

Marriage Migration and the Labour Market

The case of the migrants of Turkish descent in Belgium

Christiane Timmerman
CeMIS, University of Antwerp

Johan Wets
HIVA, Catholic University of Leuven

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1. Introduction

The persistently high popularity of migration marriages within large immigrant populations in Western Europe is an intriguing phenomenon. Since the bilateral agreements between Western European countries and Turkey in the sixties, the Turkish diaspora has steadily grown although the legal provisions in the host countries are limited. On the one hand, Turkish men and women in the Western European countries are looking for a bride or a groom in the home country of their parents or grandparents. On the other hand, young people in Turkey keep on deciding to leave their country of birth, move to countries like Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Holland, ... and live and work abroad. The labour market situation of the migrant community in general and the Turkish community in particular is however far from attractive and the prospects are limited.

This article pursues the question why so many young people born and raised in Western Europe opt for an unknown partner coming from a region that is, although it is where their parents or grandparents came from, by and large unknown to them? Why do so many young people born and raised in other countries - like Turkey- opt for an unknown partner, living in a far away country where the majority of the migrant population face difficulties to find a place on the labour market? More specifically, we will focus on the economic situation as a possible ground for explaining the ongoing success of marriage migration. However, it will be demonstrated that economic reasons alone are not able to explain this phenomenon and that other explanatory

mechanisms as the existence of 'a culture of migration' are more promising for understanding the success of marriage migration.

2. Belgium and its foreign population

Belgium is a highly developed "corporatist welfare states" , together with the other countries of the so-called "continental regime type," Austria, France, Germany and Luxemburg. It has well-developed social security schemes, but not as universalistic ones as in the Nordic countries. In general, there is a strong relationship between previous occupations and entitlement to provisions, and generous income protection for families with children. Employees are well-protected against dismissal. The number of special schemes for occupational groups is high, and there is extensive collective coverage for civil servants. Pension benefits in the continental regime are slightly above the European average (Soede, Vrooman, Ferraresi and Segre, 2004). The continental welfare system is an expensive system, with a broad coverage that might attract immigrants, and consequently bring about anti-immigrant sentiments. On the other hand, the system might need immigrants' labour power to keep it turning in the future (United Nations Population Division, 2001).

Belgium has, over time, become a country of permanent immigration, though the country still has difficulties presenting itself as a immigration country. The portal site www.belgium.be explains clearly the rules and clarifies who needs which document. Some visa documents distributed abroad clearly state that Belgium is a non-immigration country, just like the other Shengen states¹. Nonetheless, Belgium welcomed in 2008 more than 75.000 newcomers, an equivalent of 7% of the population of all foreigners. In fact Belgium has never ceased to be a country of immigration. The migrant community has gained access to the welfare system and has become very much settled. This has led, as in many other European countries, to political reaction. Right-wing, anti-immigrant parties are a major force, as in many other western-European countries. The *Vlaams Belang* is a right-wing anti-immigrant party,

¹ See e.g. The Delegation of the European Commission to Vietnams website (http://www.delvnm.ec.europa.eu/Schengen_visa/in_schengen.htm) or the visa documents made available in Vietnam by the Belgian Embassey. This document starts with the words "Belgium is not an immigration country." (www.diplomatie.be/hanoi)

campaigning against immigration². The party is against the entry of new immigrants and demands that settled immigrants assimilate or leave. These ideas and the political context are far from unique. Similar anti-immigrant parties are on the rise in countries such as Austria, Denmark, France, Italy and Switzerland. Similar developments are observed even in countries that traditionally held a more tolerant attitude, such as the Netherlands.

Belgium, a country with a population of 10 million, is home to many immigrants and asylum seekers. More than 9.1 percent of Belgium's population has a foreign nationality³. However, if one considers the total number of persons who at birth did not have Belgian nationality, it is found that the population of foreign origin is much higher, reaching almost 13 percent of the Belgian population (Martiniello & Rea, 2003). But immigration into Belgium was and still is mainly European due to its strong attraction to many EU citizens, especially the French and the Dutch. Almost 69 percent of foreigners in Belgium are EU nationals. The largest non-EU migrant communities are the Moroccans and the Turks.

Turkey became involved in the post-Second World War European labour migration process in response to a labour shortage in the Federal Republic of Germany. Germany and Turkey signed a bilateral agreement in October 1961, regulating the short-term emigration of Turkish workers. The economic situation in many other European countries was similar to the German one and shortly after; also Belgium started importing foreign labour during the post-World War II economic boom, specifically to meet the demand for coal workers. The Belgian government established several bilateral agreements to bring in foreign labour to compensate for the declining domestic work force. These agreements were first signed with Italy in 1946 followed by Spain in 1956, Greece in 1957, Morocco and Turkey in 1964, Tunisia in 1969, Algeria in 1970 and Yugoslavia in 1970. (see e.g. www.socialsecurity.be)

The 1973 petroleum crisis and the economic downturn of the 1970s led to recession. The crisis struck the coal industry, lead to increased job loss and left many of the guest workers who were already in the country unemployed.

² *Vlaams Belang* was previously called *Vlaams Blok*, but the party changed name after a conviction for racism of three associations linked to the *Vlaams Blok*. Their anti immigrant position can be found in their party programme (http://www.vlaamsbelang.org/files/200506_programma.pdf)

³ Situation of the first of Januari according to the National Register. Source: General Statistics and Economic Information of the Federal Service Economics

Belgium established in 1974 strict immigration legislation, mirroring similar actions in neighbouring European countries. It was difficult for the Turkish miners to adapt to the labour market after the mines closed down for they were unable to speak Dutch or French. However, despite the fact that work-opportunities ceased to exist and that there seemed to be no future prospects due to the new restrictive policy, immigration was not brought to a halt. The 1974 law allowed labour migration only when there was no Belgian citizen with the appropriate qualifications, but the law did permit immigrant family reunification and formation, and also legalized clandestine workers living then in the country. So, the Moroccan and Turkish migrants stayed in the country despite shrinking opportunities on the labour market and new countrymen arrived through the process of family reunification and family formation (Bayar, 1992)

In the mid-1980s, the Belgian government accepted the fact that the planned temporary migration seemed to have a more permanent character and began to develop policies to encourage immigrants to settle in the country and to integrate into society. The law on the entrance, residence, settlement, and return of foreigners, which is still in force, was passed in December 1980. This law provided more legal security regarding residence and it introduced a legal process for foreigners to contest measures questioning the legality of their stay. In 1981 an anti-racism law was passed. At that time, the political class still refused to grant voting rights at the local level to foreigners (Martiniello and Rea, 2003; Gsir, Martinielle and Wets, 2003).

The country suffered from a high and persistent level of unemployment. The immigrant population became easy scapegoats. The government implemented, with not too much success, a policy to encourage immigrants to return home. Simultaneously, an integration policy was established. In 1984, the Nationality Code, which was almost 50 years old, was replaced by a new one. The new Nationality Code introduced the principle of *jus soli*⁴ and simplified the procedure for naturalization. Children born on Belgian soil to foreign parents who themselves were born in Belgium became Belgian citizens. Although simplified, the naturalization process still required

⁴ *Jus sanguinis* is Latin for "right of blood". It is a right by which nationality or citizenship can be recognized to any individual born to a parent who is a national or citizen of that state. It contrasts with *jus soli*. *Jus soli* is Latin for "right of the territory" or "right of soil". It is a right by which nationality or citizenship can be recognised to any individual born in the territory of the related state (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org>)

individuals to demonstrate a “desire to integrate” measured arbitrarily by the administration (Martiniello and Rea, 2003). The right to political participation of the migrant communities was heavily debated. The government decided not to grant political rights, but to loosen the conditions to acquire Belgian nationality. This had a significant impact during this period. The number of applications more than doubled the year after the adoption of the new law. The Nationality Code was revised again and passed in its new form on March 1, 2000. Since then, any foreigner legally residing for at least seven years in Belgium who has a permanent residence permit can become Belgian with a simple declaration without a check on his or her “desire to integrate.” More than one third (36%) of the 202,786 persons who received Belgian nationality between 1995 and 2000 were Moroccans; 24 percent of them had a Turkish background and 6 percent were Italian (Ouali, 2003). From all naturalisations in 2007, 8% were from Turks who acquired the Belgian Nationality against 24% Moroccans. The Turkish community stays the second largest community if it comes to ask for naturalisation, after the Moroccan citizens (CGKR, 2009, p. 93).

The so-called “new Belgians” - foreigners who acquired Belgian citizenship - participated in all social activities and could join political parties. Since 1994, many cities and regions have elected “new Belgians” to political office, on local, regional as well as national level. Some even hold posts in executive functions, thus giving evidence of their integration into Belgian society. While successful by many accounts, the Belgian government's policies for integrating immigrants, like those of neighbouring countries, have been accompanied by restrictive policies on newcomers (Martiniello and Rea, 2003).

The Belgian immigration legislation is still largely defined by the migration stop of 1974, measures that were taken all over Europe. This implies that the access to the country is limited. There are four official ways to enter the country: (1) labour migration, (2) family reunification or -formation, (3) asylum and (4) non-migration like student mobility and tourism. The fifth way -irregular migration- is the same as in most European countries.

The first possibility –labour migration- is demand driven and is only open for a limited number of migrants.⁵ They are almost without exception skilled or highly skilled: international managers, scholars or highly qualified technicians. Apart from the rules for these groups, there are specific regulation for the sports- and cultural sector. Recent labour marked shortages have refuelled the discussion on opening the labour market for a larger group again.

The second possibility is family or marriage migration. Although this opening is by and large the most important from the last three decades after 1974, it is limited to those people who find a bride or groom in the country. *Family reunion* refers to the right of legally residing foreigners to bring in their spouse, children under the age of 18 and/or parents depending on them.⁶ In certain specific conditions, other members of their family can be allowed too. We speak about *family formation* when a person enters the country with the purpose of marrying a person settled in Belgium. In this case the marriage takes place in Belgium. Both ways of entering Belgium are as well called *chain migration*.

Also the fourth possibility – non migration- is limited only to those people who have a free access to the country or those people who received a visa.

The third possibility mentioned above is the asylum procedure. Contrary to the other procedures, the asylum procedure is free to everybody. Since the late eighties, this way has been used by many foreigners, but a changing international context and more severe procedures have more then halved the number of demands compared with the late nineties. The fact that only a limited number (15%) of applicants finally gets the refugee status and a permit to stay makes it still a useful way to get into the country, but a very uncertain if the migrants want to stay for a longer period of time⁷.

⁵ Entry and stay in Belgium are regulated by the law of 15 December 1980 concerning entry into the territory, residency, establishment, and removal of foreigners and later adaptations.

⁶ According to Art. 40, §3 of the law of 15 December 1980, the following family members of Belgian or EU foreigners may benefit from the right to family reunification: their partner, their descendants or those of their partner who are under age 21 or legal dependents; their ascendants or those of their partner that are legal dependents and the conjoined of the two previous categories of members of the family. These people must reside with the applicant. See e.g. <http://www.coordeurop.org/>

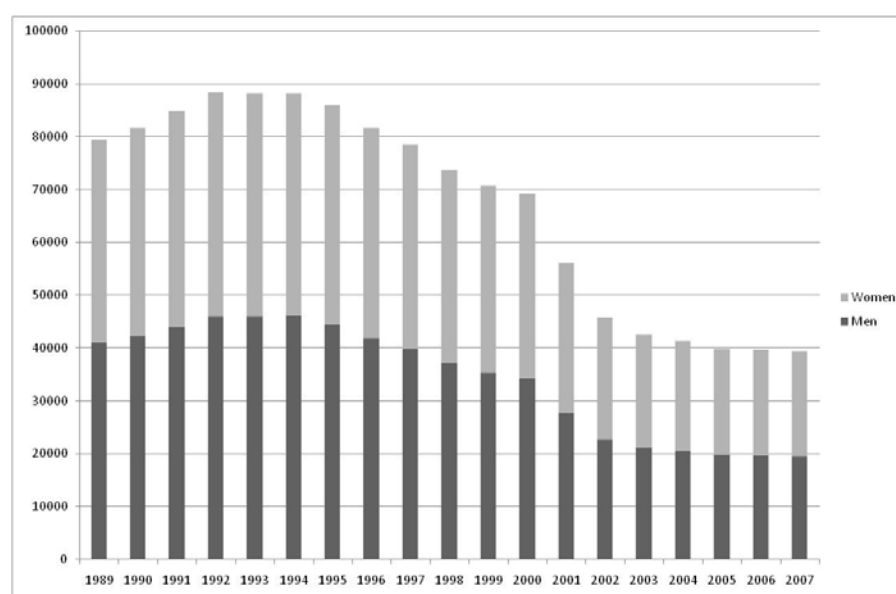
⁷ The calculation of recognitions of asylum applications is not an easy task and can be done in different ways (see CGKR, 2008, 32). The here presented figure of 15% is calculated based on indicators per cohort.

3. Turkish migration and marriage migration

Labour migration from Turkey to Belgium started with the bilateral agreement between Turkey and Belgium of 1964. Turkish migrant workers make up a significant proportion of the immigrant population in Belgium. The immigration that had been meant to be temporary had become a long-term one. The 40th anniversary of the bilateral agreement has been celebrated some years ago. Turkish immigrants have been part of the scene in various European countries already for many years. (Bayar, 1992)

As stated earlier, the largest communities of residents from outside the EU are in Belgium the Moroccan and Turkish ones. In 1998, there were 79 460 Turks (7.9 percent of the total foreign population) living in Belgium. In 2000, the number of Turkish nationals went down to 56,172 when in the same year 17 282 Turks acquired Belgian nationality. Since 2007 the number dropped below 40 000 (39 419 in 2007). By 2005 the majority of people from Turkish origin had acquired Belgian nationality (Statistics Belgium). It is estimated that the number of people from Turkish descent exceeds by far the 100 000. Between 1991 and 2005, 100 898 Turkish nationals adopted the Belgian nationality (CGKR, 2007, p. 54). And there is still an annual inflow of roughly 3000 Turkish citizens a year. According to the data of the Belgian Statistical service e.g. 2.965 Turks entered the country in 2007.

Figure 1 Evolution of the number of Foreigners with a Turkish nationality (men and women) living in Belgium (1989 – 2007)



Source: National Statistics: <http://ecodata.mineco.fgov.be/>

Chain migration is one of the above-mentioned legal ways of entering the country and of obtaining a long-term residence permit. If chain migration concerns the reunion of (future) spouses we refer to it as *marriage migration*. Contrary to expectations, the tendency within Turkish communities in Belgium to marry someone who grew up in the country of origin remained (Lesthaeghe, 1997). However, the pattern of Turkish chain migration towards Belgium gradually changed and nowadays it is equally male-female. Population data show that from January 1, 2001 until April 15, 2005, 46 percent of the Turkish newcomers who entered Belgium on the basis of marriage were women (Deschamps, 2005). Initially chain migration applied exclusively to women and children who joined their husbands/fathers who were already in Belgium as *gastarbeiter* (guest workers). Before 1974 economic migration was male, chain migration was female. In general, men chose to immigrate, while women and children merely followed their husbands or fathers. Gradually this pattern changed as the second generation grew up in Western Europe and started to marry.

Over the last decades chain migration became largely the most popular way to enter Belgium; in other words, the majority of newcomers arrived in Belgium as (future) spouses of Belgian residents. This certainly applies to Turkish migration. Particular to the Turkish residents in Belgium, including the second generation, is that the majority still marry a person who grew up in Turkey (Timmerman, 2008; Timmerman, Lodewyckx & Wets, in press).

For this we rely on a data set that is extracted from the National Register of Belgium. The dataset consists of all married couples or couples living together in Belgium on January 1, 2004 and in which one of the partners has ever had the Turkish nationality. The dataset consisted of 19 251 couples (Yalçın et al 2006). We see that among Belgian male residents who ever had a Turkish nationality nearly three quarters of the 'in-between'⁸ generation and 60% of the second generation⁹ married partner from Turkey. The percentage of women of Turkish origin marrying a partner from Turkey is even higher: nearly 80% of the women who arrived between the age of 7-18 years in

⁸ People who arrived between the age of 7-18 years in Belgium as children of first generation labour migrants.

⁹ People who were born in Belgium out of first generation labour migrants or who arrived before the age of 7 years old as children from first generation labour migrants.

Belgium, the so-called 'in-between' generation (in-between the first and second generation¹⁰) against 60% of the second generation.

Within the Turkish community in Belgium, 60% of both men and women of the second generation are married with a partner who lived in Turkey until marriage. In other words, 6 out of 10 youngsters with a Turkish background who are raised in Belgium opt for a partner who lives in the country where their parents or grandparents came from (Timmerman et al., 2009, in press).

A study from the '90s (Reniers, 1997) shows that Turkish migrants mainly originate from a cluster of central Anatolian provinces. According to data on migrants from the State Institute of Statistics in Ankara, the three provinces that provided the most Turkish immigrants are Afyon, Eskisehir and Kayseri. Almost one-third of the Turkish immigrants in Belgium originate from Afyon, in particular Emirdag (Reniers, 1997). This district consists of about 70 villages, of which the town Emirdag (approximately 20,000 inhabitants) is the administrative centre. This town is situated in a poor, arid area that is greatly affected by emigration (Timmerman, 1999;2000).

The region of Emirdag - being the most important Turkish emigration region for Belgium - is an important location for understanding the dynamics of marriage migration. As can be expected, a lot of young persons are leaving Emirdag as marriage migrants heading for Western Europe. A data set from the marriage register in Emirdag/Turkey - consisting of data about the wedding, the birthplace of the partners, their nationality, age, the age at marriage, the civil status of both partners before the wedding and the place of residence after the marriage - gives us more accurate information on this issue. For the period of January 2004 - June 2005, the marriage register showed that the majority (57%) of the couples, who marry, emigrate to Western Europe. The majority of these migration marriages are contracted within the summer, the holiday period when West European Turks are visiting their region of origin (Timmerman et al., 2009, in press).

¹⁰ A generation of people who entered the educational system in Belgium at a later age than the people of the second generation.

4. Do economic reasons explain fully the popularity of marriage migration?

Migration marriages remain an intriguing phenomenon in Western Europe. After the (labour) immigration stop in 1974, family migration became the most important entry for settling in Western Europe. Also in Belgium, the majority of immigrants enter the country on the basis of family migration, more specifically on the basis of marriage migration. Why do so many young people who have spent their youth in Western Europe, choose an unknown partner coming from a region that is basically unknown to them but is the region of origin of their parents or grandparents? And why do so many young people born and raised in countries like Turkey go for an unknown spouse, living in a far away country where the majority of the migrant population have difficulties to find a decent place on the labour market? Why remains migration such a valuable life project for many young people, despite the real danger of numerous negative side effects?

In Turkey itself, the socio-economic situation has been improving drastically over the last few years, even if it is still lagging behind Western Europe. Turkey's economy continues to expand. According to World Bank data, Turkish Gross National Income per capita between 2000 and 2005 rose from US\$2980 to US\$4750. Turkey still trails the rest of the OECD countries, but its GNI/c is higher than that of Bulgaria and Romania – two EU member states – and continues to rise. Compared with other important non-European immigration countries, such as Morocco, for example, the economic situation of Turkey is remarkably good. Turkey's GNI/c is nearly three times (2.7) higher than that of Morocco.

According to different economic migration theories, it is assumed that people leave their country in order to improve their socio-economic situation (Faist, 2000, McDowell & De Haan, 2000, Wets, 2001, De Haas, 2008). In recent theories (New Economics of Labour Migration, NELM), migration is not regarded as an individual decision, but as a decision taken by a bigger unit of people such as a household. According to this theory, a household in a migration sending country will decide to assist one of its members to emigrate in order to compensate for a shortage in various markets and for the risk related to agricultural activities. Furthermore, such a decision is dependent on the relative status of the household in the community. The

decision is therefore based on relative rather than absolute deprivation. De Haas, 2008, p. 40)

On the basis of previous research conducted in Emirdag, we know that people there feel that they are well informed about the economic differences between Emirdag and the Turkish communities in Belgium (Timmerman,2000). In conversations, the incomes of the Turkish residents in Belgium are a popular topic. People in Emirdag are convinced that Belgian Turks have an easy life of it. These opinions are based upon the spending habits of the Belgian Turks when the latter return to Emirdag. Compatriots living abroad own very nice houses in Emirdag, they drive expensive cars, they go on holiday in the popular Turkish tourist resorts, they hold costly weddings, and they give financial support to relatives left behind in Turkey. All in all, people in Emirdag see plenty of evidence that socio-economic conditions of the Turkish community in Belgium are better if compared to their own situation in Turkey (Timmerman 1999; Timmerman et al, in press).

Sometimes, respondents in Emirdag indicated that they were aware that the lifestyle their European compatriots flaunted in Emirdag is not representative of their lifestyle in Belgium. They confirmed that they were aware of the economic hardships many of their compatriots encounter in Belgium: unemployment, low-skilled employment and the high cost of living in Europe. Despite the fact that this information is available in Emirdag, it seems generally to be ignored or at least not taken into consideration. Is there really a ground for this assumption?

5. The socio-economic position of the Turkish community in Flanders/Belgium

There is a lot of evidence that the socio-economic situation of Turkish migrants in Belgium is problematic compared with that of mainstream Belgian society. Data from the Belgian National Health Survey 2001 indicate that 59% of the people of Turkish origin in Belgium live below the poverty line. (van Robays, 2006) Unemployment among people with a Turkish background is high, especially amongst young people. Research furthermore shows that ethnic minorities – mostly Moroccans and Turks – meet with considerable discrimination, in addition to their under-representation in the labour market due to their poor educational background.

The educational level among the second and third generation, especially compared to other groups, is still quite limited. Recent research has mapped school achievements of children with a foreign background (Groenez, Van den Brande & Nicaise, 2003; Duquet, et al., 2006; De Meyer, 2007; Hermans, Opdenakker & Van Damme, 2004). This research reveals the socio-ethnic gap in the field of education in Flanders, despite the notable position of the Flemish system in international comparative research. Especially the position of youngsters of Moroccan and/or Turkish descent is remarkable and problematic. According to Duquet et al. (2006: 51) they perform worse on every indicator of success than other pupils of foreign descent. Summarized, they are far behind their classmates and are confronted with persistent and cumulative arrears, even before the age of compulsory education. All the different researches record that school careers of "immigrant" youth is characterized by low achievements, failing, considerable arrears less moving on to better disciplines and postsecondary education, more (unqualified) school drop-outs etcetera (Levräu, 2009). This whole process starts at a very early age, even in pre primary education where Moroccan and Turkish children are seriously underrepresented. According to PISA data on the achievements of 15-year-olds in reading, the difference in the mean score between pupils who participated in pre-primary education for more than one year and pupils who received no pre-primary education was considerable for the European countries participating in PISA. The biggest differences were observed in Belgium and Germany. (see also OECD, 2006). The ability to profit from pre-primary education is, however, influenced by the socio economic background of the children (Sammons et al, 2002).

A direct consequence of poor schooling is the lack of vocational qualifications. Compared to mainstream society, the socio-economic situation of Turkish migrants in Belgium is problematic. Unemployment is high, especially among young people. Research from 2005 demonstrates that ethnic minorities—mostly Moroccans and Turks—encounter considerable discrimination (Martens et al., 2005) in addition to their under-representation in the labour market due to their poor educational background (Timmerman, Vanderwaeren & Crul, 2005). The average unemployment rate of Turks in Belgium is much higher than the overall unemployment rate. An analysis of some labour market data for 2003 in Flanders illustrates the poor position of the Turkish population on the labour market. The Turkish population represents only 0.5 percent of the labour population in Flanders, but represents 1.9 percent of the unemployed. The overall unemployment rate

was eight percent. For people with a Belgian nationality seven percent, for non-Belgians it was 15 percent, for the Moroccan population it was 27 percent and for the Turkish population it was 29 percent.¹¹

The Turkish labourers in Belgium work more than any other group as blue collar workers, earning less than the Belgian or other migrant groups, are mainly situated in industry and the services sector, and are seriously overrepresented in agriculture and horticulture, metallurgy and the waste processing industry. (Verhoeven, 2000) Male Turks have a much lower employment rate than the male Belgian population. Also the Turkish women are less present on the labour market. And yet, research by Martens and others found that Turks with a Belgian nationality do slightly better than Turkish nationals working in Belgium (Martens, Ouali, Van de maele, Vertommen, Dryon and Verhoeven, 2005).

The pressure of unemployment and the increasing difficulty of getting work have played a critical role in the initiative taken by some immigrants to set up their own businesses. The number of these businesses has doubled in the last 25 years. The preferred businesses are grocery stores, fruit and vegetable stores, bakeries, “doner” takeaway shops, restaurants and cafes. These account for 75 percent of preferred businesses (Manço 2000).

It is apparent that the socio-economic situation of the Turkish community in Belgium into which Turkish marriage migrants marry is rather challenging.

6. The socio economic position of marriage migrants in Belgium

To have an idea of the socio-economic position of “marriage migrants” and their spouses and/or grooms we analyzed a dataset of the Crossroad Bank of Social Security. Almost everybody living in Belgium is registered one way or another: if you are working, if you receive unemployment allowance, if you’re ill or handicapped, if you receive child benefits, a pension, ... All this is registered by different institutions of the social security system. Since 1989 all these data are linked in the Crossroad Bank of Social security. These data are partially accessible to researchers. A rather severe privacy legislation defines

¹¹ These data are coming from different sources: Statistics Belgium (ADSEI), The National Employment Office (RVA) and the Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB). Calculations are by Steunpunt WAV (www.steunpuntwav.be)

the restrictions. The dataset was used in a research on marriage migration in Belgium (Heyse, Pauwels, Wets & Timmerman, 2007).

The data of the Crossroad Bank of Social Security are Social Security data and did not include the civil status, but contained enough information to create a proxy for “marriage migration”. The family situation e.g. is classified in what is called the LIPRO-code, making a distinction between people living alone, living with parents, living with a partner (married or unmarried), living with a partner and children, etcetera.¹² We selected, independent of their nationality, man and women who were living in the reference year 2000 with their parents or alone and who’s position changed the years after. In case, the household position of these people changed to a category indicating that they are living together with a partner they were selected. In a next step, the new partners of this selected population were checked. Only those people who were living together with a foreigner who has not been living in Belgium the previous years were selected, together with their partners. These are the couples that were analyzed in the research¹³. The data were gathered for 2001, 2002 and 2003¹⁴. The dataset consisted of respective 8 942, 9 579 and 11 333 couples. The data were analysed with SAS version 9.1 for windows. These data allows us to draw a picture of the socio-economic profile of the immigrants and of their partners in Belgium. Privacy regulations prevented information on the specific nationalities; instead migrants had to be grouped in *nationality clusters*. The largest group immigrants, who entered the country with the purpose of settling with an in Belgian residing person, were citizens of the larger region of the Mediterranean and the Arab world. The large majority of people within the cluster ‘Mediterranean and the Arab world’ originate from Morocco or Turkey.

An analysis of the data showed that “marriage migration” is rather female (6/10) than male (4/10), although there are important regional differences. Southeast Asians and Eastern European migration is with respective 97% and

¹² This code is derived from the LIPRO-typology of households (Lifestyle PROjections), developed by the Dutch Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI). The variables used in this analysis are developed by the Crossroad Bank of Social Security in collaboration with a Flemish Scientific Institution, the Centre for Population and Family studies (Centrum voor Bevolkings- en Gezinsstudie - CBGS).

¹³ By using this methodology, cases of patrilocality or virilocality, where the new formed couple moves in with the grooms parents, are probably lost.

¹⁴ All social security institutes have to send their data to the Crossroad Bank of Social Security. Then these data are checked, cleaned and made available. Due to this process, there is a time gap between the calendar data and the latest available data.

81% predominantly feminine. Migration of the southern rim of the Mediterranean however shows opposite figures and is slightly more male than female (53% vs 47%). All marriage migrants are young. Three quarter is younger than 35 and 21% is younger than 25. A small percentage (2%), of whom almost all originate in Morocco or Turkey, are even younger than 20. There is a strong correlation (Cramer's $V = 0.33$; $\text{chisq} < .0001$) between age and gender in the group of the southern rim of the Mediterranean. All migrants under the age of 20 are female and almost eight out of ten (79,1%) of the newcomers under the age of 25 are women. The male domination can be found principally in the age groups between 30 and 44 (65%).

A focus on the data of the in Belgium living partners, learns that more than eight out of ten (83%) have a Belgian nationality. Moroccans as well as Turks very often – as stated earlier- opt for a Belgian nationality and doing so, they disappear statistically. An analysis of the nationality of those migrants coming from the Southern rim of the Mediterranean learns that they or marry Belgians / Europeans or people from the same region of origin. In further analysis, we based the examination of the labour market position of the in Belgium living partners on the region of origin of their newly arrived brides or grooms and not on their nationality, knowing that we put Belgians together with other Europeans, new Belgians with a Moroccan or Turkish background, naturalized Dutchman with a Moroccan background etcetera. The research results however justify this approach.

A relevant observations that can be derived from the data set is that in Belgium, one out of five from the people marrying a foreigner coming from abroad was unemployed, in an era that the overall unemployment was less than one out of ten. A focus on the cluster of people who “marry” somebody of the sub-region of the Mediterranean and the Arab world, reveals an even more important deviation from the average. One out of three of the in Belgium residing partners who marry into this group is unemployed.

A large share of those who are employed have a low income¹⁵. The average monthly income for people who marry somebody from the area of the

¹⁵ The income data only give a partial picture of e.g. the purchasing power. The way income data are gathered and made available don't allow to draw strong conclusions. The level of gross income out of employment and the differences between the overall population and the research population and between the subgroups, gives an indication of the rather marginalized situation of the young couples.

Mediterranean is remarkably low. Almost half of them (45%) have a monthly gross income of less than 1 250 Euro, compared to 29% for the overall group. Two out of three (66%) earn less than 1 500 € a month before taxes. Only 8 percent of the employed have a gross income of more than 2000 € a month (compared to 33% of the overall group). The new migrants that are working earn even less than the in Belgium residing partners: 54% has a gross income of less than 1 250 € a month.

The data also allow focusing on some of the myths that circulate around new migrants. One of the myths is that they come to Europe to enjoy the benefits of the social security system. If they would do so, there has to be a time lag. The *new migrants* in our research population are hard to trace back on the labour market. Two out of three of all new migrants don't enter the labour market the first year after their arrival: there are not (officially) working, they are not unemployed or not self employed. Especially women stay away from the labour market. In case of a spouse from the Mediterranean and an in Belgium living partner with a nationality of this region, even 93% stays inactive (82% if the partner has a Belgian / European citizenship) in the years analyzed. An analysis of the family situation of the couples one year after the year of arrival of the new partners reveals that 64% of all couples with at least one partner coming from the Southern or eastern rim of the Mediterranean consist out of partners and children. Although the figures don't show whether the children are born in the time span analyzed or joined the family together with their father or mother (one of the spouses can have married a partner with children), it is most probable that this is the case. Further analysis of the family data shows also that after three years 3 to 4 percent of the research population is registered as one parent family and between 6 and 7% as single person household. Apparently, the relationships don't proof to be very stable.

If integration in society implies among others that immigrants and their descendants have equal access to the major institutions of society like the labour market, it can be concluded that the integration the sub-group in which, for the sake of the analysis, the Turkish population was put, was not a complete success story. This research (Heyse, Pauwels, Wets and Timmerman, 2007) inspires us to formulate the hypothesis that Turkish marriage migrants marry on average Belgian residents (albeit most probably from foreign descent) with a weak socio-economic background and makes us confident to conclude that the socio-economic situation of the Turkish

community in Belgium, in which Turkish marriage migrants marry, is rather problematic.

7. Beyond economic explanations

Although economic reasons remain relevant for local people in Emirdag as a cause for emigration, the improving economic situation in Turkey as well as the feeble economic condition of the Turkish communities in Belgium must be acknowledged, specifically for those who enter Belgium on grounds of marriage migration. This leaves us with the question: why does emigration, and especially marriage migration towards Western Europe, remain so popular.

We have mentioned already in previous articles (Timmerman, 2008; Timmerman et al., in press) that it is necessary to look for complementary clarifying mechanisms to explain the consistently high popularity of migration marriages within the Turkish communities in Western Europe and in Turkish emigration regions. Let us briefly recapitulate the most important ones.

7.1 Transnational networks

Many migration theories underline the importance of transnational networks to understand migration processes (Faist, 2000, Van Heelsum & van Amersfoort, 2007; Nell, 2004; Levitt, DeWind, Vertovec, 2003; Ostergard-Nielsen, 2003). The mere existence of transnational Turkish communities is an asset that smoothens the process of migration. It is interesting to see how every day's life in Emirdag is closely mingled with that of the Turkish communities in Belgium. Most families have relatives living in Western Europe with whom they maintain close relations (Timmerman, 1999; Timmerman & Vanderheyden, 2005). Modern-day migration, including Turkish migration, is more or less a process of continuous movement and of interactions between several locations across different countries (Flemmen, 2008; Soysal, 2003). Many businessmen, retirees, ... of Turkish descent spend considerable time in Emirdag. Transport businesses (especially air and bus companies) capitalize on specific migration related demands. This phenomenon of transnational communities maintains lively relations between the migrant society abroad and the country of origin (Timmerman, 1999).

It is evident that in the Turkish case nationalism, secular as well as religious, is likewise an important factor in view of the strong ties between emigration areas and the Turkish diaspora (Kandioly, 1991, 1995). On the whole, the commitment to Turkey remains high for the Turkish communities in Belgium. The relations with Turkish expatriates is nurtured by the mother country by favouring all kinds of initiatives that keep ties with the Turkish diaspora alive (Timmerman, 1999; 2000a; 2001). Turkey's ambition to join the EU not only stimulates Turkish identity within Turkey but also among European Turks (Rohtus, 2008). The existence of transnational Turkish communities is an asset that facilitates migration. However, it cannot solely explain the high popularity of marriage migration from Turkey.

7.2 Migration as part of every day's life

As stated in previous articles, the existence of a 'culture of migration' that binds Turkish emigration regions with the Turkish diaspora might offer the most promising explanatory scheme for understanding the success of marriage migration. The positive image that is created of Western Europe as well as the 'tradition' of migration towards Western Europe have an important appeal to people who are dreaming of improving their socio-economic or socio-cultural position in Emirdag. On the other hand 'immigration' is the reason why Turkish communities in Flanders exist. Migration plays a central role within the day to day socio-cultural praxis of these communities. Language, religion, social networks, family relations and ethnic identities are still extensively inspired by their regions of emigration. Not only by means of the memory of the 'authentic' places of origin, but also because of the still ongoing migration and very dense communication between the Turkish communities in Flanders/Belgium and the regions of origin.

Migration takes a central place in Emirdag's every day's life. From childhood on, young people are familiar with the phenomenon of migration. Migration is always seen as one of the options when people are planning their future. Migration became, in a sense, 'a habit', a project in which people often

engaged because 'everyone is emigrating'¹⁶. The last four decades this omnipresence of migration has influenced local economic and socio-cultural life intensely.

Because of the lavish lifestyle and conspicuous spending of the Turkish migrants who spend their summer holidays in their region of origin, Europe is in Emirdag pictured as "country of abundance", a region with unlimited economic possibilities, fairer chances for the poor, greater social justice, more political freedom,, greater socio-cultural diversity and a modern way of life. This last element however, is often also evaluated negatively. This rosy picture of Europe is an important element in the existing culture of migration in Emirdag. This image of Western Europe sharply differs from the very boring and even depressing picture that young and especially educated youngsters paint of Emirdag, where young people are generally dissatisfied with the socio-cultural possibilities and with the rigid social control (Timmerman, 1999;2000).

Previous research, where attitudes and expectations of aspirant emigrants were examined, showed that while many are eager to emigrate to Western Europe, few have concrete ideas of the life that awaits them there (Timmerman 2006). They have no specific conception of Belgium or Flanders. They only have an image of 'Europe' - a 'mythical' destination-, shaped by migrants spending their summer holidays in Emirdag and ignore or deny the negative information communicated. Obstacles such as the necessity of learning a foreign language, non-recognition of academic degrees, irrelevant work experience and an often hostile host society are, on the whole, taken lightly (Timmerman & Vanderheyden, 2005).

7.3 Marriage as socio-cultural praxis

As stated before, family migration - and more specifically marriage migration - is the most popular emigration regime in Emirdag, and has been for more

¹⁶ This phenomenon is already described in early migration theory. William Petersen (1958) make a distinction between different types of migration and argues that is it necessary to distinguish between the causes of migration as a social pattern (what he calls mass migration) and migration as an individually motivated decisions to migrate (Free migration). Mass migration, Petersen's final category, is the type of migration where the fact of migrating becomes a settled pattern and an example of collective behaviour. Migrating can be considered as normal behaviour; not migrating can be considered as an individual choice.

than several decades. Unravelling the above mentioned 'culture of migration' is crucial for understanding the dynamics of marriage migration. And moreover the specific characteristics of 'family' and 'marriage' concepts within the social-cultural praxis of these Turkish communities - both within the regions of origin and destination - are key elements explaining the success and centrality of marriage migrations within contemporary Turkish communities in Western Europe.

In the local culture of Emirdag, as elsewhere in Turkey, marriage is one of the key social institutions. Over the last years half of the marriages contracted in Emirdag were migration marriages (Timmerman et al, 2009). Migration opportunities have a major impact on changing conceptions of 'family' and 'marriage' not only within the local praxis in Emirdag but also within the Turkish communities in Western Europe. This implies that also within the local 'culture of migration' of Emirdag and the Turkish communities in Western Europe, marriage plays a crucial role. And furthermore, the traditional praxis of 'marriage' within (semi)-rural Turkish communities fits well within contemporary migration aspirations. In what we can call the 'Emirdag connection', ambitions related to migration are easily accommodated into existing socio-cultural traditions regarding marriage. However, under the specific circumstances of migration marriages, conceptions of marriage undergo interesting modifications. It is argued that the institution of marriage as conceived within migration marriages is central to the construction of a specific migration culture in and between both communities (Emirdag and Flanders). While framing migration marriages within the established socio-cultural traditions of the community, they provide for a much needed feeling of continuity.

8. Attitudes towards migration marriages: are economic aspects important?

We know already that migration has a deep influence on the institution and experience of marriage within the Turkish cultures of migration. Therefore, we found it also relevant to investigate - on the basis of qualitative fieldwork in Emirdag and Belgium - the perceptions respondents have on migration marriages and especially if economic reasons are also involved.

In Emirdag, young people associate the advantages of marriage migration specifically with living in a modern, democratic and prosperous country. Men

are particularly motivated to emigrate in order to improve their socio-economic situation. They are rather sure that earning a living will be much easier in Western Europe. This also applies to girls, but they often stress the broader advantages of living in a democratic, prosperous country with a sound social security system: access to health care, more social rights for women, better financial provisions in case of sickness, unemployment, retirement and also more socio-cultural opportunities. Summarized, for young people in Emirdag, it are essentially the factors external to the marital relation as such that are evaluated positively. All the same, they were sceptical about the different attitudes, values and socio-cultural practices young people in Belgium are supposed to have. Afraid that Turks in Europe lost their 'authentic' Turkish culture (being too loose, having no respect for the elderly, liking to spend money, having bad taste, etc); they doubted whether young Belgian Turks were still suitable as marriage partners (Timmerman, 1999). This idea is more or less shared by the respondents in Belgium in the way that they assume that the quality of a marriage will be better with someone from their homeland than from their own Turkish community in Belgium. They resort to the option of marriage migration because they assume that many of these Turkish boys have gone astray and that many of these Turkish girls are too liberated (Timmerman, 1999; Timmerman, 2000a; Timmerman & Vanderheyden, 2005)¹⁷.

Turkish parents in Belgium seem to be longing for more 'authentic' Turkish partners for their children, which fits well in theories on ethnicity¹⁸. Also young people often share these views with their parents. But apart from the "cultural" reading, also other, more trivial or economic, mechanisms can be relevant to explain Belgian Turkish parents' preferences for marriage of their children with a partner from their region of emigration: debts towards relatives who stayed behind in Turkey, assurance of a 'dependant'

¹⁷ Hooghiemstra (2003) came to the same conclusion in her study conducted in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands too, the so-called too-Western and decadent attitude of the local Turkish youth was said to be a reason for preferring partners from the region of origin instead

¹⁸ These theories stress that immigrants want to reaffirm their ethnic identity in a foreign environment, in which keeping in touch with the original homeland is an important element (Barth, 1969; 1994; Roosens, 1998). Several theories focus on the importance of the choice of the marriage partner in the construction of an ethnic identity (Roosens, 1998; Smith, 1992). 'Ethnic identity' is defined here as the feeling of belonging and continuity in existence constituted by self- or other-ascription and which claims common ancestors and cultural tradition (Roosens, 1994)

daughter/son in law, occasionally financial benefits (high bride prize or dowry, cheap labour force,...).

Nonetheless, in our interviews, Turkish youngsters in Belgium also had their doubts about the success of migration marriages. There was suspicion about the motivation of marriage immigrants from Turkey. They were afraid that they often opted for a marriage solely for economic reasons and with the illusion of becoming very rich quickly. They further indicated that marriage immigrants are confronted with a lot of the problems like language barriers, joblessness, a strange environment, and loss of status for the man, feelings of isolation for the wife. All these elements were seen as obstacles to a harmonious marriage. Once again, in this discourse, the marriage partner coming from Turkey remained desirable, even though one could not be certain about his/her sincere love.

9. Summary and conclusion

The main focus of this article was on the question why so many young people who are born and raised in Western European countries seem to choose for a marriage with an unknown partner coming from a region that is by and large unknown to them, even if it is the region of origin of their parents or grandparents. An because they do so, the question can be raised why so many young people born and raised in countries like Turkey go for an unknown spouse in a far away country where the majority of the migrant population face difficulties to enter the labour market and find a decent job?

The historical situation – the ties between Turkey and Belgium can be traced back already more than four decades ago – and the fact that apart from marriage migration, there are hardly possibilities to enter a Western European country like Belgium, don't provide an explanation. They only draw the institutional setting. Another part of this setting is the presence of the Turkish community. They remain Turkish, have intensive contacts with the communities in Turkey, but they have decided massively to naturalize. Apparently, they are in Belgium to stay. But still, the younger generation continues to import brides and grooms.

Economic reasons alone cannot explain this ongoing dynamic. There is still a big difference between the socio-economic situation in countries like Belgium and Turkey, but according to World Bank figures, the situation in Turkey is steadily improving and even better than the situation in other countries that

recently joined the EU like Romania and Bulgaria. But the socio-economic situation of the Turkish community in Belgium – even the situation of those who are naturalized – is far from rosy. Turks and Belgians of Turkish decent are less present on the labour market and if so, they are often unemployed or employed in less attractive trades, earning considerably less than other groups, even less than other non-European immigrant groups.

Despite this, Belgian Turks often parade their relative wealth during the summer holidays in Turkey. Their example, the intensity of the contacts and continuous processes like the marriage migration itself, makes it a part of every day's life, both in Turkey and Belgium. Europe remains a mythical destination and although the difficulties the Turkish community in European countries faces is known, as well as the obstacles newly arrived migrants are confronted with, like the necessity to learn a foreign language and a often hostile host society. It is known, but often denied or neglected. Many youngsters don't have any idea what life awaits them when they leave their home region, but marriages migration remains a valid option for them when planning their future. In Emirdag, migration always is an option that is present when people are making plans for the future. Migration has in a sense become 'a habit', a project in which people often engage because 'everyone is emigrating'. In regions like the region of Emirdag, one can speak of the existence of a 'culture of migration'. The positive image that is created of Western Europe as well as the 'tradition' of migration towards Western Europe has an important appeal to people who are dreaming of improving their socio-economic or socio-cultural position.

Economic reasons obviously play a role. Especially young men in Emirdag, but also young women hope to improve their socio-economic situation by moving abroad. In Emirdag, young people are generally dissatisfied with the socio-cultural possibilities and with the rigid social control in their small town. But it is clear that economic reasons alone – however important they are- are not able to explain this phenomenon. The addition of other explanatory mechanisms like the existence of 'a culture of migration' seems to be more promising to understand the success of marriage migration. Migration marriages easily fit between traditional frames of reference and contemporary opportunities arising in a globalized world. In what we called the 'Emirdag connection', ambitions related to migration are easily accommodated into existing socio-cultural traditions regarding marriage.

It can be argued that the institution of marriage like it emerges in the process of marriage migration is a key element in the construction of a specific *migration culture* that exists in and between the communities in Emirdag and in Flanders. Framing migration marriages within the established socio-cultural traditions of the community provides for a much needed feeling of continuity. Our data demonstrate that for young people and their families living within the Turkish communities of Flanders, identification with the 'authentic' culture of origin plays a central role in their decision to marry a person from the region of origin. Marriage can further be seen as an instrument for migration as well as a possibility to stay connected with the 'authentic' culture of origin. Subsequently, also other explanatory elements can be raised. Marriage can e.g. also be used by young women within both communities as an instrument for emancipating themselves from what they perceive as constraining traditions¹⁹.

All this demonstrates that the reasons for migration go beyond mere economic benefits and allows concluding that the popularity of marriage migration can only be explained by referring to multiple frames of reference. Given the poor prospects for Turkish migrants in their future host countries and given the poor performance on the labour market of their spouses, economic motivation seems not to be adequate to explain the phenomenon at length. It is clear that the existence of a 'culture of migration' that binds the region of origin with the region of destination and in which 'the family' as an institution capable of bridging between traditional praxis and the challenges linked to international migration, is complementary in understanding the enduring popularity of marriage migration between Emirdag en Flanders.

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¹⁹ This article is not dealing with this aspect, that is fully explained in Timmerman et al. (2009).

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