

## 'Thirteen at table?' from Le Monde (15 April 1987)

**Caption:** On 15 April 1987, the day after Turkey submitted its application for accession to the European Communities, the French daily newspaper Le Monde outlines the obstacles to Turkey's participation in the efforts towards European integration.

**Source:** Le Monde. dir. de publ. FONTAINE, André. 15.04.1987. Paris: Le Monde. "Treize à table?", p. 1.

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## Thirteen at table?

Is the Europe of 12 Member States about to become the Europe of 13? On Tuesday 14 April last, Turkey submitted its application for accession to the EEC in Brussels. There is nothing incongruous about this approach, since the Treaty of Rome provides for any European state to be able to apply for accession to the European Economic Community. Doubtless, the initial effect of this application will be to make more than one European realise that Europe extends far into Asia Minor and that Turkey is both a member of the Council of Europe and an associated state of the EEC.

However, the reply to one question that Ankara has long been preparing to ask is already known: 'It is too soon.' That is the essence of what the EEC Member States will say, while maintaining — to quote the formula adopted by Jean-Bernard Raimond — an attitude that is 'not discouraging'.

Indeed, it is not possible to turn down point-blank an application from a country that is currently sensitive to its relationship with Europe, and which is attempting to achieve a very delicate synthesis between Islam and the West — and, furthermore, a country whose strategic importance is crucial to the Atlantic Alliance.

However, these are major obstacles. Europeans will say that they have not yet digested the accession of Spain and Portugal, countries which had to wait patiently for ten years. Some people will hide behind the categorical opposition of Greece, and that will relieve them of the need to express their own opposition too publicly. In fact, Turkey is not ready either economically or politically to enter the Community 'club'. Its economic structures are those of a developing country that is not yet suitable for incorporation into the Common Market. Its per capita income is well below that of Portugal, and, with a population of 50 million and soaring population growth, it constitutes a much heavier burden than the poorest countries in the EEC.

The other major obstacle is a political one. Some EEC Member States will assert that, before it aspires to EEC membership, Turkey must comply with the European concept of human rights, and that means altering a constitution that punishes people for their beliefs and impedes, among other things, trade-union freedom and freedom of association.

Taking these objections in reverse order, the Turkish Prime Minister, Turgut Özal, claims that his country's application will instigate a dynamic that will specifically lead to their removal — in his view, it will give new impetus to the economy and consolidate the process of democratisation.

Behind him in this approach Mr Özal has, just after the elections, an overwhelming majority of Turks who see his gesture as a national challenge to a Europe that is traditionally hostile. Nonetheless, the Turkish press has recently stressed the ambiguity of the government vision which emphasises the material benefits and avoids addressing the underlying issues.

The Turkish daily *Yeni Gündem* notes both the radical differences between Turkey and the other countries of the Middle East and the disparities between a society that is traditionally Islamic and a European heritage based on personal values. As one commentator writes, 'We arrive at the gates of Europe, the guard asks for our identity papers, and all we can say is that the old papers are no longer valid and that we have not yet got the new ones.'