

DILEMMA OF UNIVERSAL VALUES AND THE RIGHT TO DIFFERENCE

Ahmet Evin



AHMET EVIN is the founder and Dean of the Arts and Social Philosophy department at the University of Sabanchi (Turkey). He is also the founder of the Foundation for Research in Economics and Social Sciences in Turkey, as well as the Association for Middle Eastern studies in North America. Ahmet Evin was a participant of the Global policy forum in Yaroslavl

■ *How strongly are European values rooted in Turkish culture? Are they still merely the values of elites, or have they spread throughout the whole society? Are there any visible contradictions between Islam and European culture in Turkey?*

To begin with, it is difficult to define the term ‘European values,’ except in the broadest sense of universal values combined with a respect for pluralism and individual liberty. For instance, significant differences across Europe can be noticed with regard to the degree of respect for law, for individual rights, tolerance, civic obligations, and so forth. But, as a result of a long historical process the influence of particularities that delimit individual rights and freedoms have been gradually restricted in (mainly Western) Europe. The Ottoman reformist elite and their

republican successors adopted many of the European institutions created during this process, notably impersonal, positive law, representative institutions, as well as autonomous state institutions.

However, the question has become increasingly complex today: **Is adherence to particularistic norms by communities a part of their democratic right? If so, how can that position be reconciled with individual freedoms protected by law?** When looked at from this perspective the question seems to relate not so much to the issue of elite versus non-elite, but to the emancipation of the individual in a differentiated society. What appears to be an irreconcilable divide between Islamism and secularism could arguably be gradually bridged by putting individual rights before collective rights, thus reducing the ideological dimension of religious preferences and practice.

Such a development, however, is not likely to reduce the distance between the European ‘way of life’ and that of traditionalist Muslims. But it would nevertheless help to detract from the prevalence of ideologically driven groups that see themselves in hostile opposition to non-Muslims and, in so doing, diminish the influence of one of the key factors that reinforces resistance among some Muslim communities to integrate with their broader society. Yet, how long it might take to reverse the currently increasing prominence of identity politics in Turkey, Europe, and elsewhere remains an open question.

■ *How would you evaluate Turkey’s prospects for accession to the EU? What factors hinder this process?*

Turkey’s relations with the EU have followed a tortuous path, and one full of reversals. There were, however, periods in which progress was made towards membership and Turkey’s European future appeared to be a realistic goal. **Unfortunately, its prospects today look dim. The majority of Europeans oppose Turkish membership**

and support for membership in Turkey is also falling.

After a series of crises following the 2004 eastern enlargement, several influential EU member states turned away from enlargement, which to them appeared to aggrandize the problems that the Union faced. Turkey seemed to pose a particularly difficult problem because of its size and cultural differences. In that context, Turkey’s European credentials were called into question. Whether Turkey was European or whether it had a place in the European club were questions raised in some quarters in a tactless and hostile fashion. European hostility is now blamed by Washington for causing Ankara to look away from Europe and the West in other directions.

It must be admitted, on the other hand, that the Turkish government did very little in the past five years to advance the country’s membership goal, which it claims to be a priority and is still referred to as a state policy. However, Ankara’s overriding interest in pursuing an assertively independent regional policy often appears at odds with its European membership objectives and transatlantic obligations. Turkey’s seemingly diminished enthusiasm for EU membership, along with tensions over thorny issues such as those regarding Cyprus and Armenia, continue to detract from Turkey’s EU prospects. Moreover, integration problems associated with some immigrant Turkish/Muslim communities in Europe have exacerbated a perception of otherness, as has the growing gap between Turkey’s regional policies and those of the EU and U.S.

It should also be noted that most of Turkey’s Arab neighbours do not share Ankara’s views on Iran and, more importantly, they consider Turkey’s bid for EU membership a significant factor for enhancing its influence in the region and beyond.

■ *How successful is the process of developing public and political sciences in Turkey? Some think that Turkish*

intellectual life is concentrated in one or two major cities. Is there an interest in social sciences among those who represent the political class?

With the expansion of the Turkish university system, especially the establishment of provincial universities over the past 50 years or so, the effect of higher education and research has spread across the entire country. Yet, few provincial cities offer the kind of enriched intellectual life that major urban centers do. Nevertheless, the social sciences are attracting increasing attention beyond academia, among policymakers, opinion leaders, the media, and therefore, the public at large. Think tanks are becoming both widespread and influential.

Challenges, of course, still remain. Professional education, such as engineering and management, attract top students, and new universities have responded to the demand for professional education in training and technological research. The social sciences (and the humanities in particular) deserve a far greater share of the resources that are now being made available for higher education and research.

■ *How have Turkish-Russian relations been affected by the burden of previous wars? Can the painful historical memory be overcome in the name of cooperation, or are the countries doomed to remain strategic opponents?*

The mutual hostility that has characterized Turkish-Russian relations have deep historical roots. Both the Russian and Ottoman modernizers adopted defensive modernization during the same period: the early eighteenth century. Russia's expansion over the next two centuries at the expense of a declining Ottoman Empire sowed the seeds of mistrust and suspicion that continued through the Cold War.

Since the early 1990s, however, trade and investment between these neighboring countries have increased at a rapid pace. Still, Turkey's high dependence on Russian energy is viewed by some as a cause for concern, although it is not widely believed that it poses a serious threat to Turkey's energy supply security. Moscow's suspicions about the Turkish government's relations to Muslim groups in the Russian Federation and the NIS have been largely allayed by the increasing commercial cooperation between the two countries. Although future differences between Ankara and Moscow cannot be ruled out, both Turkey and Russia are likely to continue their *modus vivendi* together. Their new *modus vivendi* represents a major departure from their historical hostility to one another. ■

Dmitry Uzlaner exclusively for Yaroslavl Forum

HYBRID IDENTITIES



OLGA MALINOVA

is a political scientist, a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences. She is also a Professor at the Moscow State Institute for International Relations, and President Emeritus of the Russian Political Science Association. She has authored such books as 'Identity as a factor of politics and subject of political science' (2005), and 'Russia and 'the West' in the twentieth century: transformation of the discourse on collective identity' (2009).

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The term 'European non-West' has every right to be used. In its long history of understanding itself in the context of various European identities, Russia has been seen by many as European – perceived as 'also part of Europe' or 'the other Europe' (that which is Orthodox, communist, Oriental, etc.). But Russia has never conceived as itself as being Western. Russia is first and foremost an independent political world in its own right, while under-involvement and non-inclusion will forever be its downside.

Today we are living in the world of the twenty-first century, where identification, build on the 'either-or' basis, is losing its applicability. **The modern world operates on a multiple-scale principle - according to the principle of hybrid identities**, where it is possible to play the role of its own 'significant Other' in one sense, while managing to also remain original at the same time. This kind of comparative scale diversification should allow Russia to conceive of itself both as its significant Other, while at the same time, maintaining its original distinctiveness as a country.

The 'European non-West' is a cultural notion, for which, throughout the course of history, various countries have fallen into its geographical range. Even with respect to certain countries, which are now considered to be def-

initely 'Western', questions were previously raised as to whether they were really Western. The classic example of this can be seen in Germany, with its philosophy that it has its own specific path (Sonderweg), an approach which happens to have also greatly influenced the emergence of similar ideas with respect to Russia. This statement regarding Western affiliations also pertains to Poland and the Czech Republic in a sense and, of course, the Balkan States. Turkey should be also included in the list of countries falling into the 'European non-West'.

Among the countries of this sort, Russia occupies a special place. That is not so much due to the fact that the other countries have not experienced debates between the Westernisers and Slavophiles, but rather this is related to the fact that such debates became the focus of the public agenda and ultimately formalised ideological dissociations.

To me, the consolidation of the 'European non-West' on the basis of hybrid identities seems to be an unlikely scenario. The reasons for which the above-mentioned countries are considered as the European non-West tend to somewhat differ. The framework of self-identification on the basis of the 'we – others' dichotomy also assumes two poles. The third pole – non-European 'Others' – seems to be far less important. ■