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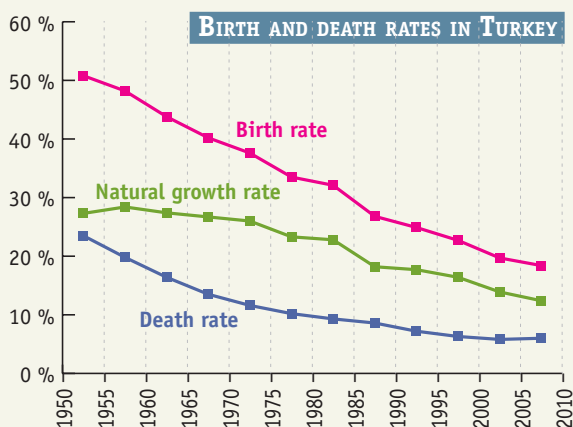
# Is Turkey split in two?

Source: Population & Avenir, No. 703, May-June 2011,  
www.population-demographie.org/revue03.htm ; www.cairn.info/revue-population-et-avenir.htm

With 74 million inhabitants<sup>1</sup>, Turkey has a larger population than France, the United Kingdom or Italy. Germany is still more heavily populated, but the projections for 2025 place Turkey at 85 million inhabitants against less than 80 million in Germany. However Turkish indicators show a distinct deceleration. Yet is this trend common all over the country?

## A clear slowing down in the population growth

*A priori*, there is nothing particularly original in Turkey's population trends. The country follows, with some lag, the same logic of demographic transition observed in European countries. Thanks to economic, health and hygiene progress, its mortality rate has been falling, by nearly three quarters between the beginning of the 1950s and the 2000s. As a consequence, the Turkish population adapted its fertility behaviour to a now durably reduced mortality. However, the infant mortality rate remains relatively high, at 28 deaths of children under one per thousand births, five times the rate in the European Union.



The birth rate in Turkey thus went down from 50 births per thousand inhabitants in the 1950s to less than 20 in the 2000s. Therefore its natural growth rate, *i.e.* the difference between birth and death rates, after going through a peak of 28 per 1,000 in the second half of the 1950s, half way through the transition, fell by more than half, to 13, in the 2000s. This is still quite high compared with a European Union in « demographic hibernation », with a natural growth rate ten times lower<sup>2</sup> than that of Turkey. This explains why the projec-

1. Sardon, Jean-Paul, « La population des continents et des pays », *Population & Avenir*, n° 700, Nov-Dec 2010.

2. Étaix, Jacques, « La Turquie et l'Union européenne, quelle incidence démographique? », *Population & Avenir*, n° 674, Sept-Oct 2005.

tions forecast that the population of Turkey will overtake that of Germany. Should it be integrated in the Union, Turkey would be its most populated country<sup>3</sup>.

By Gérard-François Dumont



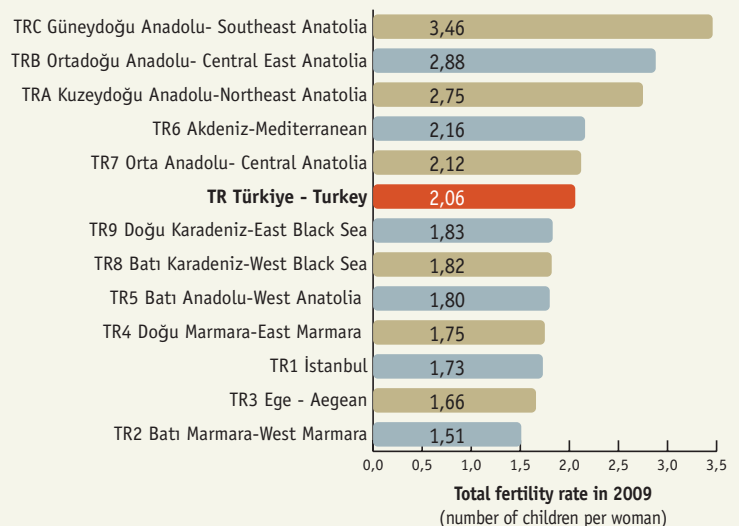
Professor at the University of Paris IV-Sorbonne ;  
President of the journal *Population & Avenir*.

## Marked geographical variations

However, the above data only show average trends. Geographic analysis reveal marked differences. Among the twelve regions that constitute Turkey, three of them, North-east Anatolia, Central East Anatolia and Southeast Anatolia, all in the eastern part of the country and with majority Kurdish populations, stand out with a much higher birth rate than the national average. Conversely, the northern and western regions in general record lower natality rates than the national average, with the two lowest observed in the Aegean and West Marmara regions.

These regional variations are confirmed by the analysis of total fertility rates. The three abovementioned Anatolian regions testify to the significantly higher fertility of the Kurds. Bordering on these, the Mediterranean region and Central Anatolia also have fertility rates above the national average. On the other hand, the seven other regions are below the simple generation-replacement threshold and among them, West Marmara has a lower fertility rate than in the European Union.

### FERTILITY BY REGION IN TURKEY



There are two lessons to be drawn from these data. First the relative weight of the Kurdish population seems bound to increase<sup>4</sup>. Second, the country seems to be split by a South-west-Northeast diagonal contrasting the five regions with a higher fertility and natality above the national average, and the seven other regions in the opposite situation. ☺

(Translation: Sylvie Vanston)

3. Cf. Dumont, Gérard-François, « La Turquie et l'Union européenne : intégration, divergence ou complémentarité ? », *Géostratégiques*, n° 30, 1st quarter of 2011.

4. Although the infant mortality rate of the regions with a mainly Kurdish population is probably higher.