

Andrew Moravcsik - Turkish accession as part of a multi-level Europe?



In this short interview, Andrew Moravcsik argues that the enlargement of the European Union has been the great policy success story of post-Cold War Europe. He advises that the polemics over Turkey's potential EU membership move away from discussions on the concept of European identity or the direction of the European project towards more pragmatic considerations of the potential benefits to both parties.

Filippa Chatzistavrou: According to the liberal argument, “EU integration is motivated primarily by material national interests as perceived by government leaders”, rather than ideology or geopolitics. Turkey's progress towards accession has slowed down. Euroscepticism in Turkey puts in doubt “EU's power of attraction”, turcoscepticism within the EU raises issues of Turkish domestic politics, human rights, geopolitical security etc. On the one side, the EU-Turkey debate is dominated by culturalist or institutionalist arguments against Turkey's membership. On the other, the uniqueness of Turkey is stressed. Is Turkey an anti-example of the liberal argument or not? In this specific ideological context, described above, how much easy is to spread the philosophy of Europeanization requiring adaptation and accommodation in the potential member?

Andrew Moravcsik: My argument is that EU integration is motivated primarily by “issue-specific” national interests in managing globalization. It so happens that the EU has dealt over the years mostly with economic issues, and thus most (but not all) of these interests have been material. The European Union is about the management of globalization. The fact that nearly every country in Europe, from Sweden to Turkey—despite very different identities and political cultures—has sought EU membership is due to the common nature of the challenge of globalization.

Consider the countries that seek EU membership today, say in the Western Balkans. Many institutions could offer them a “European identity”—the Council of Europe, the OSCE, NATO—but the EU remains of preeminent importance due to its material benefits, which can be transformative—economically, socially, and politically. For Turkey, material links with Europe—the free trade area, immigration, and the prospect of membership—have already substantially changed its domestic politics. Of course, liberal theorists point out, the interdependence between Turkey and Europe is asymmetrical: Bilateral interdependence is more

significant for Turkey than for the EU. The result: Europe has less incentive to favour Turkish membership than Turkey has to be a member. European interest has waned—a very short-sighted policy, in my view—and, as a result. Turkish domestic support has receded. But I believe the Turkish position is largely reactive. Were Europeans to welcome Turkey, I am convinced the response would be different.

Filippa Chatzistavrou: The modernization of Turkey is associated with the prospect for EU membership, insinuating that the Western model is the only progressive model to which Turkey should aspire. Do you think that Turkey’s modernization should be the same as Turkey’s westernization?

Andrew Moravcsik: Some aspects of modernization are universal: basic rights and democracy, scientific knowledge and economic growth, a commitment to social welfare, education. But the precise form these things take need not be European, or American. It can be Chinese, Indian, or Turkish, or anything else. Modernization is universal—and compatible with all these cultures. This is an essential point in understanding the nature of the European Union—and “Western” multilateral organizations in general. Europe remains an association of nation-states and each remains the primary locus of the political identity for its citizens. The EU establishes loose cooperation on certain, largely economic matters (international trade, money, finance, regulation), while leaving about 80-90% of laws and regulations national. National issues include those most central to political identities: taxation, social welfare, pensions, health care, defence, cultural and language policy, education, local infrastructure, criminal law, human rights, religion, and such. We should never forget that the EU Constitution, had it been accepted, would have replaced the motto “ever closer union” with the motto “unity in diversity.” That motto best reflects what the EU really is. There is not, and never will be, a “European Superstate” that replaces the nation-state or its culture.

Filippa Chatzistavrou: According to your analysis, “the EU focuses primarily on managing socio-economic globalization, rather than regulating geopolitical security”. Are you confident that the EU, with a weak performance in resolving conflicts, will be capable of managing the inevitable geo-strategic implications of Turkey’s accession?

Andrew Moravcsik: Let’s keep in mind two facts. First, the European common foreign policy is pursued collectively in smaller matters, but through “coalitions of the willing” in matters of defence. Second, Turkish accession is unlikely to occur within the next decade, during which time issues like Cyprus may well be resolved. So it is a bit unclear what these ominous “inevitable geo-strategic implications” we need to worry about. Turkey has been a member of NATO for half a century without major problems arising; it is hard to see why EU membership should pose a problem.

Filippa Chatzistavrou: The EU faces difficulties in developing a solid concept of European identity. Do you think that these problematic manifestations of European identity play an

important role also in the shaping of Turkey's cultural identity towards Europe? In other words, would you agree that Turkish-EU relations amount less to a clash of civilizations than to a clash of conflicting definitions of Europe itself?

Andrew Moravcsik: I do not believe Turkish-EU relations are either a clash of civilizations or a clash of conflicting definitions of Europe. In regard to the latter: Only a small sliver of Europeans accept the EU—or have ever accepted the European project—because they believe in some deep “European identity”, in the sense of a federalist project, a United States of Europe that will replace the nation-state. Most accept it because they seek the pragmatic benefits of Europe—or they believe in a “European identity” in which, as I have noted above in response to your second question, the EU handles a series of economic issues, while policy-making concerning deep “identity” issues remain national. The sooner European rhetoric shifts to match this essentially pragmatic reality, the better.

Filippa Chatzistavrou: How can the Socialist political parties of the EU clarify their ambivalences towards Turkey in order to express a clear-cut supportive position based on the principles of political liberalism?

Andrew Moravcsik: This somewhat naïve question is one I am used to hearing from Americans. In my country, we pay no domestic political cost for telling European governments to do things that are costly for them. So our government has often sent over diplomats to “stiffen the backs” of European leaders in the matter of Turkish accession. This is almost always counterproductive. Those who propose that Europeans “clarify” their position need to face some uncomfortable facts: Regrettably, EU enlargement—not just to include Turkey, but to include any new countries—is quite unpopular. In some countries it has single-digit public opinion support. European leaders have been nothing short of heroic in pursuing enlargement anyway, as it is in the European interest and in the interest of applicant countries. Indeed, it is the great policy success story of post-Cold War Europe.

Turkish accession in some form may eventually occur because enlightened and farsighted leaders in the EU make it possible—probably as part of a multi-level Europe, which appears to be emerging anyway. The best way to encourage this development is not for outsiders to try to encourage European politicians to “clarify ambivalences” and seek to force “clear-cut positions.” This is no more productive than when foreigners seek to impose simplistic solutions in delicate matters of religion and politics in Turkey. Instead, we need to be realistic and let European politicians work these things out in the manner and in the time frame they judge prudent.

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