

Vote Turkey this Christmas

Norman Stone says the lesson of history is that the Turks can rescue Europe from its glossy sterility

Herr Professor Dr Wehler once wrote a very good article about the Poles in Germany. They emigrated to the Ruhr in droves, well over a century ago, and — unlike the Poles of Belgium or France — they did not fit in at all. They had their own Catholic churches and clubs, and what was unique in Germany was that this went on generation in, generation out until at last, in the 1950s, Polish names were all over the Hamburg football team and the Politburo of the DDR. Wehler's point was that there was something special about the German handling of Polish immigration that ruled out assimilation. That same professor now writes in *Die Zeit* that the Turks can never be part of Europe, and we can guess what lies behind this: Germans often complain that their Turks do not assimilate, even in the third generation and, right enough, it can be irritating, if you get on an aeroplane to or in Germany, to find yourself behind an Anatolian rural pair in the queue. He, woolly-capped and bearded, will be lord of all he surveys. She, huge Islamic coat, will take time placing her many plastic bags and will settle, triumphant silly beam on her face, in the middle of the wrong row, and will not understand the stewardess when she is told to move. I, being British and having experience of Turkey, show Asiatic resignation and drum my fingers. Professor Wehler writes an article in *Die Zeit* saying that the Turks are not European. Will he please remember those poor old Poles a century ago, and bethink himself that, back then, a certain Professor Weber, on the back of a non-starter of an adulterous affair, wrote a rather bizarre book about how Catholics — Poles — could not adapt to capitalism?

In 1963 Turkey signed a treaty with the Europeans, opening the way for eventual membership. This week that treaty will come home to roost, and the Europeans will have to decide whether to give her a date for the start of negotiations. Turkey in Europe? There has been a litany of objection from ex-President Giscard d'Estaing and the German Christian Democrats, with an amen corner of little countries such as Slovakia, the economy of which would fit comfortably into Istanbul's Eminönü quarter. Perhaps Giscard d'Estaing is disappointed to find

that what he sees as a Third World country has not been offering him diamonds, in the manner of the Emperor Bokassa in days of yore. But, purely on technical grounds, it is going to be very difficult indeed to say no to — at least — discussions of membership. The Euros, in their wisdom, established 'the Copenhagen criteria' for membership, the usual End-of-History stuff, a market economy, minorities dancing freely around their maypoles etc. Turkey has met them. Over the past two or three years, the Turkish parliament has passed all the relevant legislation. It even includes a provision for education in Kurdish — a difficult matter, since there are seven Kurdish dialects at least, not mutually intelligible (just as the Gaelic of Mull is not understood on Lewis) — although so far only about a hundred people have volunteered to sacrifice their children in this way.

All of this is happening in an economy that has been forging ahead: the average age in Turkey is about 26, and over the past generation the Turks have been learning how to do capitalism. In 1960 the Koreans exported wigs, and had a GDP per head somewhat below Turkey's. The Turks took rather longer about such progress (politics was a mess), but they are getting there, and there are now world-class Turkish firms, with interests all over the place, which



could pay off the national debt tomorrow if the call came. If you take the road from Istanbul to Cappadocia, you pass one huge lorry after another ferrying goods to Germany (they are sometimes to be seen, even in England; nowadays, in Wales, there are Turkish ceramics factories — a phenomenon that we cannot have seen since the 16th century when Ottoman traders dealt in Cornish tin). Now, Turkey is still, overall, quite a poor country, and there are huge differences between the plush parts of Istanbul or Izmir, where you might think you were anywhere in Mediterranean Europe, and Sırnak or Hakkari in the Kurdish south-east, where — drugs traders apart — you might think you were in the Third World, producing nothing but children. But Korea was like that 50 years ago, and what Europe now has on its doorstep is a country not only Korea-like in potential, but with a long, long history, entirely missed by critics, of co-operation with Christianity and with Europe.

This is perhaps the most misunderstood thing of all. The Turks are Muslim, yes, but there is an enormously long tradition of collaboration with Christianity. Louis de Bernières has written a very good novel about this — *Birds Without Wings* — which takes the history of a Greek-Turkish small town in Mediterranean Anatolia in the period of the first world war. Critics — the *Economist's*, for instance — wondered why he had spent ten years between his last novel and this one. I can tell that critic the answer: it is a very very complicated story, and Louis de Bernières has done an enormous amount of homework, from the high politics of the Turkish war of independence to the nature of local cooking and the shape of local superstitions. But the central point is that the local Christians and Muslims got along very well — quite a bit of intermarriage, with much blurring of the edges when it came to religion. There are nowadays in the Greek press articles about how the Anatolian Greeks resented the invasion by mainlanders in 1919: they smashed the balance that generation after generation had established. The end of the Greek presence in Anatolia is a horrible story, and the chief devil in it is Lloyd George, who egged on the mainland Greeks to invade, commit ethnic-cleansing atrocities, polarise things, lose, and preside over the departure of the million or so Anatolian Greeks. In de Bernières's words, 'You do not piss off the Turks.' True, they are not good at all when it comes to public relations — lying does not come naturally to them — and in any saloon bar it can be very tiresome to have to tell people that they did not do an Auschwitz on the Greeks or the Armenians, who have been much better organised with their hard-luck stories. The Armenian diaspora can be especially tiresome, trying to make us believe that they had their very own Holocaust. In 1914 their leader, Boghos Nubar Pasha, was offered a place in the

Turkish cabinet. Can you imagine Hitler making Chaim Weizmann the same offer?

The fact was that Christians had been part of the Ottoman empire from the start. Was the initial Ottoman state in the early 14th century a creation of Warriors for the Faith, as its best-known historian in England, Paul Wittek, supposed? No, the first Osman was elected chief by the other three leaders, who were Byzantine cow-boys. Did the Ottoman dynasty, Caliphs of all Islam, marcher lords of the horizon, etc., descend from the Prophet? No, they were three-quarters Balkan Christian in origin. A 12th-century Byzantine princess, Anna Comnena, remarked that the population of Anatolia consisted of Greeks, barbarians and what she called *mixo-varvaroi*, and a famous Arab traveller, Ibn Batuta, tut-tutted about the lax ways of the Turks — wine and women well in evidence. He would tut-tut even more, now. There are Christmas lights and trees all over Ankara, Christmas shopping is the usual European epidemic, and Santa Claus is around, only the celebrations are theoretically for the New Year.

But there is nothing new in this. When Constantinople fell to the Turks, the nephews of the last emperor became governor-general of the Balkans and admiral of the Ottoman fleet, while their first cousin, Zoe, famously married the Tsar (it was not, incidentally, to give Muscovy a title to

Byzantium: the aim was to convert the Tsar to Catholicism, Zoe having been brought up by the Pope). In 1453 the Sultan's first port of call was to the Orthodox Patriarch, Gennadius, and a treaty was drawn up. The two were natural allies, because the Orthodox detested the Latins, who had taken over the Byzantine economy (the Galata Tower, one of Istanbul's landmarks, was built by the Genoese, not against the Turks, but against the Venetians, who were trying to take over the Black Sea trade). A Grand Logothete remarked famously, 'Better the Sultan's turban than the Cardinal's hat', and when Othello's Cyprus fell to the Turks in 1571 the Orthodox peasants cheered them on, as a relief from Latin feudalism. The Turks made the Patriarch a pasha. They remembered their nomadic origins, and a badge of honour was a horsetail on the coach. The Sultan had four, and the Patriarch rode around with three. He became the largest landowner in the empire (this subject is splendidly explored in Stephen Runciman's best book, *The Great Church in Captivity*) and the document was drawn up in Greek, addressed to *megas authentēs*, 'great sovereign', which was how you addressed the Byzantine emperor. The Turkish ear, incidentally, which has affinities with the Japanese, could not manage this very easily, and turned *authentēs* into *effendi*, an honorific widely bestowed. There is a very

good Greek book on this, Dimitri Kitzikis's *L'empire ottoman*. The general line is that the Ottoman empire, when it worked, was a sort of Byzantium with attitude. Quite why it declined is a good question.

But the Ottoman decline was mirrored in Spain, the European country that Turkey most resembles. Spain had a thousand years of Islam, Old Castile is similar to the Anatolian plateau in barrenness, and where Turkey has Kurds and Armenians, Spain has Basques and Catalans. Europeanisation in both countries involved a sort of civil war (Charles Esdaile's splendid *Peninsular War* deals with this) because Counter-Reformation Catholicism in Spain laid the same kind of obscurantist burden that the *ulema* imposed on Turkey — throwing the telescopes from the Galata Tower because it was impious to penetrate God's secrets, or closing a school of mathematics for gunners on the same grounds. In Spain the civil war came to a head in the 1930s; Turkey headed it off with the Atatürk reforms, which have given her a literate, healthy population and an Islam that is easy to live with, and has produced a political party quite similar to the Christian Democratic ones in Europe. Islamic mayors have also, incidentally, been quite helpful about the restoration of Christian churches, and even saved the Anglican one from deconsecration by the bishop of Gibraltar. It is now full, most Sundays.

Spain has been a considerable success story, and there is no reason for Turkey not to repeat the feat. She has already easily begun to do so, and on present form her overseas trade will soon overtake Russia's, although she has nothing much in the way of raw materials and faces difficulty in exporting agricultural goods to Europe. Given the size of the black economy, she is probably worth more than all the other 'accession countries' put together, and she has no history of communist sloth to live down. On the other hand, if she is refused a date for the start of negotiations, it would be a blow to the present religious but democratic government; it might be swept away by a nationalist revival prepared to take revenge on Europe by dumping boatloads of refugees. It is time for Giscard to remember that his career has been littered with blunders, and Professor Wehler might remember that Max Weber himself, after a nervous breakdown, began to understand that Polish peasants had a very hard existence, and needed some understanding from double-doctorate professors, not finger-wagging. But a German or a Frenchman, of all people, should understand that today's peasant is tomorrow's tycoon. A French critic of modern Europe, Marc Fumaroli, says that the Continent is turning into an enormous version of Venice in the later 18th century — glossy and sterile. Slovakia and Slovenia will not arrest that. Turkey would.

Norman Stone is Professor of International Relations at Bilkent University, Ankara.