

## ENDURING RELATIONSHIPS

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I think we tend to forget what underlies the whole process of the negotiations. The basic consideration is the linking of the future of a people that has a vast and treasured cultural heritage with the fortunes of many other European peoples, each of which has partially surrendered its sovereignty and agreed to abide by an ‘Acquis Communautaire’, so that all of them may develop economically in peace and harmony.

In Turkey’s case perhaps the process is in danger of being misguided. While a fair number of Turkish people perceive themselves as being put upon or that the Commission negotiators are patronizing them, there are more than a few Europeans, mostly middle-aged and older, who continue to contend that the cultural differences are too great for there to be any real chance of a successful union of all the peoples involved. Turkey may be secularized, they concede with difficulty, but it is hard to give credit to the vision of the several Turkish peoples integrating within the European Union without this giving rise to considerable cultural turmoil – at both ends of the spectrum.

Daring to approach the question outside the various political boxes, I venture to postulate that whether the negotiations ever draw to a satisfactory conclusion or not is not the priority issue. What matters above all is the formation of a lasting and esteemed relationship between the Turkish and all the other European peoples.

To create this relationship will be much simpler than most of us imagine – provided that we do our best to follow what I have the temerity to call the *Guiding Principle of Goodwill*. This entails deliberately putting aside all thoughts and memories of the things, philosophies and past events that have divided us or our ancestors. Distinct efforts have to be exerted instead to remind ourselves of the cultural affinities we have with the other person and/or their people as a whole and, above all, the similarities between our several spiritual codes.

When we evaluate social, economic or political relationships, we have to confess to ourselves that we prefer to develop them with persons we respect. Therefore, if we recognise that there are affinities between their and our cultural values and spiritual beliefs, the basis is already laid for the development of what may become a relationship based on mutual understanding and esteem.

In Nigeria in the middle of the last century, I was walking to meet a merchant at around four in the afternoon. I came upon him sitting in good shade with his back against a tree. Facing away from me he was reading and meditating out loud. “I am glad that Thou art Thou” he said. As a God-loving person myself, it was impossible for me not to feel kinship with that merchant. The nominal difference of our religions was irrelevant.

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