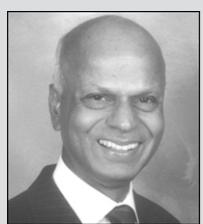


Turkey, the EU, and an alliance between civilisations



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 treat 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

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 Mohasthangarh 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

UNITED NATIONS DAY

Let it be a day of reckoning

AMM 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.

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 Bolkestein from the Netherlands warned of the "Islamisation" of Europe. Helmut Schmidt of Germany and Valery 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, rummaged 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

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

found, 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,

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 the 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 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 Rcep Erdogan would like it to be. Prof. Bernard Lewis of Princeton University, a neo-conservative, 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.

Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam is a regular columnist for The Daily Star.

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

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 investments 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.

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

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.

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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

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-voiced 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.

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

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

UN, that he would defend his war in Iraq and Afghanistan as part of a sweeping global campaign to fight the name of freedom!

The UN Secretary General deserves credit and appreciation for upholding the cause of the UN, particularly since the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Main issues before reform panel

The 16-member reform panel, which is expected to submit its recommendations to reform the UN to Mr. Annan by next December, has two main focal points before it. One is the expansion of the present 15-member Security Council, adding nine more members to it, of which five will be additional new permanent members. But the more decisive point will be whether the five new PMs will also enjoy the veto powers now being enjoyed by the current five. This is an old question

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 political-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