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Turkey: Change from an Emigration to an Immigration and Now to a Transit Migration Country

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In the post Second World War period Turkey was an emigration country for a long time.¹ But things have changed since. After the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union, immigration from the neighborhood to Turkey increased substantially. A lively cross-border movement with the countries of the former Soviet Union, but also with the Middle East countries (i.e. especially Iran), has occurred. On the other hand, Western European countries have become extremely reluctant to open up their borders to Turkish migrants. As a consequence, Turkey is a country of emigration, immigration and transit, nowadays.² In this paper, we concentrate on immigration and transit migration.

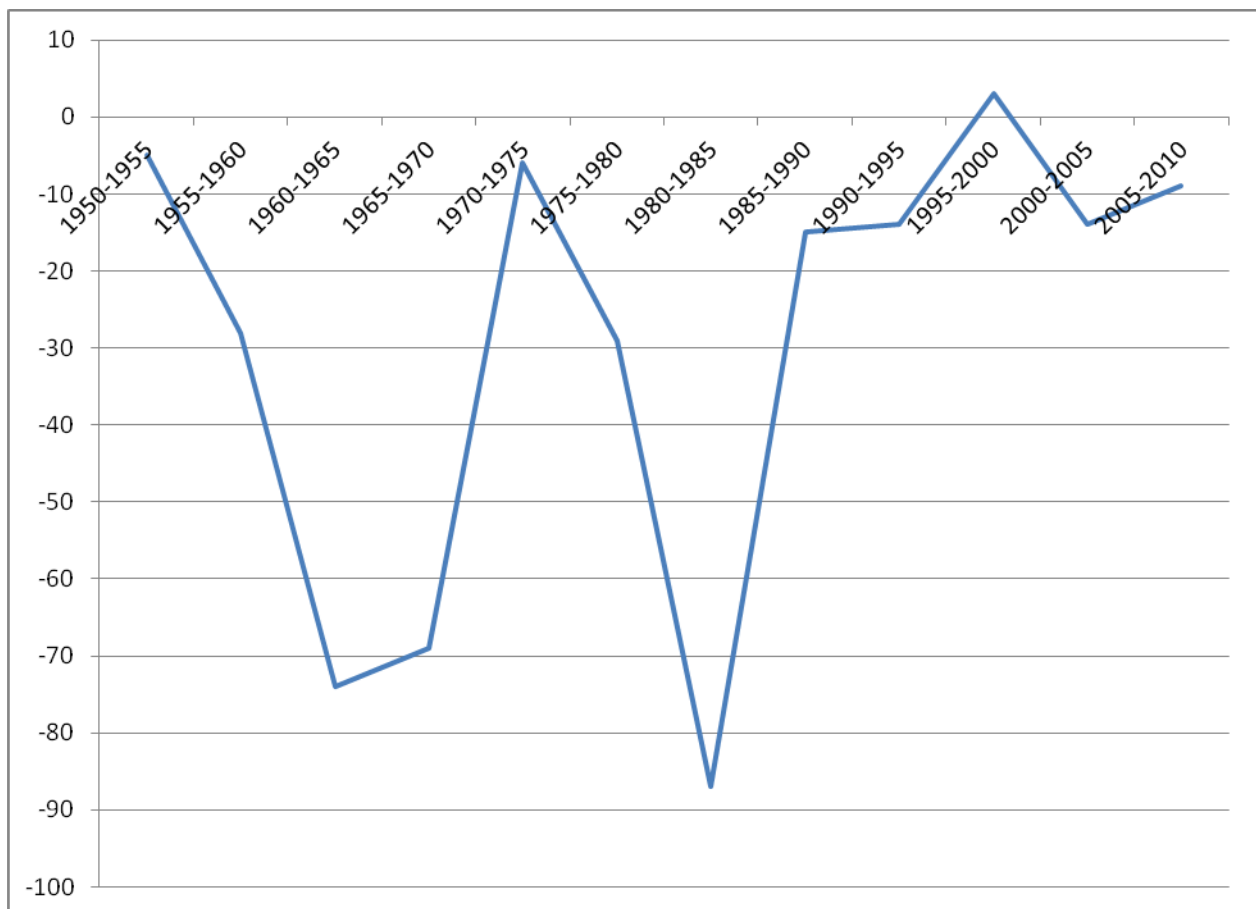
¹ See Elitok, Secil Pacaci and Thomas Straubhaar: Is Turkey still an Emigration Country? *HWWI Policy Paper*, 3-15. Hamburg, 2010 (June).
http://www.hwwi.org/fileadmin/hwwi/Publikationen/Policy/HWWI_Policy_Paper_3-15.pdf.

² See: Transatlantic Academy: Getting to Zero: Turkey, its Neighbors and the West. Washington DC, June 2010 (www.transatlanticacademy.org), and İçduygu, Ahmet and Deniz Sert: Türkei. Focus Migration Länderprofil Nr. 5, April 2009. HWWI Hamburg, http://www.focus-migration.de/Tuerkei_Update_04_2.6026.0.html.

1. A Look Back

A look at the net migration (i.e immigration minus emigration) figures shows that Turkey was a typical emigration country for decades (see figure 1). It has had a quiet substantial negativ migration balance. In the times of high emigration to Western Europe (especially Germany) Turkey has lost about 70 thousand people per year in the 1960s and even substantially more in the first half of the 1980s. Today, however, it reaches almost a balance between emigration and immigration.

Figure 1: Annual Net Migration Flows (Immigration minus Emigration) for Turkey in Thousand



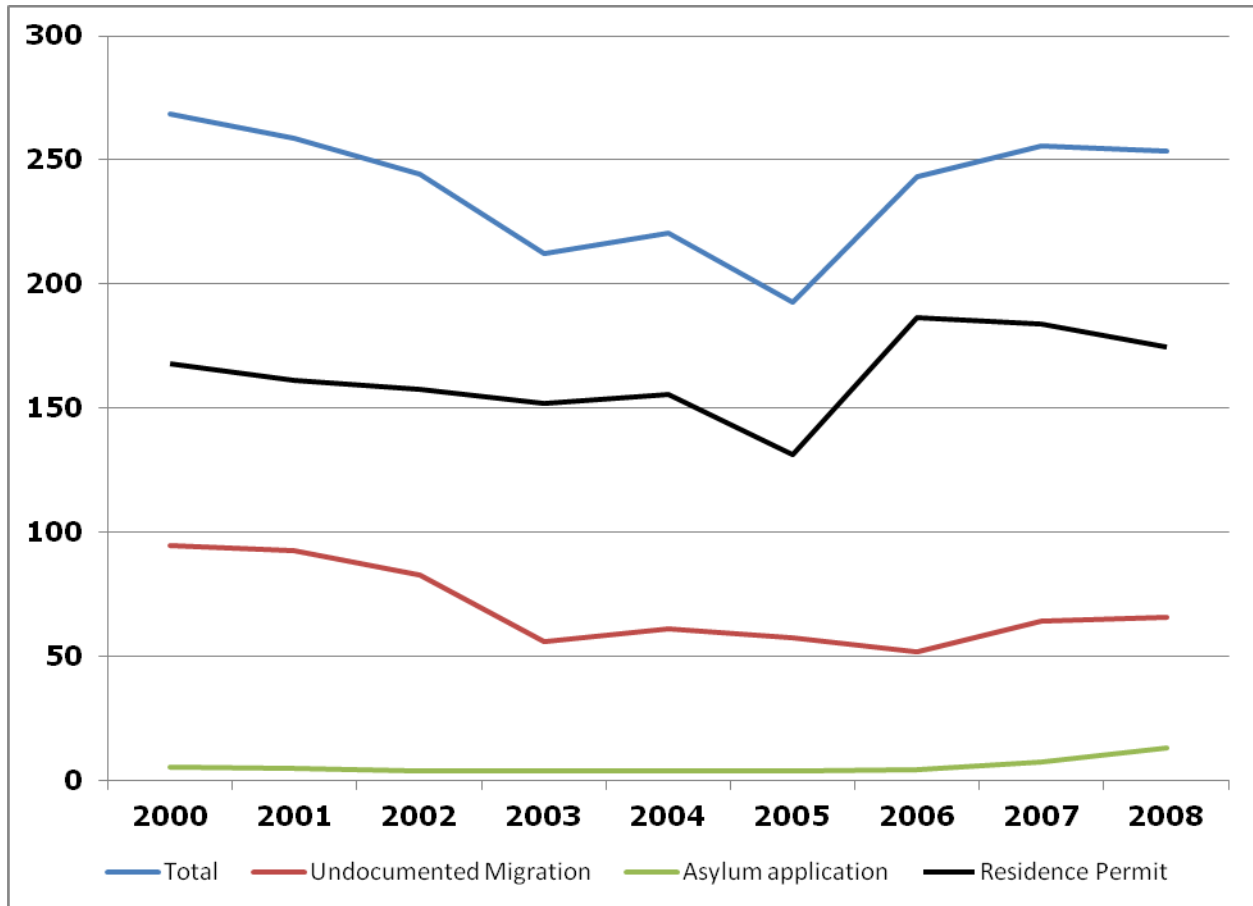
Annual figure is calculated as average over the period.

Source: United Nations: Population Division. Washington 2010. <http://esa.un.org/UNPP/>

Immigration has become more important in the last decade than before. Figure 2 shows that in the recent decade per year about 250.000 people have immigrated to Turkey. The data include some rough estimations about people that have illegally immigrated. Some

visa holders have overstayed the allowed period of time. Other people have crossed the borders without permission.

Figure 2: Immigration Flows to Turkey, 2000-2008, in Thousand



Source: İçduygu, Ahmet. *Turkey and International Migration 2008 (SOPEMI Report for TURKEY 2008/09)*. Istanbul, 2009 (mimeo), table 7, page 43.

The number of foreign nationals living with an official residence and work permit in Turkey is relatively small (just over 170,000, see Table 3). However, there are also citizens of countries of the former Soviet Union such as Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, the Central Asian republics and to a lesser extent Russia and Ukraine, that come to work in Turkey often illegally in the household and tourism sectors. The Turkish visa system allows these people to commute between their home countries and their jobs in Turkey. Furthermore, there are also Turks with dual citizenship from EU countries, especially Bulgaria and Germany, that come to work in Turkey. Additionally, to these numbers one can include students as well as retirees. Finally, about 30% of all migrants arrive as undocumented migrants and remain in Turkey for undetermined length of time.

The statistics of immigration to Turkey flows do not really record the whole mobility picture. A better feeling of the change of the migration pattern might get out of entry

statistics. In 2009, 25.5 million foreigners arrived in Turkey (see Table 1), more than twice the number of 2000 and eleven times the number of 1990.³

The largest numbers of entries continue to come from the EU member countries. Tourism is the major force behind Europeans coming to Turkey, yet short business trips from managers and staff members related to international activities of multinational firms as well as movement of retirees and students increasingly play an important role in this picture.

Table 1: Entries of persons to Turkey, 1990 and 2009 (in million)

	1990	2009	Increase 1990 to 2009 by factor ...
Russia		2.7	
Rest of ex-Soviet Union		2.8	
Total ex-Soviet Union	0.2	5.4	24
Balkan Countries	0.9	2.6	3
Middle East	0.4	2.2	6
Total	2.3	25.5	11

Balkan Countries include Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia-Montenegro; Middle East countries include Iran, Iraq, Syria and Gulf states. Data for ex-Soviet Union for 2009 excludes Baltic States.

Source: Kirisci, Kemal, Nathalie Tocci, and Joshua Walker. *A Neighborhood Rediscovered (Turkey's Transatlantic Value in the Middle East)*. Washington DC: German Marshall Fund of the United States (Brussels Forum Paper Series), 2010, p.21

Entries from neighboring countries, especially from the areas of the former Soviet Union, have been steadily increasing. They have risen overproportionally by a factor of 24 between 1990 and 2009 (while the average factor for the total of all entries to Turkey was 11). In contrast to those coming from Europe, many more people from the neighborhood come not for a holiday, but for work. They get engaged in small scale business (suitcase business) or in seasonal work or work in private households (cleaning, child and elderly

³ These figures contain back-and forth movements, several entries and commuting.

care, gardening). Tourism has only started to play a growing role with respect to entries from Russia. With the exception of Iran, entries from the Middle East have been relatively low. But it is likely to increase in the coming years following the recent decision of the Turkish government to lift visa requirements for a number of countries from the Middle East and Black Sea area.⁴

In sum, Turkey has become a magnet for people from the neighborhood. The dynamically growing Turkish economy attracts people with all kind of qualifications and skills and thus attracts citizens from the neighborhood countries. While Turkish migration to the EU has declined significantly (due to the fact that Europe has turned into a kind of a “fortress”), Turkey has begun to act as a migration hub for the Black Sea area and the Middle East. In addition, these movements to Turkey have been only the first transit step on a way to further destinations in Europe or elsewhere.⁵

2. A Look Ahead

Turkey is an important actor in terms of migration flows due to its geopolitical significance and closeness both to the European Union (EU) Area and MENA (Middle East and North Africa). The possible accession of Turkey to the European Union triggered the discussion on migration potentials from Turkey as it stands at the nexus of emigration, immigration and transit migration.

2.1 Immigration from the EU to Turkey:

The migration flows from the EU to Turkey will be determined by different factors in the future:

1. European retirees will keep migrating to Turkey, particularly to the Aegean and Mediterranean Area, for their retirement life.⁶
2. The return of people with Turkish background and also the return of retiring Turkish migrants (e.g. first generation German-Turks) will also be an increasing part of potential migration flows from the EU to Turkey. Yet due to the entry requirement to the host country every six months; their movements will be categorized under circular migration.
3. As Istanbul becomes more and more attractive for international business, headquarters of multinational corporations will keep setting up there, which will

⁴ See Kirisci, Kemal, Nathalie Tocci, and Joshua Walker. *A Neighborhood Rediscovered (Turkey's Transatlantic Value in the Middle East)*. Washington DC: German Marshall Fund of the United States (Brussels Forum Paper Series), 2010.

⁵ See: Erzan, Refik: *The Impact of the Global Crisis on Illegal Migration and Remittances: The Turkish Corridor*. CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2009/38. Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, Fiesole/Florence (EUI) 2009 and Kirisci, Kemal: *Managing Irregular Migration in Turkey: A Political-Bureaucratic Perspective*. CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2008/61. Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, Fiesole/Florence (EUI) 2008.

⁶ According to Içduygu, only in Alanya, the total number of Germans and Dutch is 5000-7000 (Içduygu, Ahmet. *Turkey and International Migration 2008 (SOPEMI Report for TURKEY 2008/09)*. Istanbul, 2009, mimeo).

motivate expatriate workers and professionals to migrate to Turkey for work related purposes.

4. In addition to foreign professionals, the potential migration of high-skilled migrants with Turkish background, who are educated in Germany, to Turkey is and will be significant. In his study analyzing the return migration of high-skilled migrants with Turkish background, who went through German education system (from primary school until the college degree) back to Turkey, Aydin (2010)⁷ discusses whether this potential migration is a brain drain process, within the transnationality framework. In addition to underlying the fulsomeness of estimated amount of potential migration from Turkey to the EU, Aydin postulates the reasons that motivate the high-qualified migrants with Turkish background for their return migration decision. Among these reasons, three most important ones are as follows. First, due to the recent developments in the German economy such as the privatization, increasing unemployment and shrinkage of social benefits, high-skilled labor is under the risk of unemployment or underemployment. These economic determinants play the most important role among the pushing factors yet influence the confidence of high-skilled workers to the future of the German economy. Second, high-qualified workers feel themselves under the risk of being disadvantaged or even discriminated. For instance, the unemployment rate among the German academics is 4.4 %, whereas it is 12.5 % among the academics with an immigration background. Third, in line with the integration of the Turkish economy with the world economy, the Turkish labor market became quite attractive for the high-skilled German-Turks. The attractiveness of Istanbul, as it is center to the branches of many German firms and as it is preferred due to social networks and cultural closeness, also plays a role in the return migration decision. German companies that have branches in Istanbul mostly prefer high-qualified German-Turks who immigrated back to Turkey, hold the blue-card (free to work and reside in both countries) and speak both languages.
5. Student migration will play a crucial role as well. Due to the lack of cultural and language barriers, students from Turkic Republics will prefer Turkey for educational purposes. This temporary future potential of students may turn into permanent migration depending on the work opportunities. The Green Card application of 2000 and the Immigration Act of 2005 which intended to encourage the high-skilled migration to Germany provide us with some hints about the future trends in migration policies and tendencies. For instance, according to Werner (2002)⁸, regulation of Green Card applied foreigners (who- before the implementation of Green Card-had to leave the country after graduation) graduating from German universities and polytechnics. This is a sign for an intention behind Green Card recruiting students who are perceived as potential for future high-skilled labor force. The easement of residency and work permit in the aftermath of internship process of

⁷ See Aydin, Yasar : [Der Diskurs um die Abwanderung Hochqualifizierter türkischer Herkunft in die Türkei](#), *HWWI Policy Paper*, 3-9, Hamburg, 2010.

⁸ See Werner, Heinz: The Current "Green Card" Initiative For Foreign IT Specialist In Germany," *International Mobility of The Highly Skilled*, OECD Proceedings, (2002), p. 321-326.

students can be considered as a policy that encourages student migration in the short run, who will become part of the high skilled labor supply in the long run.

2.2 Immigration from the Middle East to Turkey

Currently, Turkey altered its approach with respect to migration policy, namely; asylum law, visa regulations, illegal migration and human trafficking. Two main legislations, that are under consideration, in terms asylum are the 1994 Asylum Regulation and 2006 Circular stipulating asylum procedure and the rights and obligations of refugees and asylum seekers. Even if Turkey is party to UN Refugees Convention of 1951, it still has not lifted the geographical limitation, namely, non-Europeans are not granted refugee status. With respect to visa restrictions, since 2005, Turkey is following a liberal visa policy via which several visa-free agreements were signed with neighboring countries including Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Russia. The main motivation of Turkey was mainly economic gains from more integration in the region yet its liberal visa regime brought the 'construction of a new Schengen area in the Middle East' under discussion. In line with the EU regulations, Turkey became more proactive in dealing with illegal migration and human trafficking. These recent developments in the migration management of Turkey triggered discussions on a possible Middle Eastern Union and the leading role of Turkey, in this alternative model.⁹

Under this framework, it is possible to foresee that illegal migration from the Middle East will keep its importance in the near future - and may even increase due to the latest developments in the visa policy of Turkey. Male migrants will be motivated by the job opportunities in construction, tourism, entertainment whereas female migrants will be preferred for domestic services. Current migration form as contract-dependent labor migration and marriage migration will be persistent in the near future where asylum seeking (in accordance with the possible solution of Kurdish dispute) may have a declining trend with the full membership to the EU. Migration potential from Turkey to the Middle East Countries¹⁰ is relatively weak due to the tendencies in the region to employ their own citizens and encourage the young generation to work in the country.

⁹ For more details see Kirisci, Kemal, Nathalie Tocci, and Joshua Walker. *A Neighborhood Rediscovered (Turkey's Transatlantic Value in the Middle East)*. Washington DC: German Marshall Fund of the United States (Brussels Forum Paper Series), 2010 and Transatlantic Academy: Getting to Zero: Turkey, its Neighbors and the West. Washington DC, June 2010 (www.transatlanticacademy.org).

¹⁰ Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan are skilled and high-skilled labor exporting countries, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Libya, United Arab Emirates are large scale labor importing (high skilled) countries, Algeria is an unskilled labor exporting country and Tunisia, Syria, Iraq, Morocco are self-sufficient countries which are neither importing nor exporting labor power.

3. Conclusions

Having become a country of immigration and transit migration, Turkey has become a multi-cultural country, again, as it was in the first half of the last century. As a multi-cultural society, Turkey faces similar challenges of migration and integration that are characteristic for areas with strong cross-cultural movements of people. As Tolay shows Turkey is addressing the issue of a multi-cultural society differently than the European partners: “rather than tackling the issue of multiculturalism by talking about multiculturalism, Turkey deals with multiculturalism by ensuring free cross border movements of migrants”.¹¹ It follows this approach “by combining three elements – the perception of a temporary migration, the informality and flexibility of Turkish society and market, and a liberal visa policy”.¹² For the moment the strategy of not debating the issue of multiculturalism and the challenges that stem from it, seems a rather successful approach. However, it remains an open question, how long such a strategy might really avoid a more critical debate on multiculturalism and its impact in Turkey.

One of the most crucial challenges for Turkey in its relations with the EU is the illegal migration. Due to its geographical location, Turkey will be under the risk of increasing irregular migration pressure. Kirisci emphasizes the increasing importance of managing illegal migration, both as a challenge and as an opportunity, for Turkey in the near future as it has become a transit country.¹³ Yet, he postulates that the manner in which “migration” has become securitized by the EU has adversely affected the EU-Turkish relations and generated “mistrust” on both sides. According to Kirisci, the EU feels that Turkey is not doing enough to combat and prevent illegal transit migration and suspects that Turkey has allowed illegal migrants to use its territory to transit to the EU; and there is fear on the Turkish side that the EU intends to use Turkey as a buffer zone for irregular migrants. In his work estimating the impact of the global crisis on the illegal migration and remittances, Erzan presents predictions - under different employment and GDP growth rates - that are ambiguous due to the fact that growth in the EU will likely be affected more severely than the peripheral countries.¹⁴

If it is well managed, challenge of illegal migration can turn into an opportunity for Turkey so as to freshen the negotiations with the EU. Cooperation and dialogue between Turkey and the EU with respect to illegal migration would be beneficial for the security of both sides.

¹¹ Tolay, Juliette: Turkey’s Other Multicultural Debate: Lessons for the EU. Annual Sakıp Sabancı International Research Award Winning Lecture. Istanbul, June 2010, page 2 (mimeo).

¹² Tolay, Juliette: Turkey’s Other Multicultural Debate: Lessons for the EU. Annual Sakıp Sabancı International Research Award Winning Lecture. Istanbul, June 2010, page 2 (mimeo).

¹³ Kirisci, Kemal: Managing Irregular Migration in Turkey: A Political-Bureaucratic Perspective. CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2008/61. Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, Fiesole/Florence (EUI) 2008.

¹⁴ Erzan, Refik: The Impact of the Global Crisis on Illegal Migration and Remittances: The Turkish Corridor. CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2009/38. Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, Fiesole/Florence (EUI) 2009.

The EU intends to control migration, select migrants on a skill-basis, avoid illegal migration and sign bilateral agreements so as to correspond the need for migrants' labor. Turkey, a country which has long-awaited for the EU membership, alters its foreign policy and migration management in a manner that it improves its relations with its neighbors, especially in the Middle East. This alteration stands both as a challenge and an opportunity for Turkey and its future perspectives on migration. On the one hand, it can be read as a 'political message' to the EU, which lately initiated the privileged membership as an alternative for Turkey, revealing that there are other options for Turkey in its neighborhood for various integration possibilities and unions. On the other hand, within the EU, Turkey's liberal visa policy increased the concerns about the security issues in relation to border management, since the free entrance of immigrants both from Middle East and from Russia facilitates the potential for illegal and transit migration to Europe via Turkey.

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