

Will Turkey ever join the EU?

A couple of years ago, the answer to this question would have been an unequivocal “no”. Austrian opposition, along with a commitment by the French government to offer its citizens a referendum on the subject virtually ensured that the stalled accession talks would never get anywhere.

Since the refugee crisis, however, Turkish membership has begun to appear less implausible than it previously appeared. Firstly, last month, the European Parliament voted to make Turkish an official language of the EU. This is only a small step, but nonetheless an indication of support for this predominantly Islamic nation, with a population of some 80 million people, eventually joining the 28-member bloc.

After a long history of Conservative Party support for Turkey, it is encouraging that David Davies, the former Home Secretary, has expressed grave concerns. ““In supporting Turkish membership – a country with a porous border with Iraq, Iran and Syria – the EU is hardly helping British national security”, he said.

It is quite astonishing that the EU seems so willing to accede to Turkish requests. It is true that numbers of migrants crossing from Turkey into Greece have fallen since the deal between the EU and Turkey agreed in March, which allows migrants to be deported back to Turkey. However why is the EU so keen for Turkey to join? You do not have to be an expert in Turkish affairs to be aware that the secular Turkey of Kemal Atatürk has given way to a more pronouncedly Islamic country under the government of President Erdogan. The country is facing a violent insurrection from Kurdish separatists and what is more, only a tiny percentage of the Turkish landmass is actually in Europe anyway.

The support of successive UK governments makes even less

sense. The accession of a country with such a large population would of necessity reduce our voting power in the Council of Ministers. Given the huge disparity between the UK's view of the world and Turkey's, it is hard to imagine that we would find Turkey to be an ally within the Council. We are already outvoted more than any other country – and this by member states whose values are less removed from ours than Turkey's.

The only real beneficiaries will be those big businesses relying on cheap labour. It was Spain and Portugal who provided unskilled workers in the 1990s, with the former Eastern Bloc countries being the main source since 2004, but with demand seemingly insatiable, another source has to be found. As Nigel Moore has pointed out, the UK is being turned into a low-wage economy because of the influx of so many unskilled EU migrants. Using these people is a cheap, unimaginative way of making a profit, whereas instead we should be looking to create highly skilled jobs for our own countrymen. This in turn would create a better, less crowded environment.

Nonetheless, Turkey's prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu continues to put pressure on the EU and the EU continues to give way. He warned the migrant swap deal with the EU risks collapse unless visa restrictions are lifted on Turkish nationals by June as planned. At the moment, the official line is that these people will only be allowed to travel within the Schengen area, but John Redwood has raised doubts as to whether we will be able to prevent them coming into the UK – or indeed, whether the Government even wants to .

While it is true that some sort of deal had to be reached with Turkey because of the migration issue, reading between the lines, the EU does seem finally, in its usual style, to be turning the migration issue into yet another beneficial crisis – at least, beneficial for big companies that pull the strings in Brussels and who want more cheap labour.

Furthermore, as EU observer reports, it is being used as an excuse for member states to be forced to give up control of migration policy to the EU – something which, thankfully, is likely to face strong resistance from some Eastern bloc countries.

Many obstacles still lie in the way of Turkish accession, but Brexit, even if it required us to accept the EEA free movement principle, would still – thanks to the additional tools available under the EEA agreement – enable us to distance ourselves further from its effects. Indeed, with one advocate of Turkish membership removed from the EU, the accession process may slow sufficiently for us to create a Europe-wide Free Trade area without free movement of people to replace the EEA before the Turks finally join.