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**Research Report**

## Is Turkey still an emigration country?

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Hamburg Institute  
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Economics



# Is Turkey still an Emigration Country?

Secil Pacaci Elitok, Thomas Straubhaar

HWWI Policy  
Paper 3-15

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# Is Turkey still an Emigration Country?

**Secil Pacaci Elitok and Thomas Straubhaar**

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Located at the geographical intersection between East and West, with both Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts, Turkey was always a country with large movements of people. There were several waves of forced (ethnic) movement of people as a consequence of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the following nation-building process in the Turkish neighborhood.

In the post-Second world war period, Turkey became a country of emigration. In 1961 a bilateral agreement on labor recruitment between Turkey and Germany had been signed. In the following years, similar bilateral agreements were reached with a couple of other European countries (Austria, Belgium, France, the Netherland and Sweden).

Nowadays, things have changed. Turkey is still a country of emigration. But it has also become a country of immigration and transit.<sup>1</sup> And therefore, it faces similar challenges of migration and integration that are characteristic for areas with strong cross-cultural movements of people.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, we concentrate on the emigration flows.

## 1. A Look Back

In the times of the “Gastarbeiter” system of the 1960s until the early 1970s about 800.000 Turkish workers were recruited to Western Europe.<sup>3</sup> After the economic turbulences as a consequence of the first Oil crisis Western European countries stopped the recruitment of non-EC-workers. However, those already working in the European Community (EC) could stay and many would even allowed the right to family reunification. Thus, the number of

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<sup>1</sup> See: Transatlantic Academy: Getting to Zero: Turkey, its Neighbors and the West. Washington DC, June 2010 ([www.transatlanticacademy.org](http://www.transatlanticacademy.org)), and İçduygu, Ahmet and Sert, Deniz, Türkei. Focus Migration Länderprofil. Nr.5, April 2009. HWWI, Hamburg, [http://www.focus-migration.de/Tuerkei\\_Update\\_04\\_2.6026.0.html](http://www.focus-migration.de/Tuerkei_Update_04_2.6026.0.html).

<sup>2</sup> See: Tolay, Juliette: Turkey’s Other Multicultural Debate: Lessons for the EU. Annual Sakip Sabanci International Research Award Winning Lecture. Istanbul, June 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Still the best analysis of the Guest Worker Program is: Martin, Philip L.: The Unfinished Story: Turkish Labour Migration to Western Europe, with Special Reference to the Federal Republic of Germany. ILO, Geneva 1991; for a more recent and more general evaluation of the Guest Worker System see Martin Philip L.: Managing Labor Migration in the Twenty-first Century. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2006.

people with a Turkish background living in the European Union (EU) has further increased to about 2.74 million in 2008 (see Table 1).

In recent decades there have been five main types of emigration of Turkish citizens to the EU area: “family-related emigration; asylum-seeking; irregular (undocumented or clandestine) labor emigration; contract-related (low-skilled) labor emigration; and emigration of professional and highly-skilled people”.<sup>4</sup>

*Table 1: Turkish Migrant Stock Abroad in 1985 and 2008 (in million)*

	1985	in % of Total	1995	in % of Total	2008	in % of Total
Germany	1.40	59	2.05	62	1.89	56
Total Europe	1.99	84	2.84	86	2.74	81
Middle East	0.20	8	0.13	4	0.11	3
Ex Soviet Union	0	0	0.05	2	0.08	2
Total	2.36	100	3.31	100	3.38	100

Source: İçduygu, Ahmet. *Turkey and International Migration 2008 (SOPEMI Report for TURKEY 2008/09)*. Istanbul, 2009 (mimeo), table 20.

As can be seen from Table 1 about 3.38 million people with Turkish background live outside Turkey today, 40% more than in 1985. By far most Turkish citizens have gone to Germany, where about 1,9 million people with Turkish background live, nowadays. While the total has not changed a lot since the mid-1990s, the geographical distribution has become different. In the mid-1990s about 86% of Turks living abroad were in Europe. This share has declined to about 80% today.

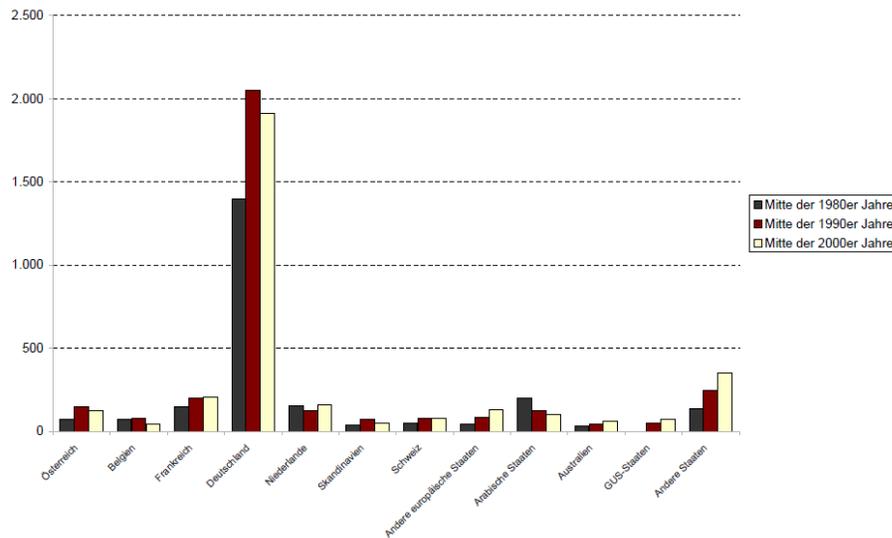
Migration flows to Europe are down to 50-60,000 a year. Overwhelmingly they occur through family formation or family reunification. As reported by the German Federal Statistical Office (Destatis) on the basis of provisional results, 30.000 persons from Turkey immigrated to Germany in 2009 and 40.000 people have left Germany with the destination “Turkey”. Hence, the migration balance has changed its sign and more people migrate from Germany to Turkey, than people migrate from Turkey to Germany.<sup>5</sup>

More Turkish citizens have gone to the countries of the former Soviet Union. However, compared to the total, the emigration flows to the close neighborhood have remained very small. This is also true for the emigration flows from Turkey to the Middle East. Only about 3% of all Turkish citizens living abroad have gone to the Middle East.

<sup>4</sup> İçduygu, Ahmet: *Turkey and International Migration 2008 (SOPEMI Report for TURKEY 2008/09)*, Istanbul, 2009 (mimeo), page 9.

<sup>5</sup> German Federal Statistical Office (Destatis): Level of immigration into Germany increasing again in 2009. *Press release No.185 / 2010-05-26*; Wiesbaden. The data include German pensioners (“snow birds”) and also the return of Germans with Turkish background to their country of birth (i.e. Turkey). Thus, the change in the stock of people with a Turkish background living in Germany might not correspond to these flow data!

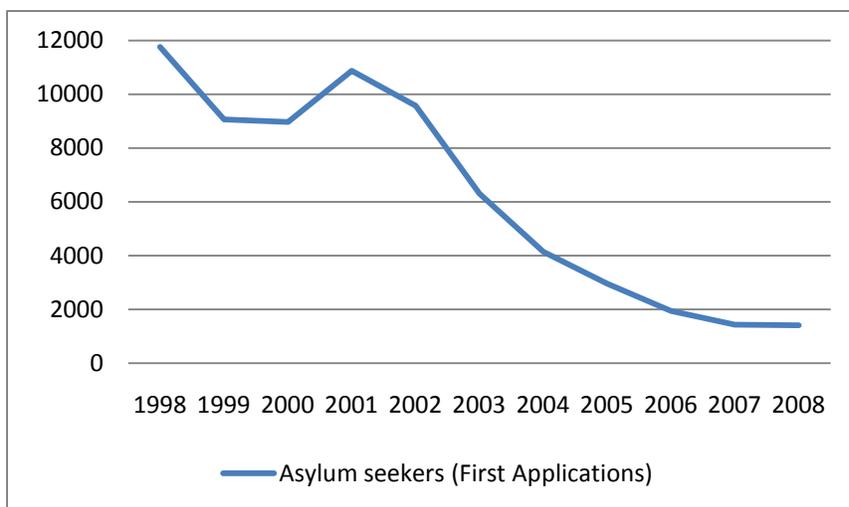
Figure 1: Where have Turkish citizens gone? Turkish Migrant Stock Abroad (in Thousands)



Source: İçduygu, Ahmet and Sert, Deniz: Türkei. Focus Migration Länderprofil. Nr. 5, April 2009, HWWI, Hamburg, page 8, figure 2.

Interestingly enough, the asylum channel, heavily and controversially debated in the EU and especially in Germany in the 1990s, does not play an important role anymore. Just as an example, figure 2 shows the strongly declining number of asylum seekers with Turkish origin in Germany in the last decade.

Figure 2: Asylum seekers with Turkish origin in Germany 1998-2008



Data Source: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF): Asyl in Zahlen 2008. Nürnberg, 2009

([http://www.bamf.de/cln\\_101/nn\\_441594/DE/DasBAMF/Statistik/statistik-node.html?\\_nnn=true](http://www.bamf.de/cln_101/nn_441594/DE/DasBAMF/Statistik/statistik-node.html?_nnn=true)) and Asyl in Zahlen 2007.

## 2. A Look Ahead

What will be the size of the Turkish migration potential to the EU and especially Germany in the future? The answer to this question depends on two factors: the individual behavior (i.e. the willingness to emigrate) on the micro level and on the size and development of the population on the macro level.

### 2.1 Theoretical Expectations

The necessary condition for the existence of a migration potential is the individual willingness of people to migrate. Therefore, at the micro level it is the individual utility function that determines the propensity to migrate. The higher (lower) the average individual migration propensity is, the higher (lower) is the migration potential.

Individual utility function means that individuals compare the utility levels (that they expect to reach with their own individual options, (financial) abilities and skills) of either the actual place of stay or every alternative place. Thereby, "utility" is defined in the broadest possible way. It means basically "standard of living". It contains economic (material) factors (such as income, employment possibilities, purchasing power and others), and non-economic (immaterial) factors (such as seniority, social acceptance, cultural well behavior, language and others) as well.

A useful migration model has to include the possibility of migration flows being determined by relative deprivation (i.e. the motivation to reach a relatively better position within the social ranking of a reference group). In this perspective, the migration decision is an effective strategy to improve a person's income position relative to others in the person's reference group, and, consequently, it differs accordingly to the perceived relative deprivation.

Furthermore, migration models have to cope with the analysis of family migration (or a joint group of migrants and non-migrants) as opposed to individual migration. Migration-decision is often an intra group interaction within a cooperative-game framework. In this view, migration is a calculated strategic behavior that yields a higher payoff to anyone of the family members than a non-migration alternative. Within such a framework it becomes possible to consider the issue of risk in migration decision-making. By sending one of the members abroad, the family's income portfolio is more broadly distributed. For some families, therefore, international migration becomes an optimal strategy to reduce the risks of income earning.

Migration models have to understand migration as a process of innovation, adoption and diffusion. Why are some individuals quicker to migrate than others? An answer to that question is related to the problem of risk and the possibilities of lowering it, which opens the field of research to the inclusion of lags in the migration process. If relatives, friends or other people from the country of potential future emigration have moved to another country in a previous period, information about the destination country will flow back to the place of origin. This information will reduce the uncertainty of subsequent emigration for those remaining. If such information increases the probability of migrating, we could assume that individuals with this additional information would be quicker to respond to

the emergence of the expectation of higher utility in some destination countries – a potential answer to the question why some people move faster than others.

Finally, migration models have to acknowledge that immobility has an economic value. It allows people to use their specifically local know-how for earning an income (i.e. mainly on the labour market) and for spending that income (consumption decisions). This specifically local know-how cannot be transferred. It would be lost in the case of migration and would have to be acquired once more at the new place of residence. Precisely this value of immobility explains why most people prefer to stay even if “to go” seems to be an attractive alternative at first glance. For most people, however, the second glance clearly shows that the value of immobility is higher than the expected net present value of a move abroad. Consequently, it is a very rational individual behaviour to stay. The *large majority* of people want to live, work and stay immobile where they have their roots. People prefer the status quo to an unfamiliar or insecure change. The simple abolishment of legal impediments to migration is usually insufficient to overcome individual (microeconomic, social and cultural) obstacles to migration and to overshoot the value of immobility.

For a macro analysis of the migration potential, individual behavior has to get into an aggregated function. This is done by taking into account the population size of a country. The migration potential is (*ceteris paribus*) the larger (smaller), the larger (smaller) the population size is.

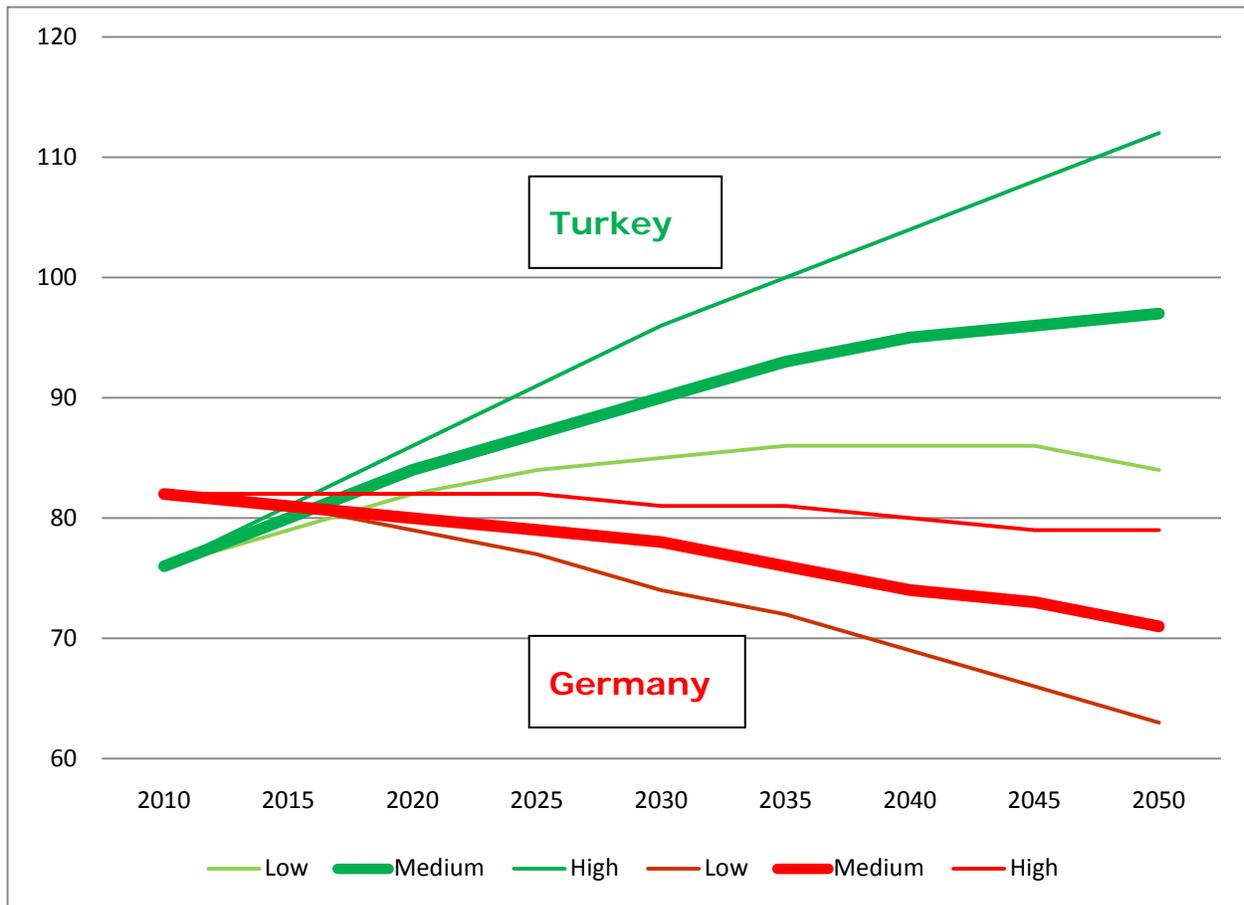
## 2.2 Empirical Considerations

If we take the most important macroeconomic factors causing migration, we might end up with population development and standard of living differences. They allow to stylize the migration pattern to be expected between Turkey and Europe in the next decades.

On the one hand, the EU is facing the challenge of an ageing problem together with low fertility rates and declining working populations. On the other hand, Turkey’s population grows fast.

Figure 3 shows the projections of population developments for Germany and Turkey over the next forty years. It becomes clear that while in Germany population is expected to decline, in Turkey it will increase. Therefore in Turkey, the population development might lead to an excess supply of labor and in Germany; it might lead to an excess demand for labor. Taken together that will stimulate incentives to migrate from Turkey to Germany.

Figure 3: Population Projections for Germany and Turkey 2010 to 2050

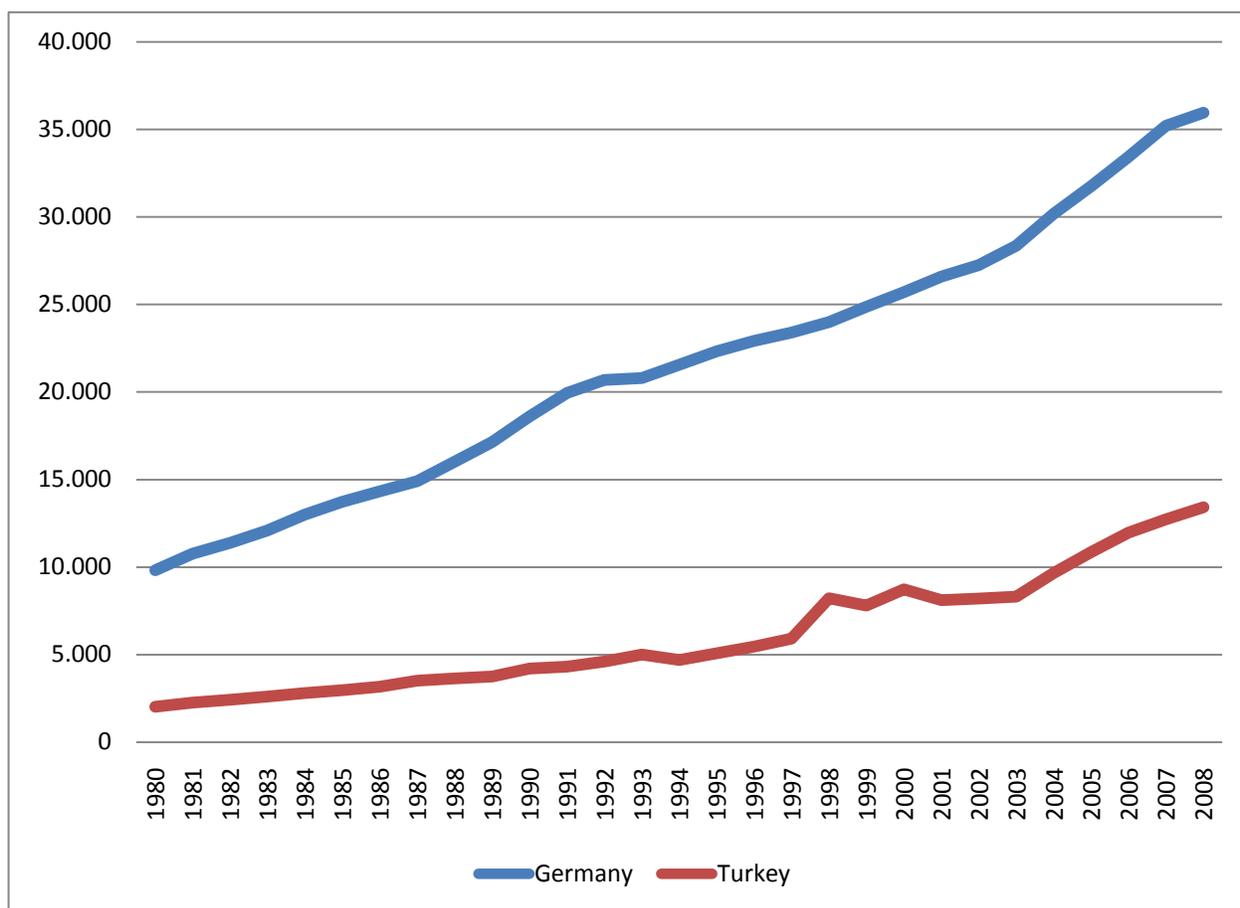


Data Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>.

Analysing the differences in the average standard of living as another crucial determinant of migration, one aspect is of special importance. The individual reaction on differences in the average standard of living or the average income per capita does not follow a linear function. Rather, it behaves logarithmically. This means that the individual migration propensity is stronger in the case of larger income gaps but becomes weaker in the case of smaller income gaps. Individual migration propensity might even land at a saturation border that will reduce incentives to migrate long before an equalisation of incomes is achieved. Thus, the speed of change is important. It makes a big difference whether the income gap is declining rapidly or not.

Figure 4 shows the rather wide gap in the average standard of living between Turkey and Germany by comparing the per capita GDP measured in purchasing power parities US-\$. The gap has declined. In 1980 the GDP per capita in Turkey reached about 20% of the German GDP per capita. Today, it reaches about 37%.

Figure 4: Per Capita GDP (in Purchasing Power Parities US-\$)\* in Turkey and Germany, 1980 to 2008

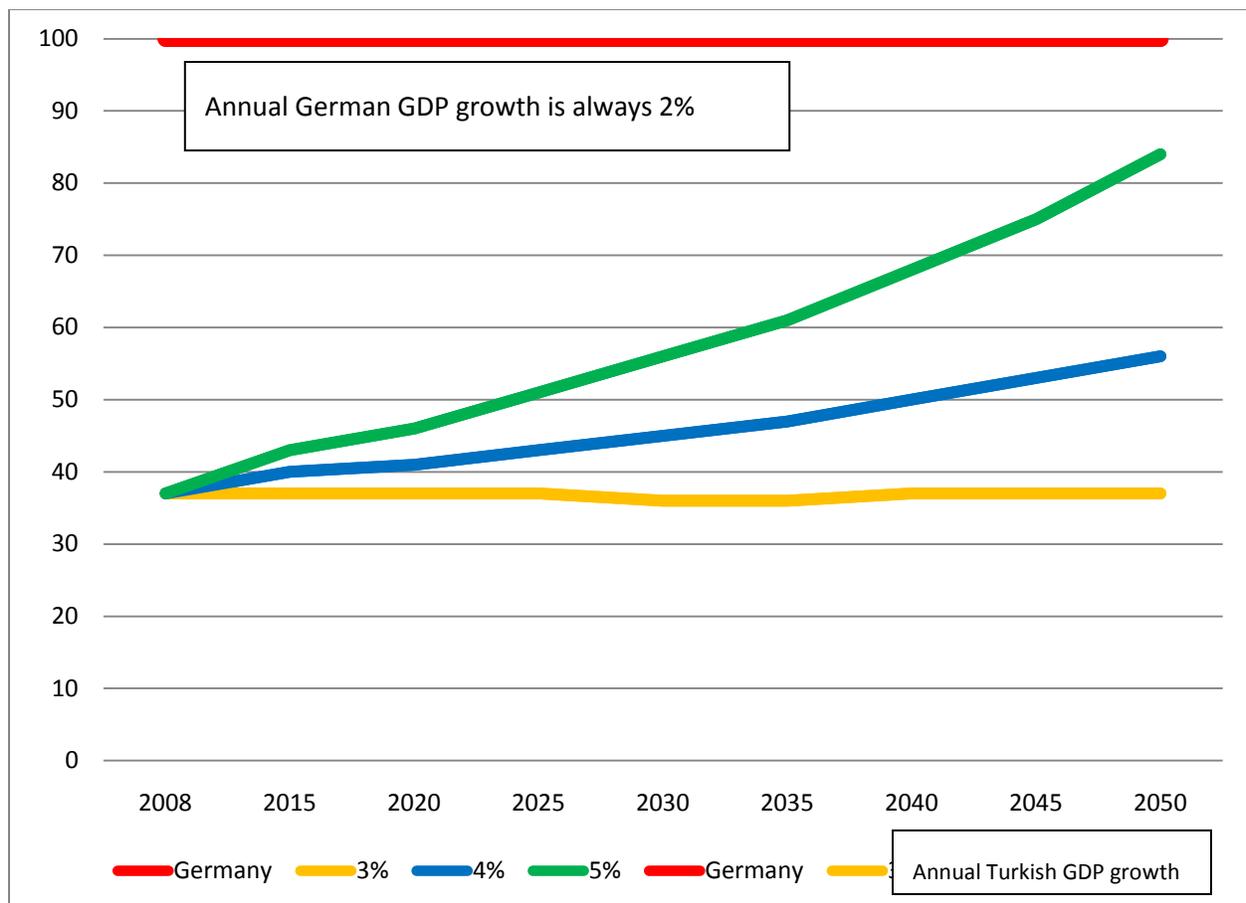


\*In this figure Purchasing Power Parity US-\$ have been used to reflect the standard of living and its difference between Turkey and Germany.

Data Source: World Bank: World Development Indicators.

Just to show, how long a catching up process will last; figure 5 reflects a simple simulation exercise. It is assumed that in the next decades the GDP in Turkey will grow faster than the German GDP. The simulation shows that under this assumption that the German GDP grows with a constant rate of 2% per year, the Turkish GDP has to grow by 3% to keep the existing gap of the GDP per capita vis-à-vis Germany stable. The more rapid growth of Turkish GDP is just needed to compensate for the more rapid Turkish population growth. If the Turkish economy grows by 4% per year (and the German GDP stays by 2% per year) the Turkish GDP per capita will reach half the size of the German GDP per capita by 2040. If it grows even with 5% per year the 2:1 gap is reached by 2025. The simulation exercise is just supposed to make it clear, how long a quiet substantial gap of the average standard of living will persist between Germany and Turkey, even if the Turkish economy is growing (much) faster than the German one.

Figure 5: Simulation of the Gap in Per Capita GDP (in Purchasing Power Parities US-\$)\* between Turkey and Germany, 2008 to 2050 under the assumption of different annual growth rates for the GDP



\*In this figure Purchasing Power Parity US-\$ have been used to reflect the standard of living and its difference between Turkey and Germany.  
Data Source: World Bank: World Development Indicators.

### 3. What Should Be Expected?

It is no question. Regarding the diverse population developments in Turkey and in the EU – with a fast growing population in Turkey and a declining and aging population in the EU – and taking into account the gap in the average standard of living, there is a strong potential for strong migration flows from Turkey to the EU. This is one (and probably one of the most important) reason, why some EU countries (especially Germany and Austria) are concerned about applying the right of free movement in the case of Turkish workers. Are these fears justified by theoretical expectations or empirical evidence?

Several econometric studies have attempted to estimate the migration potential from Turkey into the EU. They can be categorized into two groups. One group of studies has used surveys and has evaluated these surveys to conclude about future trends in

migration. Another group of studies has applied econometrical methods to forecast the migration potential.

While polls and surveys are very popular they are not very reliable in forecasting the migration potential. "Migration intention" is a complicated concept whose measurement is fairly complex. Due to the subjectivity of the concept and its sensitivity to time, most of the surveys suffer from definitional absences. One of the main drawbacks of opinion polls and individual surveys is the biased impact of the questionnaire on the flow of answers. Hence, especially in the surveys, the distinction between the "intention" and "act" itself must be clearly underlined. Estimations depending on opinion pools are used to forecast the amount of expected migration flows.

In econometric models several approaches are utilized in estimating the amount of potential migration. Error correction models test for the equilibrium in the long run in which part of the population has the potential to migrate. Gravity models analyze annual migration potential via various explanatory variables such as stock of existing migrants in the country, income discrepancies, unemployment rate differentials etc. Based on earlier migration experiences, extrapolation models are constructed for the forecasting purposes.

The main methodological difficulty for all of these approaches lies in the fundamental political and institutional change that goes along with a Turkish accession to the EU. Turkey becoming a member of the EU and being granted the right of free movement for Turkish workers means doubtlessly a unique experience with no historical blue print at all. Thus, if there is a case where the famous Lucas-critique is well applied, it comes with the changes an EU membership for Turkey would generate.<sup>6</sup> The methodological key questions are: how far can we (1) use experiences in the past to learn something for the future and (2) speculate about the migration potential from Turkey to the EU after such a fundamental change from strong to no restrictions has taken place?

Briefly summarizing the existing empirical evidence from all the different studies shortly indicated in box 1, one thing becomes very clear: The estimations present broadly varying numbers. Figures with respect to volume of potential Turkish migrants from Turkey to the EU range between 0.5 to 4.4 million. It is sufficient to say that the literature lacks an agreement on a reasonable interval with a minimum and a maximum value. The wideness of the range is rather large and quite sensitive to the data sets and methodologies that are applied, which brings the reliability of numbers into discussion.

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<sup>6</sup> The Lucas-critique is "that any change in policy will systematically alter the structure of econometric models. ... (This conclusion) is fundamental; for it implies that comparisons of the effects of alternative policy rules using current macro econometric models are invalid regardless of the performance of these models over the sample period or in ex ante short-term forecasting." Lucas, Robert E.: *Econometric Policy Evaluation: A Critique*, in: Karl Brunner and Allan H. Meltzer (eds.): *Carnegie-Rochester Conference Series on Public Policy*, Vol. 1, 1976, p. 41. The Lucas-critique refers to the level of consistency and invariance over time and space. It is about the correctness of an extrapolation from past migration patterns to expected migration behaviour and it is about the possibilities of applying empirical migration experiences from one area to another. Some scholars try to overcome this fundamental methodological problem by the inclusion of so-called country-specific effects. In most econometric forecasts the country-specific aspects are captured by a country-specific intercept which remains constant over time. However, it remains more than crucial how the country-specific intercept is defined and applied to Turkey that has had no historical experience of free migration to Europe.

**Box 1: Survey over Different Empirical Studies Estimating the Migration Potential from Turkey to the EU under the Conditions of Free Migration**

*Togan* (2002) makes a forecast of free Turkish migration to Germany. He concludes that the Turkish immigrant population starts out at about 2.2 million in 2000 and reaches about 3.5 million in 2030 under the assumption of zero restriction on migration.

His findings are confirmed by *Flam* (2003).

*Lejour et al.* (2004) expect that 2.7 million people will permanently move from Turkey to the EU in the longer term. The majority of these people will settle in Germany, where Turks have settled in the past as well.

*Erzan et al.* (2006) estimate that net migration from Turkey to the EU-15 over the period 2004-2030 is between 1 and 1.2 million foreseeing a successful accession period with high growth and free mobility starting 2015. According to another scenario under the low growth rates accompanied by non-free movement, *Erzan et al.* (2006) **estimate that emigration flows from Turkey in 2030 exceeds 2.7 million.**

*Quasier and Repegather* (2004) forecast, in the absence of transition periods and with full application of free movement as from 2013, the long term potential migration from Turkey to Germany at 4.4 million.

*Krieger and Maitre* (2006) predict a migration potential of 3.03 million.

References:

Erzan, R., Kuzubas U. and N.Yildiz (2006): Immigration Scenarios: Turkey-EU. *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 7. No 1, 33-44.

Flam, H. (2003): Turkey and the EU: Politics and Economics of Accession. CESIFO Working Paper No 893.

Krieger, H. and B. Maitre (2006): Migration Trends in an Enlarging European Union. *Turkish Studies*. Vol. 7, No 1, 45-66.

Lejour, A. M, R.A. de Mooij and C. H. Capel (2004): Assessing the Economic Implications of Turkish Accession to the EU. CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, No 56.

Quasier, W. and A. Repegather (2004): EU- Beitrittsreife der Türkei und Konsequenzen einer EU-Mitgliedschaft. Osteuropa Institut München, Working Paper, No 252.

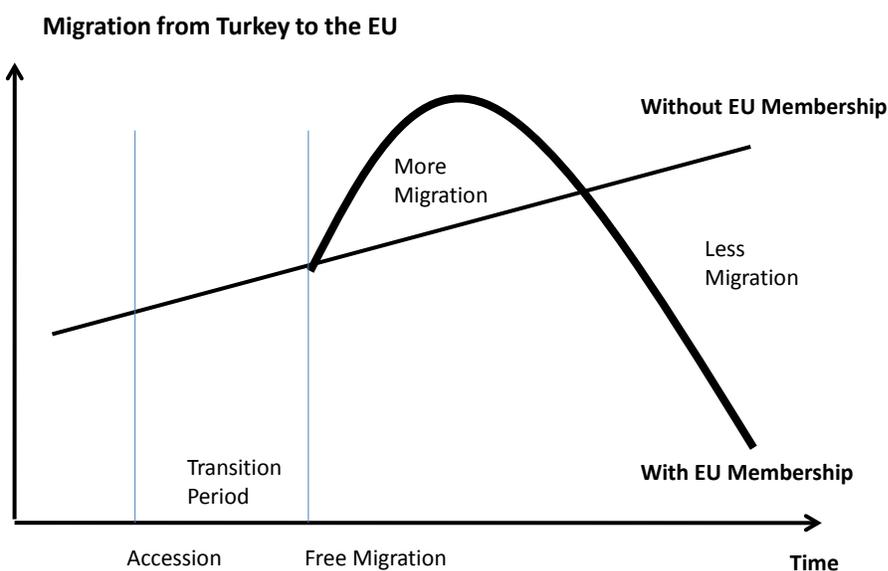
Togan, S. (2004): Turkey: Toward EU Accession. *World Economy*, Vol. 27, No 7, 1013-1045

Forecasting the approximate volume of potential migration is quite necessary especially for policy makers. However such controversial studies are not sufficient. One should be cautious when approaching the estimation literature since the range is rather wide, the quality of the data is poor and the methodologies are unclear and inconsistent. Moreover, the focus of the debate should rather shift to the profile, the structure, the dynamics, the regional distribution, trends and mechanisms of potential migration flows and to the motivation of migrants to come to Europe.

Actually, the question is not so much, how many Turkish workers would take use of the right to move freely. The right question is: how many **more** (or even less) would move compared to a situation with no right of free movement. *Erzan et al.* (2006) show that if Turkey's membership process is endangered and high growth cannot be sustained, 2.7 million people may be penetrating the EU-15 despite the restrictions on the labor mobility. This is more than in a scenario with a Turkish EU membership and free movement for Turkish workers. Thus, it is not unrealistic to expect, that under the lack of

full EU membership and free movement of labor, Turkish migration flows towards the EU will be even at higher levels. The migration experience after the Eastern enlargement has shown that the actual migration flows are fairly below the expected levels, following the accession. It might be, that something like a migration hump will be the most realistic scenario (see figure 6). There will be an increase of migration flows firstly, just after the right of free movement is granted. But after a while, it will decrease.

Figure 6: The Migration Hump



Source: Martin, Philip, Trade and Migration: NAFTA and AGRICULTURE. Washington (Institute for International Economics) 1993, page 136.

What we have learnt from the EU experience in the past is that if labor has the legal right to move freely, this makes people (especially in border areas) more mobile internationally, but it does not in itself induce mass migration from one country to another. People's social and cultural ties to their local environment are an important obstacle to migration which has commonly been underestimated from the perspective of theoretical economics and has not been taken into account seriously enough in the structural migration (forecasting) models.

On the *macroeconomic* level international labor migration within the common EU labor market has proved to be mainly *demand-determined*: it usually depends to a major extent on the needs and employment opportunities in the *immigration* countries. In the EU, trade has reacted much faster and more elastically to economic integration than labor. The removal of formal and informal protectionist impediments led to a strong increase in intra-community trade. The equalization of goods and factor prices expected by

arguments of the international economic theory thus materialized through trade rather than through the increased mobility of labor. To an important degree, *trade has replaced the economic demand for migration* in the EU. In brief: having the option to migrate within a common labor market has turned out to be the most effective anti-migration policy!

#### 4. Conclusions

Due to migration network effects dependants and relatives of Turkish migrants living in the EU already will have a high probability to migrate to the EU as Turkey becomes part of the EU. The number of student migrants (which is already high because of exchange programs) will have a tendency to increase since students tend to integrate more easily because they are younger and they are not confronted with insurmountable language obstacles. With respect to labor migration, flows will take place at every skill level. Emigration and also remigration of high-skilled Turkish workers will become more distinct. Ethnically discriminated groups' potential to migrate may have a decreasing trend under the new regulations of the EU that are protecting their rights as well. Finally, circular migration will be the new form of immigration flows due to the free mobility.

These arguments create expectations for rather strong migration flows. However, there are some other factors that moderate at least partly these expectations. Along with being integrated in the EU some strong growth stimulating impacts might improve substantially the average standard of living. The removal of obstacles to trade and the integration of international finance markets make trade in goods and services easier. It makes capital and know-how more mobile internationally. Labor migration thus becomes increasingly dependent on the progressive liberalization of trade in goods and services and the international mobility of capital.

Interestingly enough, it is not only the level of the standard of living but also the improvement that influences the individual migration decision. If people expect that life is going better in their home country and that at least their children will have better options they might stay even if they could improve their standard of living in the short run by migrating.

Push and pull factors behind the potential migration are of great importance. With the possible membership to the EU, Turkey should consider revising these factors in its historical context so as to find policy solutions to eliminate the pushing factors and improve the pulling ones. Considering the low wages and high unemployment as the main pushing factors behind the potential for labor migration, Turkey can develop policy measures to deal with these issues. This, inevitably, requires structural and institutional reforms that are stabilizing the Turkish economy. Better living standards which are closer to the EU average would decrease the motivation of Turks to migrate towards Europe. EU membership helps to reach this goal. Therefore, EU membership might not provoke more but rather less migration from Turkey to the EU.

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