


# if Turkey, why not Russia?

Photo by osipovva 

During the Crimean War 160 years ago, there was much disquiet in Britain – that we were allied with Moslem Turkey fighting Christian Orthodox Russia. It just didn't seem right.

Now we find ourselves in a similar strange position – following the Syrian refugee crisis, the stalled Turkish EU accession talks appear on the surface to have been brought out of the cold store, but no one is advocating that Russia joins the EU.

Of course, such a suggestion would provoke outrage in the Baltic States, who fear a repeat of the recent troubles in Ukraine. Poland and the Czech Republic would be none too keen either.

On the other hand, Greece has had long-standing issues over more than a century with Turkey and recently over Cyprus, which is still divided into Greek and Turkish sections. Likewise, Serbia is being courted as a possible Member state, even though it fought a war with Croatia less than 25 years ago. If the EU is so keen to bring peace to the Balkans and to Cyprus, why does it take a different approach to Russia? Is Germany really so keen on any of these peace proposals? Its behaviour in the Ukraine and in the Balkans would suggest otherwise.

There are, admittedly, many obstacles to Turkish membership besides Cyprus – notably France and Austria. Memories linger in Vienna, which saw a Turkish army at its gates in 1683.

Of course, Turkey has changed a lot since 1683. The Ottoman Empire came to an end in 1918 and was followed by the era of Kemal Atatürk, a former army officer who sought to transform his country into a modern, secular, democratic republic.

Turkey joined NATO in 1952 and applied to join the European Union in 1987. However, since then, Turkey has changed once again. The secularists have given way to the Islamist AKP Party led by the current president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. He is known to have links with a controversial Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen, who has openly called for the dismantling of the secular Turkish state in favour of an Islamic Republic. This process seems to be under way, whatever the president may say.

In 2007, three Christians were murdered by Islamic extremists in the Zirve Publishing House, based in Malatya. One was a German missionary; the others were Turks who had converted from Islam to Christianity. No one has yet been convicted of their murder. However, shortly after this atrocity, the former Foreign Secretary William Hague reiterated his support for Turkey to join the EU. Last month, in an international football match between Turkey and Greece, attempts to hold a minute's silence in memory of the victims of the Paris massacre were disrupted by some Turkish fans who booed and shouted "Allahu Akbar". Nonetheless, our Prime Minister is still keen for Turkey to join the EU.

No one would claim that Russia is a paragon of virtue in comparison. Its democracy is flawed – indeed, Vladimir Putin has ruthlessly silenced a number of his most vocal opponents. The Kremlin is suspected of involvement in the murder of Alexander Litvinenko, a former KGB Agent who was killed by Polonium poisoning in London in 2006. The chaos in the years following the demise of the Soviet Union resulted in the rise of a number of fantastically rich oligarchs whose fortune was gained by knowing the right people at the time when state-owned businesses were being sold off.

Nevertheless, Russia today is not the USSR. Russians have far greater freedom to travel abroad and atheism is no longer the state religion. Indeed, the Russian Orthodox church has made a comeback to the extent that even Mr Putin has a personal

confessor – Archimandrite Tikhon Shevkunov. It is also no longer committed to spreading the poisonous ideology of Marxism-Leninism throughout the world. In short, for all its faults Russia today is far closer culturally than Turkey to some countries already admitted to the EU – notably Bulgaria and to a lesser extent, Greece and Cyprus.

This is not to suggest that Russia ought to join the EU – indeed, no one who understands the nature of its superstate aspirations would wish EU membership on its worst enemy. Nor can one ignore the unpleasant nature of Mr Putin's régime, but why is the West trying to provoke the Russian bear? It was the EU that pulled the plug on discussions about closer trading relationship and the EU which fermented much of the recent unrest in Ukraine.

With the rise of Daesh, Isil or call them whatever you will, one thing is clear:- Russia is totally committed to its destruction. Turkey, on the other hand, has been somewhat ambivalent. Indeed, it has been accused of facilitating the sale of oil in areas under Daesh control, with fingers being pointed at no less a person than the President's son Bilal. Naturally, Ankara has denied these rumours, but if one is forced to decide between which of the two "sons of a bitch" ought to be "our son of a bitch", the case for choosing Turkey isn't very convincing.