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Pope supports Turkey's entry into European Union

By **Ian Fisher and Sabrina Tavernise** / The New York Times

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ANKARA: Pope Benedict XVI came to Turkey on Tuesday carrying a surprise gesture of goodwill that could blunt much of the Muslim anger against him: Publicly reversing his own personal objections, the pope gave his blessing to Turkey's deep and long- stalled desire to join the European Union.

"I asked his support for our membership in the European Union," the Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, told reporters after a brief, last- minute meeting with Benedict at the airport here. "The pope said they did not have the political power to interfere but said they would like to see Turkey as a member."

The Vatican does not play any formal role in EU process, but the pope's gesture was nonetheless a deft piece of political stagecraft at a delicate time in relations between Muslims and the West and for this pope's own damaged reputation among Muslims.

Long before he angered the Muslim world two months ago with a speech criticized as equating Islam with violence, Benedict was not liked here because of comments he made, as a cardinal in 2004, opposing Turkey's EU membership. As the successor to the Ottoman Empire, Turkey has always stood, he said at the time, "in permanent contrast to Europe."

But the 79-year-old pope's concession Tuesday, at the start of a four-day trip here, seemed a concrete act to make good on his pledge, amid the uproar among Muslims over the speech, to heal the wounds between East and West. It also may have the practical effect of tamping the still-smoldering anger here. Because of that anger, security Tuesday

was thick, with helicopters hovering at the airport, commandos draped in bullets guarding the pope's plane from Rome and sharpshooters on the roofs of buildings.

The pope also seemed to demonstrate a bit of diplomacy that many critics said his speech two months ago lacked: Since Benedict did not make any announcement himself, it appeared to some degree a concession won by Erdogan, who is rooted in a moderate political Islam and who, until Monday, had said he would not be able to meet the pope on this visit. As the leader of the only Muslim country in NATO, Erdogan left immediately after speaking with the pope to attend a meeting of the Western military alliance in Latvia.

Hours later, the pope's spokesman, Federico Lombardi, released a brief statement repeating that the Vatican had "neither the power nor the specific political task" of gaining Turkey's admission to the Union in a time of apparently growing opposition in Europe to Turkey's accession.

But Lombardi said that the Vatican "views positively and encourages the road of dialogue and of moving toward integration of Turkey in Europe on the basis of common values and principles."

The trip here is Benedict's fifth outside Italy since he was elected pope last year, and his first both outside the European Union and to a predominantly Muslim country. His main aim in this trip is to visit leaders of the Orthodox patriarchy here, as part of his goal to mend the 1,000-year rift between the Roman church and the 220 million Orthodox.

But Christians make up less than half a percent of Turkey's 72 million people.

Even before a speech in September in Germany, when the pope quoted a Byzantine emperor who referred to Islam as "evil and inhuman", it was clear that this trip would be far different from the trips to Christian countries. The trip to Turkey, though now a modern and secular democracy, seemed particularly fraught with symbolism: Here Christian and Muslim warriors battled for centuries, as the Byzantine empire founded by Rome's first Christian emperor gave way to Muslim Ottoman Turks who established their own empire and pushed deep into Europe.

After his plane touched down, the white-robed pope was met at the airport with a red carpet and a small honor guard, but with none of the music, cheering crowds and waving banners of other trips. Rather, small demonstrations protesting Benedict's visit were held here and in Istanbul, where the pope will travel Wednesday.

In brief comments on the plane, Benedict, who had apologized for the at- times violent reaction to his speech, made clear that one of his chief aims was to stimulate a dialogue to bring Christians and Muslims, the West and East, closer.

"The scope of this visit is dialogue, brotherhood, a commitment to understanding between cultures, between religions, for reconciliation," he told reporters before his plane took off from Rome.

Erdogan, who unexpectedly greeted the pope at his plane, spoke too of the need for greater understanding.

"We are going through a tough period when the culture of violence has been expanding and our world faces disaster scenarios like the clashes of civilizations and polarizations in various directions," he told reporters after his 20- minute meeting with Benedict. "Therefore, we need mutual understanding among different beliefs and civilizations more than any time in history."

He said he viewed the pope's visit as "very important" in building "an alliance of civilizations," even as he seemed to refer to the pope's speech about Islam and violence.

"I told him that Islam was a religion of peace and tolerance, and I saw that he shared this view," he said.

Even before the meeting between Benedict and Erdogan, the Vatican had obliquely signaled a warming to the idea of Turkey's membership in the EU. Over the weekend, several church officials said the Vatican had no such opposition. The Vatican has never issued a formal position on the issue, In 2004, when the future pope said it would be a "grave error" for Turkey to join the EU, both he and other church officials made clear it was his personal opinion.

It is unclear what effect the pope's reversal will have on the fraught and

broader debate in Western Europe over Turkey's membership, especially among conservatives who shared the views expressed by Cardinal Ratzinger two years ago. Some of the opposition is general, rooted in the fear of more terror attacks in Europe and already-difficult integration of millions of Muslims in Europe.

Many of the problems, though, are specifically tied to the difficulty Turkey has had in meeting specific demands of Europe to join, and the pope's visit comes at a particularly sensitive time in Turkey's talks with European negotiators.

Admission talks, which began this year, have hit a snag over the insistence, by the European Union, that Turkey open its ports and harbors to vessels from Greek Cyprus, an internationally recognized state opposed by Turkey. But officials in Turkey say they cannot do that until an international embargo that has been in place on the Turkish part of the island for more than 20 years, is lifted.

The stalemate has frustrated Turkish officials, who are working toward meetings among European Union members in December.

"Everything is just stuck," said Namik Tan, spokesman for Turkey's Foreign Ministry in an interview Monday. "How can an elected government with all these restrictions over the Turkish Cypriots open its ports without any restrictions? This government has a public here."

On Tuesday night, officials from the European Union met to set conditions for the future of the talks. Turkish officials expect certain topics in the negotiations to be suspended, but for others to continue, an assumption that was expressed by Erdogan on Tuesday.

"Look, they said there would be a train crash," he said at the press conference. "Now they say, there is no train crash, but the train slowed down."

After his meeting with Erdogan, Benedict visited the grave of Kemal Attaturk, the founder of the secular Turkish state after World War I, creating with much struggle the fullest democracy in the Muslim world.

He met later with the nation's chief Muslim religious figure, Ali

Bardakoglu, who was among the fiercest critics of the pope's speech two months ago, and Turkey's president, Ahmed Necdet Sezer. Later in the evening, he met with members of the world's diplomatic corps in Turkey's capital. At every stop, he stressed the need for greater joint efforts to end terror, war and misunderstanding.

"I appreciate the efforts of numerous countries currently engaged in rebuilding peace in Lebanon, Turkey, among them," he told the ambassadors. "In your presence, ambassadors, I appeal once more to the vigilance of the international community, that it not abandon its responsibilities, but make every effort to promote peace and dialogue."

Sebnem Arsu contributed reporting from Ankara.

http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Cronache/2006/11_Novembre/28/papa.shtml

Il pontefice è arrivato alle 12. E' stato accolto da Erdogan

Il Papa in Turchia: «E' un viaggio di pace» Benedetto XVI all'aeroporto di Ankara a colloquio con il premier turco. Poi va al Mausoleo di Ataturk e incontra il Gran Mufti

ROMA - Il «viaggio per il dialogo e per la pace» è iniziato alle ore 12 in punto, quando il Papa è arrivato all'aeroporto di Ankara. La visita di Benedetto XVI in Turchia durerà quattro giorni.

Il premier turco Tayyip Erdogan è stato il primo a stringere la mano al Papa sotto la scaletta dell'aereo. Subito dopo il pontefice ed Erdogan sono andati, in compagnia del cardinale segretario di Stato Tarcisio Bertone e di alti dignitari turchi, nella saletta Vip dell'aeroporto, dove si sono seduti per le foto, prima di fare uscire i giornalisti e intrattenersi a colloquio. «La mia visita - ha detto Benedetto XVI poco dopo il suo arrivo ad Ankara - serve per approfondire l'amicizia tra Turchia e Santa Sede». Il colloquio è durato 15 minuti. Al termine Erdogan ha riferito ai giornalisti che il Papa si è detto favorevole all'ingresso della Turchia nella Ue. Il Pontefice poi raggiunto il Mausoleo del padre della Turchia moderna, Kemal Ataturk, per l'omaggio di rito previsto dal programma della sua visita in Turchia.

AL MAUSOLEO DI ATATURK - Come fu per Wojtyla nel 1979, Benedetto XVI ha firmato il Libro d'Oro, destinato nel Mausoleo di Ankara agli ospiti più illustri che arrivano in Turchia, con una frase significativa: «La Turchia è punto di incontro e crocevia di religioni e culture diverse, cerniera - ha vergato il Pontefice - tra Asia ed Europa. Volentieri faccio mie le parole del fondatore della Repubblica turca per esprimere l'augurio, «pace in patria e pace nel mondo». La frase è stata scritta in lingua inglese. Il Papa ha anche deposto nel Memoriale una corona di fiori bianchi e rossi, con la scritta "Benedict XVI".

COLLOQUIO CON IL GRAN MUFTI: «PACE TRA I POPOLI» - Pace, riconciliazione, impegno comune per la pace e per la libertà religiosa, sia degli individui sia delle comunità. E ancora: «Comuni radici abramitiche delle due religioni, che rappresentano un impegno per la fratellanza dell'umanità». Il gelo tra Benedetto XVI e la Turchia sembra superato e la conferma arriva durante l'incontro con il Direttore degli Affari religiosi della Turchia Ali Bardakoglu, nella sede della Diyanet, ad Ankara. Citando Papa Rancalli Benedetto XVI ha detto: «Io amo i turchi. Questa nobile terra ha visto una ragguardevole fioritura della civiltà islamica nei più svariati campi. Il dialogo fra cristiani e musulmani deve essere portato avanti come un sincero scambio fra amici. Noi - ha aggiunto il Papa - vogliamo andare avanti sulla scia del Concilio Vaticano II che con la dichiarazione sulle religioni del mondo ha aperto una nuova pagina nella storia della nostra sede». Il Papa ha anche sottolineato «il comune impegno per la pace» delle religioni di fronte «al tanto sangue umano versato ogni giorno». Ratzinger ha quindi ricordato le comuni radici abramitiche delle due religioni, che rappresentano un impegno per «la fratellanza dell'umanità».

NON E' UN VIAGGIO POLITICO - «Questo non è un viaggio politico ma un viaggio pastorale e ha come sua determinazione il dialogo e l'impegno comune per la pace». È quanto aveva detto Papa Benedetto XVI rivolto ai giornalisti a bordo dell'aereo che è arrivato ad Ankara a mezzogiorno.

LA DELEGAZIONE - Nel quinto viaggio apostolico fuori dall'Italia, Benedetto XVI è accompagnato dal Segretario di Stato, cardinale Tarcisio Bertone e da una delegazione composta da una decina di cardinali, tra cui il cardinale Paul Poupard, presidente del Pontificio

Consiglio per la cultura e il dialogo interreligioso e dal titolare del dicastero per la Promozione dell'unità dei cristiani, cardinale Walter Kasper. Il Papa farà rientro a Roma venerdì: l'arrivo all'aeroporto militare di Ciampino è previsto nel primo pomeriggio.

29 novembre 2006

L'International Herald Tribune parla della visita in Turchia del Papa soffermandosi più sull'aspetto politico: fin dal titolo evidenzia l'appoggio di Benedetto XVI all'ingresso della Turchia nell'Unione Europea, e l'argomento resta al centro anche nel prosieguo dell'articolo. Tuttavia è trattato in modo piuttosto ambiguo, passando dalle affermazioni di Ratzinger risalenti a due anni fa, quando ancora non era Papa e avversava con forza l'ingresso della Turchia nell'UE (e sottolineando che tale posizione affermava una opinione personale) e al discorso di due mesi fa in cui sottolineava il legame tra l'Islam e la violenza; e alle dichiarazioni rilasciate nel corso della visita, tutte in tono conciliante: in tal modo insinua implicitamente il sospetto di un gioco diplomatico fatto per placare le temute dimostrazioni contro il Papa, e dal canto suo anche l'accoglienza (inaspettata) del premier turco Erdogan al pontefice risulta un atto conciliante e diplomatico.

Il **Corriere della Sera** traccia una sorta di diario della giornata, e al tema che nel IHT era centrale è dedicato solo un breve accenno alla fine del primo paragrafo. Il tono nel complesso è rassicurante (anche per l'uso frequente del termine "pace") e conciliante, con quasi nessun accenno alle recenti polemiche e alle minacce al Papa.