Istanbul (Not Constantinople)
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Don't hold your breath for Turkey to enter the European Union.

BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

On October 12, the Swedish Academy announced its award of the Nobel Prize in Literature to the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk. He is the author of several books that have attained worldwide bestseller status, the most recent in English being last year's *Istanbul: Memories and the City*. The gifted Pamuk is read widely in the West—perhaps even more than in his native country.

Indeed, inside Turkey, political issues almost immediately intruded into discussion of Pamuk's prize, which he will formally accept in Stockholm on December 10. Many in the Turkish cultural elite took a sour view—one symptomatic of aspects of the political culture that threaten to keep their country out of the European Union.

Sophisticated observers might have seen in Pamuk's honor evidence that Turkey has attained a certain cultural parity with other leading countries—surely a favorable sign for the E.U. accession to which so many Turkish citizens aspire. Or they might have construed Pamuk's selection as a cultural gain for Muslims generally. Some in the West pointed out that Pamuk had differed with his country's rulers on several occasions, making him one more in the line of literary dissenters rewarded by the Swedish Academy.

Instead, Turkish political and media circles treated Pamuk's Nobel prize as simply another skirmish in their endless war with the ghosts of Armenians killed on their soil during the First World War. Last year, Turkish authorities charged Pamuk with "public denigration of the Turkish identity"—under a law enacted after his alleged insult occurred. The supposed infraction came in comments made in an interview with the Swiss newspaper *Tages Anzeiger* about historic massacres of Armenians and Kurds by the Turkish authorities. At the beginning of 2006 the legal case was dropped, but only, it seems, as a sop to European sensitivities.

The tragedy suffered by up to a million Armenians at the end of Ottoman rule is not contested by serious historians anywhere, including inside Turkey. Pamuk himself exaggerated when he claimed that "nobody but [him] dares talk about" the subject. A Turkish leftist, Taner Akcam, published a lengthy volume on the atrocities against Armenians, *A Shameful Act*, in Turkish in 1999 (now available in English). But Turkish nationalists labeled Pamuk's prize a European reward for his comments on the Armenian question.

It is easy to assert that Turkey has no place in the E.U. because it is Muslim, and that Europe should define itself by its Christian heritage. But would Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, or an independent Kosovo be eternally excluded from the European Union because they have Muslim majority or plurality populations? Very likely not. The truth is that Turkey is handicapped in its approach to Europe much less by its majority faith than by three aspects of its political culture that mainly reflect the legacy of radical secularism. These are the state ideology of Turkishness, the systematic denial of minority ethnic and religious rights, and the excessive influence of the military within the government.

In addition, to be sure, Turkish politics has taken an Islamist tilt in recent years, with the ascent of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, current prime minister and leader of the AK or Justice and Development party. Although opposed to the petrified and crumbling national-secularist heritage, Erdogan's orientation indicates a path of less, rather than more, speed toward full political reform, including individual and minority rights. Erdogan and his colleagues have made some concessions to the European Union—mainly changes in the legal system (they abolished the death penalty) and gestures toward concil-

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iation on occupied Cyprus—but the AK party's enthusiasm for rapid progress soon faded. The latest assessment from the E.U., published last week, chastised Turkey for dragging its feet on Cyprus as well as on the rights of ethnic and religious minorities.

And it's worse than foot-dragging. Turkey has lost ground. The Turkish Republic has adopted, in the last two years, laws regulating speech and written discourse based on an official definition of Turkishness. Turkishness is defined entirely politically, and with reference to historical events. It is officially "anti-Turkish" to engage in frank discussion of the history of the Anatolian Armenians or, one presumes, the standing of the Greek Orthodox Christians in Turkey, represented by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeus. The visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the ecumenical patriarch scheduled for the end of November seems bound to stir new controversy, for the simple reason that his church has almost no rights in Turkey: It cannot operate a seminary or publish religious literature. This is not the European model of mutual respect between faiths (much less the American model of free exercise of religion).

Minority issues further dramatize the distance between the present Turkish style of governance and European principles. Kurds make up at least a fifth of Turkey's population. They are an Indo-European, not a Turkic, people, and their presence in the region, like that of the Greeks and the Armenians, predates the arrival of the Turks. In Turkey, they have produced a notably nasty bunch of terrorists, including the notorious Abdullah Öcalan of the former Kurdistan Workers party or PKK, an extreme Communist group once aligned with the late Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. But most Kurds are no more radical than their co-ethnics in Iraqi Kurdistan, who are exemplary in their moderation.

But apart from token measures of amelioration adopted to please the Europeans, Turkey continues to deny Kurds the right to enjoy their historical cultural and linguistic traditions. Considering how far Spain has gone in recognizing Catalan, Basque, and other minority-language cultures, and the significant gains by the Scots and Welsh in securing political autonomy in the United Kingdom, Turkey has a long way to go before it will satisfy a European criterion on ethnic minorities.

If the situation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the memory of brutalities inflicted on the Armenians are still provocative topics, the condition of another minority in Turkey, the Alevis, is arguably more dramatic in that they are Muslims. Ethnically both Turkish and Kurdish, the Alevis are Sufi-Shia Muslims and comprise as much as one quarter of the population of the republic, around 18 million people.

The religious traditions and social attitudes of the Alevis illustrate the spiritual diversity of the Islamic global community. While reference volumes, including *The CIA World Fact Book*, routinely cite the official Turkish claim that 99 percent of Turks are Sunnis, Alevis do not follow the established precepts of Sunni Islam. Rather, they honor the 12 imams or religious guides of the main Shia sect. Alevi women do not cover themselves, and they participate equally with men in prayer. Alevis worship "truth" (*hakk*) rather than a divine creator, and they believe truth resides in the hearts of all humans. Their devotion represents a synthesis of Turkic pre-Islamic ecstatic religion, transcendental Sufi practice, and protest against worldly injustice. Like other Shia Muslims, they appear more influenced by contact with Christianity than do Sunnis.

Cruelties inflicted on the Alevis in recent years include an incident of mass murder in the Turkish town of Sivas in 1993, when 37 people died in a hotel set on fire by Sunni extremists. The pretext for this lynching was that an Alevi cultural group was meeting to hear an author, Aziz Nesin, who had defended Salman Rushdie's freedom of the pen. Erdogan's AK party includes no Alevis in its leadership, and Alevis believe the prime minister seeks to exclude them from recognition as Muslims.

Under the Erdogan administration, Alevis fear the rise of a new government-backed, Sunni fundamentalism with strong similarities to the official Wahhabi cult in Saudi Arabia—a shocking possibility in Turkey, where Wahhabis were always despised as enemies of the Ottomans. How could a Wahhabization of Turkish Sunnism take place? With frightening ease: If Erdogan empowers a new state Sunnism, it will expose the inadequacy of religious education and the degraded state of theology in Turkey, a result of the nation's secularist heritage—and a gap in religious culture the Wahhabis will handily fill.

That is the typical Wahhabi response to the revival of Islamic feeling under or after secular rule; the pattern has been seen in Algeria, the Balkans, Central Asia, Nigeria, Malaysia, the Caucasus, and Iraq. In most cases the effort at Wahhabization has failed, but only after serious bloodshed. Turkey would be a most tempting prize for the fundamentalists. In any case, the Alevis seem destined to endure second-class citizenship, if not direct oppression, although they are immensely influential in Turkish cultural (especially musical) life. Turkey is bad, and probably getting worse, for Muslim religious minorities like the Alevis, as well as for the much smaller non-Muslim communities. And as we see in Iraq,

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fighting among Muslims can be bloodier than combat between Muslims and non-Muslims.

As if all these barriers to Turkish-European harmonization were not enough, there remains the enormous problem of the Turkish army. Turkey's armed forces are the sole survivor from an earlier era: They still act as guardian of the official national ideology, rooted in the militant secularism of Kemal Atatürk. Like the People's Liberation Army created by Mao Zedong, which attempted to gain power in the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and '70s, and the former Yugoslav army, for which military professionalism was no bar to involvement in genocidal adventures, the Turkish army has repeatedly asserted the right to intervene in politics and to dismiss Turkey's elected leaders by coup. But while the Chinese army would not attempt such a thing today, and the Serbian remnant of the Yugoslav army no longer has the power to do so, the Turkish army still believes it can flex its muscles when it wishes.

The last ideological military establishment in Western Europe, that of ex-Francoist Spain, was definitively removed from any influence over political life a quarter century ago. But the Turkish army erupted into the civil realm as recently as 1997, when it forced the resignation of Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan. Erbakan was an Islamist precursor of Erdogan; but military pressure to remove him did not match the European pattern of democratic accountability. Unless Turkey follows Spain's example and completely separates its army from any direct use of political power, it cannot be considered for E.U. accession. In today's Turkey, separation of the army from the state is even more urgent than maintaining the wall between religion and the state. But how can this be accomplished peacefully? There is little indication the Turkish army will not lash back, once again, to keep its privileges.

Americans may have other objections to Turkish policies today, especially in the aftermath of Ankara's refusal to assist in the liberation of Iraq, and the subsequent explosion of anti-American propaganda in the country. But by contemporary European standards, neither the state Atatürk created, with its militaristic secularism, nor the state that threatens to succeed it, with narrow, militant Sunnism as its foundation, would be welcome. Turkey has profound choices to make, and soon—for the good of its citizens no less than for the satisfaction of Brussels bureaucrats, European politicians, and even its past, present, and future American friends. ♦

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