gradual basis as happened in the case of Spain (seven years' transition period was allowed). On the other hand, if one can examine the immigration issue in a dispassionate manner, Turkey's mostly young population may prove to be a boon to Europe's economic growth. After all, everybody knows that Europe's ageing population is a hindrance to sustained economic growth.

It is also said that Turkey is not a democracy in the strict sense of the term. There is some truth in this. The deplorable way successive Turkish governments have treated the

# The curse of 'development'

NAZRUL ISLAM

JUST one and a half weeks back, I saw a huge green paddy field with luxuriant growth on both sides of the Bogra-Rangpur highway. The farmers were expecting a bumper harvest this year within a month or two. But their hopes were severely dashed following the heavy downpour that damaged their crops due to water-logging, thanks to the unplanned construction of roads and embankments. From Mohasthanagar of Bogra to Peergachha of Rangpur, a vast tract of *aman* paddy and winter vegetables was totally damaged due to the water-logging.

In fact, the heavy downpour in the third week of September and the first week of the current month caused extensive crop damage at various parts of the country. However, the extent of damage and agony of the cultivators hardly drew the attention of either the media or the policy-makers.

The damage wrought due to water-logging triggered by torrential rains, although many may differ, is not less than the damage inflicted by

the deluge in the month of July. In a true sense, in July, there were less standing crops in the field, and those that were lost were recouped through replanting or re-sowing soon after recession of the flood-waters. But the heavy precipitation in September and October damaged standing crops, especially *aman* paddy, at a stage when it is not possible to repair the damage.

Newspaper reports say some 8 lakh hectares of *aman* paddy of Meghna-Dhanagoda project in Chandpur went underwater due to water-logging as there is no provision for letting out water from the enclosure of the embankment. Such damage was also wrought in other parts of the country.

A crop is preciously to a farmer not only for its economic value. A crop to a farmer is considered beyond economic significance. The price of 50 mounds of paddy might be Tk 15,000, but damage to 50 mounds of paddy to a middle-range farmer is equivalent to the end of the food source for the next 6 months.

There is no way to recover this loss. He would have either to sell his drought cow or mortgage land to a

moneylender to maintain his family. He will be caught in the vicious cycle of borrowing. Being caught in the cycle, he will have to finally join the ranks of landless farmers.

The middle class and marginal farmers are the most vulnerable

food for work programmes. But the middle class farmers can neither seek relief nor do work in such programmes so far as they have some land. This is a serious dilemma for the middle class.

Who is responsible for the dam-

mainly were: (1) rainwater adjacent to the rivers rolled quickly down to the water bodies, keeping the crop field unaffected, (2) rainwater trapped within the unplanned roads and embankments created water-logging, damaging crops, and

discharge their duty properly?

Our politicians, public representatives, bureaucrats, even educated engineers think construction of roads and concrete structures is the sign of development. They are also interested in construction activities

The rivers, beel, haors, and other floodplains in our country have been built over hundreds of years and they have taken almost permanent shape through various changes during this long period. But our development architects want to change these structures overnight through various means, taking them as slaves of human beings. But nature is not a slave. It is our master.

section of our society. They become the first casualties of any disaster. They cannot beg anything from others.

After every disaster, the government and other voluntary organisations come up with helping hands. Such assistance never goes to the middle class or marginal farmers. The assistance provided by the government or other organisations goes to the landless, distressed people. The day-labourers also sometimes get opportunity to earn more through various projects like

age of the paddy that is supposed to fill-up the granary of the farmers within a few days? Rain is a normal phenomenon in this country, but who closed the ways for fast draining out of rainwater?

During my recent visits to some parts of Tangail and northern districts, I noticed that the heavy downpour did not affect areas adjacent to rivers having considerable navigability. On the contrary, areas generally remaining above flood level were badly damaged due to water-logging. The reasons that I found

(3) the roads constructed have no outlet at all or inadequate outlets for draining out of water.

The affected farmers also blamed unplanned roads and embankments for water-logging. The villagers definitely want roads, but they never want those in lieu of their crops. They do not know the engineering mechanism of water drainage. The people who were behind the planning and construction of the roads are trained and employed with the tax money of the people to protect their interests. Did they

for reasons known to everybody. Sometimes, personal interest gets priority over public or national interest. During the last few decades, numerous roads and embankments were constructed connecting villages and upazilas or district towns. According to data from 1997, the total length of road in the country is over 2 lakh kilometres. Of this, 19,112 km is paved and 182,070 km is unpaved. On the other hand, the total length of flood control embankments are around 6,000 kilometres. None of the roads

or embankments have adequate water passageway from the enclosures. As a result, heavy rains time and again cause water-logging, damaging standing crops.

It might be thought that these roads and embankments have made rural life easy and prosperous through increasing economic activity. But in reality, such "cosmetic development" has little or no impact on the improvement of the living standard of the common people. Rather, the unplanned and haphazard construction of roads and embankments consumed huge quantity of arable lands, affecting small and marginal farmers.

Roads are necessary for smooth communication and transportation. But we should also look into the fact of whether such construction creates any hindrance to the smooth passage of water. Water bodies like beels, haors, baors, which once acted as water reservoirs have dried up mainly due to the unplanned construction of roads and embankments. Besides, the rivers and canals were also drastically silted up, losing their water discharging capacity. Construction is welcome,

but environmental issues should be kept in mind before implementing any project. Mindless construction in the name of development will only cause harm instead of benefit.

The crop loss due to water-logging is not a new problem. It's a recurrent problem. But nothing has been done to redress that. Rather, we are witnessing mindless so-called development programmes, ignoring the environmental impact.

The rivers, beel, haors, and other floodplains in our country have been built over hundreds of years and they have taken almost permanent shape through various changes during this long period. But our development architects want to change these structures overnight through various means, taking them as slaves of human beings. But nature is not a slave. It is our master. If we enrage nature, it will not spare us. Please consider the dynamics of nature while implementing any development project, small or big.

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## UNITED NATIONS DAY

# Let it be a day of reckoning

A M M SHAHABUDDIN

WHEN the UN celebrates its 59th birth anniversary today, the painful question must be haunting the minds of peace-loving people around the globe: What was the purpose that inspired its founding fathers to make common cause for the establishment of the world body, and has the UN been able to complete its mission, or is it going off on the wrong track?

The founding fathers of the UN must be turning in their graves to see the current pathetic condition of their hand-made ideal of world peace and security. Frankly speaking, the world body today stands there in that glass-house in Manhattan, recklessly violated, right and left, making it a laughing stock before the world.

Therefore, it wouldn't be proper just to observe the official UN Day with great pomp and show, with flowers and bouquets, making high-sounding speeches, adopting goody-goody resolutions, and holding nice holiday parties. Rather, this day should be treated as a Day of Reckoning, a day for making amends, a day of atonement, a day of stock-taking and heart-searching. Are we really serious about having a world-body, worthy of its name?

If so, let us make a new move to bring about radical changes in the political infrastructure of the UN to make it more suitable and workable for the 21st century.

## Cold war period: blessing in disguise?

It can't be denied that the UN, during its six decades of existence, has made tremendous progress and notable achievements, both in the economic and political fields, particularly during the 50s, 60s and 70s, which also covers the cold war period and the emergence of about one hundred countries from their centuries-old colonial rule, now making the majority of today's 190 members of the world organisation. But, unfortunately the rising star of the UN started getting eclipsed following the demise of the Soviet Union, leaving the sole superpower on Earth to have a field day. Whether the cold war period, maintaining a balance between the two of power-blocs, was good or bad is for the historians and posterity to judge, but the fact remains that it was a blessing in disguise for world peace and security.

The bloody events in Afghanistan and Iraq are glaring examples of what a particular superpower has done to the UN. The war on terror has created more problems than it can now solve. The sole superpower has created a monster with its much hyped war on terrorism, which is now serving as a double-edged sword. Bush is now up to his neck in the hot-soup of his own making as a result of his political follies in Iraq. But it makes little difference to Bush as well as his close associates like Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld as long as

Iraqi oil flow continues undisturbed to fill their coffers. But who can put a hurdle in the destructive path of such devotees of jungle rule? Perhaps only a strong and renovated UN can do that. And that is why Kofi Annan is moving that way.

and the hard challenges lying ahead for the world organisation. Further elaborating his point, Mr. Annan mentioned "the events of the past year (2003) have exposed deep divisions among members of the United Nations on fundamental

Whatever may be the recommendations of the reforms panel, the questions of expansion of the Security Council -- doubling its present five permanent members, giving all council members, permanent and non-permanent, equal powers by demolishing the out-dated and much-vexed veto system -- should take centre-stage to stop any trigger-happy member state that goes against the UN Charter in its unilateral adventurism.

## Kofi Annan's new move

It may be recalled here that Secretary-General Kofi Annan has made a decisive move to bring about a vital change in the UN to boldly tackle global problems, and thus to revitalise the almost moribund world organisation. In a newspaper article last December, he announced the launching of a 16-member reform panel, headed by former Thai Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, to review the role of the world body in the light of the recent global divisions. The other members of the panel included former Russian Prime Minister Primakov, Arab League Secretary-General Amr Musa, former Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, and National Security Adviser to former US President George Bush Sr. Brent Scowcroft.

In his article, Mr. Annan wrote that the panel would "focus primarily on the threats to peace and security"

questions of policy and principle."

## US Iraq adventure: A fork in the UN road

Thus the new move made by Mr. Kofi Annan raised new hopes in the minds of the peace-loving people of the world, particularly because of the UN's utter failure in taking any action, as recommended by the UN Charter, against the naked aggression committed by the US-led forces against another UN member state, Iraq.

However, it must be admitted that some of the Security Council members, both permanent and non-permanent, namely, France, Russia, China, and Germany, created a stumbling block for the US and its ally the UK to push through a resolution authorising the attack on Iraq.

When America realised that the Security Council members would vote against the US-sponsored resolution, it decided to by-pass the

US-led war on Iraq, felt shy to recommend UN action against the aggression. There lies the rub.

## Annan blasts US-led war in Iraq

Kofi Annan, in his recent interview with BBC prior to his opening statement in the current 59th session of the UN General Assembly, boldly echoed the feelings of the peace-loving people of the world, when he blasted the US-led war against Iraq without UN authorisation as "illegal" and declared that it was "not in conformity" with the UN Charter, giving a broad hint that the UN needs vital reforms which can stop such breaches of international law and UN Charter.

In his speech in the current General Assembly session, Mr. Annan was more categorical, reiterating his earlier stand against Bush's Iraq policy, saying: "Those who invoke international law must

themselves submit to it." He also dropped repeated hints about Bush's unilateral decision to invade Iraq. He also criticised Bush's plan to deliver democracy to Iraq through force. But Bush had already indicated, both within and without the

which has been hanging fire before the Security Council because of difference of opinion. The best way out would be to abolish the much-abused veto-power of the permanent members and put them all at equal footing, both permanent and non-permanent members, thus making the decision-making organ of the UN more democratic.

Another issue that the reform body is to tackle is the question of developing a criteria as to when and how to evoke the relevant charter articles in the case of any aggression by a member country against another member country.

## New aspirants for PM

It is a good sign that four countries, two Asian, one European, and one Latin American, namely Japan, India, Germany, and Brazil, are already in the field to campaign for permanent membership in the much-expected expanded Security Council. For Germany and Japan, the two emerging politico-economic giants, perhaps it won't be too difficult to win their much-desired slots. As regards India, the world's largest democracy professing a secular state-policy would be a nice choice from the Asian region. But before going ahead, India would have to mend its fences with its big and small neighbours, particularly Bangladesh and Pakistan, to earn their friendship, of which bright signals are already there. As they say, "good fences make good neighbours." As regards Brazil,

although it was its own potential for getting such a status, it would be better to leave the question to the region it comes from.

## Conclusion

The above analysis leads us to the conclusion that whatever may be the recommendations of the reforms panel, the questions of expansion of the Security Council -- doubling its present five permanent members, giving all council members, permanent and non-permanent, equal powers by demolishing the out-dated and much-vexed veto system -- should take centre-stage to stop any trigger-happy member state that goes against the UN Charter in its unilateral adventurism.

The UN should also, come up with a clear-cut definition of a "terrorist" and a "freedom-fighter" and also lay out strong measures to restrain an over-smart bullying state from misusing the UN Charter provision on the right of self-defence, provided under Article 51 of the charter.

If UN fails in this basic task of maintaining peace and security in the world, then it is bound to lead to a global free-for-all and state-sponsored terrorism. That would be doomsday for the UN.

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