

TURKEY AND THE IDEA OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN EUROPE: THE INTERWAR EXPERIENCE, 1923-1939

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In the 1930s, the new Turkish state was gradually brought into the European fold through participation in two significant European Union projects of the time. The first was Coudenhove-Kalergi's project, the second one was Briand's. Coming from a cosmopolitan family of an Austrian father and a Japanese mother, Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi was born in a multi-national and multi-ethnic empire, Austria-Hungary. His ideas inspired influential political leaders of the time such as Aristide Briand who attempted to launch a European Union with the framework of the League of Nations. Moreover, Coudenhove-Kalergi's Pan-Europe, although left Turkey out initially, was subsequently revised to include it.

In fact, it was the weakness of the League of Nations that had already led Coudenhove-Kalergi to focus on the ideal of the United States of Europe in the early 1920s. His united Europe was defined politically rather than geographically or culturally. Geographically there was no European continent; there was only a European peninsula of the Eurasian continent. For him, Europe was a political concept which embraced all the non-Soviet states of continental Europe, including Iceland (united to Denmark by a personal union). What remained of European Turkey belonged politically to Asia. "To the political concept Europe, as distinguished from its geographical counterpart, I give the name: Pan-Europe,"¹ he said.

As for Briand, in 1927, French Foreign Minister became the honorary president of Coudenhove-Kalergi's Pan-Europe movement. Briand had been in the office since 1925 and retained the foreign affairs portfolio even after he became Prime Minister in 1929. Briand's interest in a European federation can be linked to a number of factors. First and foremost, as a realist, he was concerned about the French security. Like most of his compatriots he believed that French security could be jeopardized by German revival. He, therefore, was convinced that the French security interests would be served best if Germany could be linked to a European framework. In May 1930, Briand published a memorandum concerning his ideas on European Union.

Coudenhove-Kalergi, the idealist, was disappointed with Briand's memorandum for the following reasons: "It rejected a European customs union and scrupulously

¹ Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, **Pan-Europe** (NY: Alfred.A. Knopf, 1926), p. 31-32.

respected the sovereignty of all nations involved. It avoided intruding upon the authority of the League of Nations. It aimed at no European federation, but an effective League of Nations. It was a substitute, not the real thing.”² In fact, Briand deliberately refrained from using the term “European Federation”. He instead talked about a federal link between the European states.

Briand believed that the collaboration of three great powers, France, Britain, and Germany, was fundamental for the formation of a new order in Europe.³ In other words, Briand thought that the union would be based on the initiative and the agreement of great powers, whereas Coudenhove-Kalergi argued that European federation lay “in the interest of the whole civilized world in preventing the hegemony of one European nation over all others.”⁴ He assumed that hegemony would not exist in a unified Europe.

When Coudenhove-Kalergi’s *PanEuropa* was first published in 1923, Turkey had just emerged as a sovereign state trying to build a nation and detach itself from the Ottoman past. Considering the magnitude of domestic and international challenges to the viability of the new Turkish state, Coudenhove-Kalergi’s decision to leave Turkey out of his Pan-Europe was probably one of the lesser, if not the least, concerns of Turkish leaders who could only stabilize both domestic and international situation by the end of the decade.

In contrast, the Briand proposal at first came as a blow to the Turkish pursuit of recognition as a European member of international society in the early 1930s, as Briand did not initially include Turkey among the twenty-six European countries, which were invited to discuss his memorandum on the European project. Turkey was excluded from the project for two reasons. First, it was not a member of the League of Nations. Second, Turkey was not part of the geographical Europe as defined by Briand. Briand’s mindset reflected the realist approach of France concerning the European Union. By the same token, in Briand’s European federation, there was a place for Britain as the lynchpin of French security, but not for Turkey.

Although not officially invited to discuss the project, Ankara was more attentive to Briand’s initiative than London.⁵ Nevertheless, the Turkish intellectuals and statesmen remained skeptical about Briand’s proposal and particularly about

² Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Crusade for Pan-Europe: Autobiography of a Man and a Movement*, (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1943), p. 135.

³ Maarten L. Pereboom, *Democracies at the Turning Point, Britain, France and the End of the Postwar Order, 1928-1933* (NY: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 147.

⁴ Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Crusade for Pan-Europe.*, p. 257.

⁵ The British opposed Briand’s European Union project as Coudenhove-Kalergi had predicted it. In general, British observers equated France with Poincaré rather than Briand who seemed a tragic figure, struggling against the atavistic forces to which Poincaré allegedly gave expression. Robert W. D. Boyce, “The Briand and the Crisis of British Liberalism”, in *Le Plan Briand d’Union Fédérale Européenne*, ed. by Antoine Fleury (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 132 (121-144).

inclusion of Britain into it. An eminent Turkish journalist of the time, Zeki Mesut, foresaw that Britain would not favor such a project since this was developed as a political move to counter the Anglo-American hegemony.⁶

On the other hand, the fact that Briand did not include Turkey within the proposed European Union confirmed the existing Turkish suspicions regarding France's political motives. The Turkish press criticized the way in which the French defined the borders of Europe. For the French, the Turkish press argued, the European borders ended at the borders of France and those of its allies. Therefore, the French project was not considered viable because it was based on subjective criteria including some and excluding others.

Even though the French ignored it, Turkey was geographically in Europe, according to the Turks, since it was encircled by two European seas: the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.⁷ Moreover, it was argued that the values and norms accepted by societies were more significant than the geographical criterion, which Turkey met anyway, in defining Europeanness, which in any case met by Turkey.

Meanwhile, Ankara lobbied in several European countries, namely, Italy, Germany, Greece, Hungary and Bulgaria, to push for extension of an invitation to Turkey for its participation in the deliberations on European Union.⁸ While Italy and Germany recommended the participation of both Turkey and the Soviet Union to the European Union project in their responses to Briand,⁹ Greece stood out as Turkey's principal sponsor.¹⁰ Greek Foreign Minister Michalakopoulus stated: "It is the opinion of the Greek government that, from an economic and even from the geographical point of view, Turkey belongs to Europe rather than Asia."¹¹

In fact, it was not a surprise that Greece gave the full support for Turkey's membership into a European Union. At the same time as the European Union idea, the Balkan states, especially Greece and Turkey, were moving towards the Balkan Entente. The World Economic Crisis led the Balkan political leaders to realize the significance of a Balkan Union. In 1930, when the European Union

⁶ Zeki Mesut, "Avrupa Birliği" *Milliyet*, 1 August 1929, "Başka Bir Ses" *Milliyet* and 18 August 1929, "Samimi İtilaf" 20 August 1929.

⁷ "Avrupa Devleti," *Ayın Tarihi*, Vol. 22-23, No. 75-78 (June-September 1930): 6440.

⁸ Tevfik Rüştü Aras, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politikası* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2003), p. 76.

⁹ Petricioli argues that Italy was fighting against the French hegemony in Europe either by a rapprochement with Britain (as in the naval disarmament conference), or forming an entente with Berlin or by drawing new forces such as Turkey and the Soviet Union into the European system. Marta Petricioli, "Dino Grandi et la Réponse Italienne", in *Le Plan Briand d'Union Fédérale Européenne*, p. 331-346 (337). Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen believed that Italy had pressed for the invitation to Turkey and the Soviet Union as a means of killing the scheme (possibly discrediting the League). Pereboom, *Democracies* ..., p. 167.

¹⁰ *T.C. Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi (BCA)*, 30.10.0.0. (3 August 1930).

¹¹ League of Nations, Commission of Enquiry for European Union, *Minutes of the Second Session of the Commission*, *Cilt*:144.M45. 1931. VII, (Geneva, 16 to 21 January 1931), p. 22.

idea was being discussed in various European capitals, Athens and Ankara had already resolved the problems that had defied settlement since 1924.

Later, Coudenhove-Kalergi wrote that peace was concluded between Turkey and Greece thanks to the two far-sighted and energetic statesmen, Atatürk and Venizelos. These two statesmen concluded an alliance and hence laid the foundations of a Balkan union.¹² According to him, the only bright spot in the dark picture of continued European strife was the reconciliation between Greece and Turkey. He argued that while the Franco-German reconciliation stalled, there was a major success in the East in that respect. The old archenemies Greece and Turkey solidified their reconciliation which provided the core for the Balkan Entente.¹³

Therefore, it was the Greek Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos who persuaded Coudenhove-Kalergi that Turkey under the rule of Kemal Atatürk had become an integral part of Western civilization and that whatever the future of Pan-Europe, Turkey should be made a part of it. Coudenhove-Kalergi wrote: “He [Venizelos] assured me that Greece could only cooperate with our movement if Turkey were also included.”¹⁴

Coudenhove-Kalergi’s view of Turkey seems to have made sharper turn from 1923 to 1934. In the first half of the 1930s, Turkey was among the countries Coudenhove-Kalergi visited in order to enlist allies for his struggle against the Nazism. In 1934, Coudenhove-Kalergi published his second book, *Europa Erwacht! (Europe Awake!)*, where he rejected Nazi theories about nations being naturally given entities.¹⁵ He believed that cultural nationalism was a menace to the European federation. He complained that the leaders of Europe, with few exceptions, remained blind and deaf to this menace.¹⁶

His visit to Turkey obviously helped him change his mind about this country’s place in the Pan-Europe, because in his book published in 1934, Coudenhove-Kalergi included Turkey along with other Balkan countries within a political Europe. In fact, it was Kemal Atatürk’s reforms that compelled him to reconsider his view of Turkey.¹⁷ Coudenhove-Kalergi wrote in his autobiography: “The most important step toward such a new understanding between Europe and the Near East has been accomplished by Modern Turkey, that recently under its leader Kemal Atatürk, embraced without any European pressure all vital elements of

¹² Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, **Europa Erwacht!**, (Zurich: Paneuropa-Verlag, 1934), p. 21.

¹³ Coudenhove-Kalergi, **Europa Erwacht!....**, p. 156.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126-127.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Coudenhove-Kalergi, **Crusade for Pan-Europe....**, p. 182-183.

¹⁷ Peter Bugge, “The Nation Supreme, The Idea of Europe 1914-1945” in **The History of the Idea of Europe** (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 99-101.

Western civilization. This Turkish Revolution is paving the way for a complete reconciliation between Europe and the Near East.”¹⁸

Moreover, Coudenhove-Kalergi was convinced that Turkey was an integral part of Pan-Europe. He maintained his positive view on Turkey and Greece years later. For instance, he pointed out: “Since then I had often thought of the inspiring example Greece and Turkey had given their sister nations by securing national peace and prosperity at the price of a generous compromise. I thought of them now. I compared their attitude with that of France and Germany.”¹⁹ In this comparison, contrary to Turkey and Greece, he was more pessimistic vis-à-vis France and Germany. He said: “If France ... recognizes that it cannot destroy Germany without putting itself in danger of death, it must ... resolutely take the path of reconciliation”.²⁰

Coudenhove-Kalergi was right in his analysis of Turkish-Greek and French-German relations in the interwar period. The former countries were successful to form an entente and also able to convince other Balkan countries to be part of it. However, French-German reconciliation could not be achieved in this decade. The main difference between the two parties was the way how they had intended to deal with uncertainties. Regional cooperation for countries such as Turkey was determinant for stability in their own regions under the world economic crisis. Even in the case of a united Europe, Balkan countries felt the need to be in solidarity since they were facing similar economic problems.

But for countries such as France and Germany, economic and political rivalry was above all. In fact, the great power rivalry in Europe secured Turkey a seat in the Europe of institutions in the interwar period. Ankara’s success in breaking its international isolation and securing an invitation for Commission of Enquiry for European Union was certainly linked to political rivalries in Europe and mostly to the acts of balancing on the part of Italy and Germany against France in the continent. In this context, the Italian insistence on the Soviet and Turkish inclusion in the works of the Commission of Enquiry for European Union point to a continuity and consistency in Italian thinking. Both Italy and France tried to modify the proposed schemes to suit their political interests in the region.

The Turkish leaders and public could relate more effectively and easily to Briand’s European Union than Coudenhove-Kalergi’s Paneuropa for two reasons. First, Briand’s proposal called for an intergovernmental setting which was acceptable for the sovereignty-conscious Turks. Second, the new Turkish state

¹⁸ Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Crusade for Pan-Europe*..., p. 280.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Stirk, *Building European Union*..., p. 8.

was seeking an organic presence in the European state system.²¹ Admission to the League of Nations stood as a way station to such organic presence. Since Briand's proposed European Union would form under the League framework, it added yet another layer of obstacles to Turkish admission to the European states system.

On the ideational aspect of European integration, the record available does to suggest that the Turkish leadership or public could relate to the most prominent initiative in this regard as much. Although Coudenhove-Kalergi's idea on Turkey and its place in Pan-Europe had turned around radically from the 1920s to the 1930s, it is not possible to find a trace of his influence among the most ardent pro-European intellectuals of the time in Turkey. This lack of awareness and appreciation of Coudenhove-Kalergi's Paneuropa continues to date. It may reflect a general failure to articulate European Union as an ideal beyond its economic and political dimensions.²²

²¹ Georges-Henri Soutou, "Was there a European Order in the Twentieth Century? From the Concert of Europe to the End of the Cold War, *Contemporary European History* 9 (3), (August 2000): pp. 337-338.

²² See Cengiz Aktar, "Olmayan Avrupa Düşüncesi Üzerine," (on the non-existence of an idea of Europe) in *Modernleşme ve Batıcılık, Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce (Modernization and Westernism: Political Thought in Modern Turkey)*, Vol. 3, (ed.) Uygur Kocabaşoğlu, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınevi, 2002), 269-274.