

Will the Development Road Project be a Threshold for the Islamic Common Market Initiative?

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Abstract

In 2024, a ‘Memorandum of Understanding on Joint Cooperation on the Development Road Project’ was signed between Turkey, Iraq, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. This road will open the Persian Gulf hinterland to Europe via Turkey. Although it is a protocol signed by only 4 countries, all countries in the Middle East will benefit from the opportunities of the road. However, for the project to work, an atmosphere of peace must be established in the region. In this context, it should be ensured that the signatures signed in this context will evolve step by step into permanent peace in the Middle East and eventually into the Islamic Common Market.

This study focuses on the effects, contributions, and benefits of an EU-like integration in the Middle East, based on supranational structure and economic cooperation. For this purpose, the steps that will end the conflict and war between the Middle Eastern states and the exploitation and absolute superiority of the West are discussed in historical context and by comparing them with the EU.

As a result, to end the conflicts in Palestine, Syria, and other regions, to ensure the well-being of the people in the Middle East and the welfare of those living there, it is necessary to establish a common market, to produce policies for the benefit of everyone and to eliminate future dangers by acting together. The first step could be the Development Road Project. Therefore, all actors should endeavour in good faith for the success of the project.

Keywords: Development Road, Islamic Common Market, integration of the Middle East with the supranational structure

Introduction

The Middle East has been the center of civilization throughout history. The production of the first writing, the discovery of fire and the invention of the wheel, the establishment of the first library, the first units for measuring time such as clocks and calendars, the first written peace treaties, etc. were all realized in the Middle East. All three Abrahamic religions originated in the Middle East. Naturally, their holy places are also in the Middle East.

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Looking at the last two millennia of the Middle East, the presence of religious structures has shaped the region politically, socially and economically. This situation offered significant advantages to Middle Eastern societies until the 20th century. For the prophets established social change and an order based on the justice brought by revelation. Every time there was a social disruption in the region, a warning came and prophets such as the Torah, the Bible, the Qur'an and the prophets Moses, Jesus and Muhammad who preached these books restructured the region with reforms that built social peace (Okumuş, 2020: 69). Thus, the pre-Islamic period is called the Jahiliya period. This period is referred to in literature not only as the 'age of ignorance' but also as the 'age of barbarism' (Fayda, 1993: 17). There are many reasons for this. The place of women in society, for example, is one of them. In the Jahiliya period, women were perceived and treated as commodities belonging to their fathers and husbands. Islam, which came to the rescue of humanity struggling for life in darkness, prevented the oppression of women and gave them the dignity they deserved. Women gained equal rights with men in almost all areas of life such as freedom of property, inheritance, learning knowledge and witnessing with Islam (Acarlıoğlu, 2018: 115). This order continued in the post-Prophet period. During the period of the Rashid Caliphs and Umayyads, it is seen that women were involved in working life under the same law as men. During this period, women worked alongside men from intelligence to weaving, tailoring, shoemaking, leatherwork and baking (Gül, 2014: 102). In addition, Islam ensured the institutionalization of the main organs of the state such as the census, the divan organization and the treasury organization (Bayt al-Mâl), which were utopian issues for many places in the Middle East (when the Prophet Muhammad was still alive) (Şimşir, 2017).

While the Middle East, which achieved political stability and prosperity with the regulations brought by Islam, experienced its golden age in science, art, economy and military service, Europe experienced the Middle Ages (478-1453 or 1492 AD), which lasted for 1000 years and is known as the Dark Ages. This era in Europe was characterized by power struggles, people were oppressed and tortured for the sake of religion and belief, people were killed mercilessly and no one was granted freedom of thought, belief and conscience (Bozkurt, 2018: 1). Medieval Europe experienced very bad times, especially due to the Inquisition (Çetin Ünal, 2022: 6). The replacement of old beliefs and ideologies with rational thinking (Age of Enlightenment) in the 17th and 18th centuries in Western society started at least a thousand years before the West in the Middle East. The Prophet Muhammad's promotion of lifelong learning increased the demand for and access to knowledge in the region. To meet this need for knowledge, the first translation activities began during the Umayyad period and became a serious state policy during the Abbasid period. With the coming to power of the Abbasids, Muslims began to benefit from the intellectual and scientific products of Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Assyrian, Greek and Indian civilizations. This was achieved through translation. The translation activities, which lasted for about two hundred years, created a significant accumulation of knowledge over time and were replaced by copyrighted works (Dağbaşı, 2013: 186). During the Mamlukid and Ottoman periods, centers of learning such as Cairo, Alexandria, Damascus, Kufa and Basra were established in the region, and scholars and writers from Europe, Anatolia and elsewhere flocked to the region to write, teach and lecture.

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For example, Kashgarli Mahmud, the great veteran of the Turkish language, emigrated from Kashgar to Iraq and wrote his works there. In the 11th century, the Iraqi region was the heart of the Islamic world. Baghdad in particular was an important centre of knowledge and wisdom under the influence of the Caliphate (Baskın, 2012: 49). The famous Arab philologist Abū Hayyān (Özyetgin, 2003: 35), born in Granada, Spain (1256-1344), one of the most important representatives of Turkish lexicography and grammar, came to Egypt both to lecture and to publish his works. The statesman Kadı Burhaneddin, one of the most important scholars and poets of Anatolia, was educated first in Damascus and then in Cairo in the 14th century to study languages and religious sciences (Özaydın, 2001: 74).

In the 15th century there were two states at the height of the Islamic state tradition. One was the Mamluk state, based in Egypt, and the other was the Ottoman Empire in Anatolia. During this period, the Middle East was part of the Mamluk state. However, the development of the Ottoman Empire had a profound impact on the Mamluks, Islamic geography and Europe. In particular, the conquest of Constantinople transformed the Mamluks into the Ottoman Empire during this period, while the attention of European explorers, merchants, missionaries and soldiers turned to the other side of the Mediterranean (Sander, 2012). For example, Spanish and Portuguese invaders and merchants began to spread to all the seas outside the Mediterranean in the hope of finding wealth, and in time established the first transoceanic European empires. Factors such as population growth in Europe, developments in trade and manufacturing that facilitated the exchange of ideas and gradually raised living standards, the use of gunpowder and the compass, and the development of printing encouraged and facilitated European powers to establish new colonies regardless of location (Merriman, 2018: 30). The discovery of the American continent by Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci in 1492, and the melting down of the temples and other artefacts made of expensive metals and metals such as gold and silver of the ancient Inca and Aztec civilizations in South America and bringing them to continental Europe, resulted in significant economic growth and social transformation in Europe. In particular, the utilization of the compass and the construction of merchant vessels capable of enduring the tumultuous seas for extended periods, along with the Silk Road and Spice Route, which traversed from land to sea. As a result of the displacement of Europeans from the Mediterranean, new sea routes were discovered, enabling navigation to the Americas in the west and to China and India in the east. These included the Cape of Good Hope and the Strait of Magellan. Europe, enriched by intercontinental maritime trade and colonial activities, was characterized by a constant drive for new discoveries and inventions, as well as a commitment to investment in education, science, art and culture. In this period, especially following the conquest of Istanbul in 1453, scientists and clergymen who took refuge in Rome translated works such as astronomy, mathematics, geometry and philosophy written in ancient Greek and Greek into Latin, which led to the Renaissance in Italian city states such as Florence, Rome, Venice and Genoa. The developments mentioned above have prompted a re-evaluation of the role and continued relevance of the Church in the Western world. The Church has been perceived as a negative force, impeding and hindering the advancement of new approaches and the reality of change in a multitude of domains, including thought, science, technology, social relations, the

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economy, and politics. (Okumuş, 2020: 68) was effectively dismantled by Martin Luther's protest declaration and subsequent reform of religion in 1517. In Europe, reason, wisdom and science came to the fore, superseding traditional dogmatic beliefs. Concurrently, in 1517, the Ottomans, led by Yavuz Sultan Selim, brought an end to the Mamluk state in Egypt, annexing the entire Middle East and restoring political unity in the East.

The developments that occurred during the 15th and 16th centuries resulted in significant shifts in intellectual paradigms, marking the advent of a new era in Europe (Karabağ, 2015: 32). In this new period, reason and knowledge were held in high regard, and the ideas of progress and the scientific method were widely embraced throughout Europe. This process culminated in the English Revolution of the 17th century and the French Revolution of the 18th century. The social and political structures that were transformed by these revolutions (Çiğdem, 2015: 13-14) gave rise to the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century and the evolution of production from manual and physical labour to machine power. This resulted in a shift in the balance of power in favour of the West, marking the beginning of a period of stagnation and subsequent decline in the Middle East. During this period, there were no notable innovations or developments in science, art, education, culture, or military strategy within the Islamic world, with the exception of the military successes and victories of the Ottoman Empire in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. In the West, the German, Latin, Frankish, Anglo-Saxon and Slavic tribes collectively engaged in conflict with the Muslims and Turks, setting aside their internal disputes. Consequently, the Ottoman Empire gradually weakened and diminished in size due to the continuous loss of territory. During this period, the Ottoman Empire, and consequently the Middle East, experienced a degree of respite when European states, North and South America, Africa, South-East Asia and Oceania were engaged in conflicts of interest and fell against each other.

The Middle East Drifting from Light to Darkness: 19th and 20th Centuries

The Middle East attained political stability as part of the Islamic State during the time of the rulers known as the Khulafa Rashidin (632-661 AD) (Hz. Ebû Bekir, Hz. Ömer, Hz. Osman and Hz. Ali). Ali (Fayda, 1998) enjoyed a period of prosperity until the 19th century, during which time it was ruled by the Umayyads, Abbasids, Mamluks and Ottomans. However, the weakening of the Ottoman Empire and the growing influence of Europeans in the Middle East led to a gradual decline in the region's fortunes. By the nineteenth century, intellectuals and statesmen within the Ottoman Empire were engaged in discourse surrounding novel concepts. In particular, nationalism, which emerged in response to the French Revolution, and Islamism, which was shaped by religious sensitivities, had a significant impact on the political and social structures in the region. The approach of Western states, in particular Britain and France, to these ideas was opportunistic in nature. They deliberately supported and utilised nationalism when it was advantageous to them and Islamism when it was advantageous to them, in order to gain selfish advantages from the circumstances. To illustrate, the continued existence of the Ottoman Empire in Egypt was transformed into an international issue by Western countries, who did so deliberately and by exploiting Arab nationalists. The Arabi Pasha affair provides a key illustration of the deployment of ideologies as a strategic

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instrument in the Middle East, as well as Britain's shifting policies towards the region. Despite espousing a nationalist rhetoric, Arabi Pasha demonstrated his continued allegiance to the Ottoman Empire. He cautioned the Ottoman Empire against the potential implications of the Khedive's (governor of Egypt, vizier) interactions with European states. Nevertheless, the consequence was that Arabi Pasha was designated a rebel and Egypt was occupied by the British (Özkaya, 2017: 279). In the nineteenth century, Egypt, situated as it was in a geopolitically advantageous position in relation to Iraq and Arabia, which were endowed with substantial subterranean resources, became the focus of attention for both the British and the French. Consequently, both states engaged in extensive propaganda, intelligence, and espionage operations in the Middle East. During this period, groups were formed based on slogans such as 'Egypt belongs to the Egyptians' in Egypt, 'An independent Kurdistan for the Kurds' in Iraq, and 'The liberation of Hejaz and an independent Arab Kingdom' in Arabia. The formation of these groups resulted in the disintegration of the Middle East and the emergence of states with defined rulers. Consequently, the peoples of the Middle East, who had previously enjoyed political stability and coexisted since the 7th century, became subject to colonial rule by Western powers. The West achieved this through the recruitment of its own personnel, including Thomas Edward Lawrence (Aşan, et al.), Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell (Aydın, 2023), and the utilisation of local collaborators such as Sharif Hussein and King Faisal. These collaborators were employed with such efficacy in the region that they were able to resolve all of the West's issues. For instance, King Faisal, who played a pivotal role in the uprising for the liberation of Hejaz, was appointed King of Syria as a reward, and subsequently became King of Iraq following the deposition of the previous monarch. Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell exerted considerable influence in the process of his ascension to the Iraqi throne (Aydın, 2023). Additionally, King Faisal was a close associate of Thomas Edward Lawrence.

From the nineteenth century onwards, the reciprocities continued until the First World War. During this period, the region gradually broke away from the Ottoman Empire and became a mandate of Western states, including France and Britain. The French and British did not immediately fulfil the promises they had made to the Arabs regarding their freedom. Firstly, the region was mapped in accordance with the interests of the respective powers, with a view to facilitating subsequent governance. Subsequently, they facilitated the formation of the contemporary states. Egypt, which had been under British mandate, achieved independence in 1922; the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932; Iraq in 1932; Jordan in 1946; Kuwait in 1961; the Sultanate of Oman in 1970; the United Arab Emirates in 1971; Bahrain in 1971; Qatar in 1971; and Yemen in 1990. Furthermore, Lebanon, which had been under French mandate, declared its independence in 1943, and Syria followed suit in 1946. Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to assume that these declarations of independence were entirely free from the influence of the West. Furthermore, the establishment of the State of Israel between Lebanon and Egypt in 1948, which received unwavering support from the West, is also a pivotal event in the region's history. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 led to a prolonged and intractable conflict between Jews and Muslim Arabs in the Middle East, resulting in a series of recurrent wars.

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In the 20th century, France, Britain, the USA and Russia all had geopolitical ambitions in the Middle East. Russia has long held aspirations to gain access to warm seas, including the Mediterranean, and to expand its maritime influence beyond this region. In recent decades, the Middle East has emerged as a key area of international competition, with Russia paying particular attention to this region. This presents Russia with an opportunity to demonstrate its status as a global power. Following the conclusion of the Cold War, Russia was compelled to withdraw from the region. However, following the ascendance of Putin to the Russian presidency, Russia returned to the Middle East. During this period, Russia made considerable gains, but these were lost with the advent of the Arab Spring due to a lack of preparation. The success of Russia's renewed engagement with the region is contingent upon the outcome of its policy in Syria (Üren, 2019: 231). For this reason, the Russian government attaches special importance to the situation in Syria. It provides arms and financial aid to the Syrian government and maintains a military base in Latakia, which it uses to protect the Syrian regime.

It would be erroneous to assume that the attention of Westerners was the sole focus in the Middle East. Furthermore, the Safavid states have consistently demonstrated a propensity for aggression, particularly in Iraq and its surrounding regions. The region is home to several significant Shia cities, including Najaf and Karbala, which have historically been the subject of contention between various political and religious factions. In this context, Baghdad played an important role for the Ottomans in maintaining the traditions of the Abbasid Caliphate. The cities of Najaf and Karbala, meanwhile, were at the centre of the Safavid-Ottoman rivalry as they were considered to be of great significance as holy cities for the Safavids (Küçük, 2016: 123). In the 20th century, this rivalry culminated in a war between Iran and Iraq between 1980 and 1988. The conflict resulted in approximately one million deaths, two million injuries, and 150 billion US dollars in material damage, yet neither side emerged as the clear victor (Wikipedia, 10 February 2024). A comparable rivalry exists between Iran and Saudi Arabia. This competition is typically conducted through third parties. The two countries in question seek to expand their respective political, economic, and religious spheres of influence, which has resulted in civil unrest and even armed conflict through their representatives in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. Nevertheless, there is no direct communication between the two countries. The current state of affairs may be described as a form of cold war.

In the 20th century, two world wars had a profound impact on the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, as they did in other regions. The Second World War was a pivotal moment in history, marking a shift in global power dynamics and the advent of a new political order. In this context, the role previously occupied by Britain and France in the Middle East was assumed by the USA. In the aftermath of the war, the United States pursued its geopolitical interests in the Middle East through a multifaceted approach, leveraging its bilateral relations to counter the expansionist policies of the Soviet Union. This policy, particularly in regard to the domination of the region's oil and resources, has demonstrated its influence and impact through the Truman Doctrine, Eisenhower Doctrine, Nixon Doctrine, Carter Doctrine, Reagan Doctrine, and Bush Doctrine (Kapucu, 2021: 220). For instance, as a consequence of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the United States intervened militarily in Iraq with the objective of

preventing Kuwaiti oil from being acquired by another state. Following a brief military campaign, Iraq was compelled to withdraw from Kuwait. Subsequently, at the request of the Gulf countries (Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, etc.), the US established military bases in the region and became a significant presence in the area (Kapucu, 2021: 230). From time to time, the United States' oil-oriented policy has resulted in cooperation with the PKK and its extensions, which are designated as terrorist organizations by numerous countries, including the United States, European countries, Canada, and Australia. This evidence demonstrates that the United States supports various actors in the region in accordance with its own interests. The designation of these organisations as terrorist groups does not alter the fundamental circumstances. It is regrettable that this self-serving policy has resulted in significant turmoil and conflict in various countries in the region, including Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. The United States' position and policy have resulted in the formation of two distinct structures in the Middle East.

Two Different Middle East: Lives in Luxurious and Indigent Circumstances

Those in the Middle East who have pursued unconditionally pro-Western policies, particularly those of the United States and the United Kingdom, have made significant advancements over the past quarter-century and are currently experiencing a period of prosperity. The countries bordering the Persian Gulf are the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman. To achieve their economic, political and social goals collectively, these countries have established the Gulf Cooperation Council, which is headquartered in Saudi Arabia. The countries in question boast a few tourist attractions, including Dubai and Doha. They also have their own airlines, such as Emirates, Etihad Airways and Qatar Airways, which offer premium flight services and operate international flights from Africa to the Americas, Europe and the Far East. Furthermore, they have international companies, such as Emaar and Nakheel Properties, which produce real estate with unique designs and aspirational lifestyles in prime locations. Finally, they have ultra-wealthy groups, such as the Nahyan family, which have fortunes of hundreds of billions of dollars.

Consequently, international sporting events such as the FIFA 2022 Qatar Football World Cup, large trade fairs and exhibitions can be held in this region. Despite their relatively modest population and military capacity, these countries occupy a significant position in the Middle East, largely due to their substantial economic potential (Kaya & Kaya, 2019: 505). The majority of these countries' military requirements are met by the USA. The United States maintains a significant military presence in these countries. Furthermore, they procure sophisticated weaponry at a considerable expense from the United States. To illustrate, Saudi Arabia, the second largest importer of arms after India, purchases 61% of its weapons from the USA. In 2017, following his election as president, US President Trump undertook a visit to Saudi Arabia, during which he signed an agreement for the sale of military equipment to the value of \$110 billion. As a consequence of the recent agreements, Saudi Arabia has become the largest customer of the United States for military equipment (BBC News Turkish, 2018). Furthermore, the Iranian attack on Israel was successfully prevented by the United States' military bases in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and the logistical support

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provided by Jordan. While 40,000 innocent Arab civilians were killed in Palestine, the Arab countries did not intervene to protect Israel, which perpetrated a massacre and committed war crimes in violation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) mandate. The primary rationale for this is the United States' continued involvement. These states adhere unconditionally to the directives of the United States, which in turn provides them with security and guarantees their economic stability.

A number of Middle Eastern countries have demonstrated a proclivity for collaboration with other nations, as opposed to the United States. For instance, Syria has adopted a more pro-Russian stance. Furthermore, Iraq has historically maintained closer ties with Russia, both during the Cold War and in the subsequent period. Egypt, in contrast, pursued a policy of equilibrium, seeking to cultivate amicable relations with both Russia and the United States.

Following the conclusion of the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR, the USA emerged as the dominant global power, establishing itself as the sole superpower in the emerging new world order. Considering the realization that no power could impede its progress, the USA directed its attention towards those in the Middle East who maintained a distance from it or collaborated with the USSR. The initial phase of this strategy was initiated in Iraq. He initially instructed Iraq to invade Kuwait and subsequently constituted an international coalition under his leadership with the objective of halting Iraq's incursion into Kuwait. The coalition was responsible for the disintegration of Iraq because of the First Gulf War in 1991. Even though Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was not deposed from power, he nevertheless experienced a notable loss of control over the country. The United States invaded Iraq on the grounds of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Initially presented as a 'war on terror', the invasion subsequently became a 'war to rid Iraq of weapons of mass destruction' and finally 'Operation Iraqi Liberation' in the Second Gulf War in 2003. The United States' actions in Iraq and the embargo imposed on the region resulted in the collapse of the Iraqi economy, which condemned the people to hunger and misery. The prevailing authority vacuum, economic crisis, hunger and poverty in Iraq presented significant challenges to the US presence in the country. Concurrently, these circumstances created a conducive environment for the rapid organization and development of radical Islamic organizations (Sokullu et al., 2023).

In Syria, as in Iraq, the United States sought to overthrow the government, exploiting the Arab Spring as a pretext for weakening Russian influence in the region. In this regard, local opposition groups have constituted a key collaborator. The most prominent of these opposition groups are the Muslim Brotherhood, DAESH and Kurdish groups. To overthrow the pro-Russian regime, Western powers, particularly the USA, exacerbated sectarian divisions within the country and endorsed the creation of a 'Free Syria' through the utilization of economic challenges and political coercion, presenting these as justifications for their actions. To achieve this objective, the United States provided military, economic, and logistical support to opposition groups. The expectations of the US and other Western powers that this support would result in a rapid regime change were not realized. Conversely, the Syrian Civil War, which originated as a limited popular movement in 2011, has rapidly evolved into an international concern with significant regional and global ramifications,

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attracting the involvement of numerous actors (Kiraz, 2020: 99). In the Middle East, Egypt generally seeks to maintain a neutral stance regarding Russia and the USA, pursuing a policy of balance. From the 1950s until 2011, Egypt was ruled by the military. During this period, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak held power. In 2011, the people of Egypt rose up with the Arab Spring, ensuring the realization of a democratic election. On 30 June 2012, the Egyptian electorate elected Mohamed Morsi as president, placing him ahead of two other candidates: Ahmed Shafik, who had served as prime minister during the previous administration, and Mohamed Morsi, who represented the Muslim Brotherhood. Nevertheless, Morsi was deposed from his position a year later in a military coup d'état orchestrated by opposition forces, which were supported by external actors, notably the Gulf states and the United States. The country was thrust into a state of civil unrest, characterized by protests, looting, arrests and occasional clashes. The military government that assumed power in 2013 has been unable to rectify numerous issues that were previously attributed to Morsi. Furthermore, the government's policy of frequent devaluations has contributed to the impoverishment of the Egyptian people, as the national currency is devalued, and the cost of living rises. These circumstances demonstrate that those in the region who are not aligned with the United States are facing consequences. Those who demonstrate unwavering allegiance to the United States are enjoying a state of economic stability and are accumulating assets daily.

Integration Efforts in the World: Different Integration Processes in the West and East

The emergence of Italy and Germany as powerful states in the nineteenth century, along with their attempts to colonise Africa and Asia for the purpose of acquiring raw materials and expanding their markets, contributed to the outbreak of the First and Second World Wars, as did the actions of other European powers. By 1945, the European states, which had been the dominant political, economic, social and military powers on the global stage for nearly five centuries and which exercised control over more than 80% of the world's territory as colonies at that time, had become subject to their own rule following the USA's use of the atomic bomb. Consequently, the locus of power underwent a further shift. In the Middle Ages, the centre of power was located within the Islamic world and its associated states. Subsequently, the Europeans and, following the Second World War, the USA became the dominant power (hegemony). The European states' descent into this situation was precipitated by internal conflicts and wars amongst themselves. For instance, France and Germany were engaged in seven separate wars. The last three of these have resulted in significant devastation.

The European Union (EU) was established to address the perceived weaknesses of the continent's previous political and economic structures. These structures had been characterised by competition and strife, which had in turn undermined Europe's global influence. The EU's founding fathers sought to reverse this trend by establishing a common market and a unified political and economic space. Their aim was to make Europe the dominant global actor, to enhance its security and prosperity, and to foster a peaceful and stable international environment. This resulted in the cessation of centuries of religious and sectarian conflicts, ethnic-based disputes and economic rivalries, such as the competition for

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access to natural resources, including coal and iron, and for markets. Instead, a process of cooperation began to emerge. As a consequence of this process of integration, Europe has once again become one of the most significant economic and political powers in the world. This situation, which has resulted in Europe becoming a region characterised by prosperity and peace, has been realised gradually. The process commenced with the European Coal and Steel Community (1952) and reached its zenith with the European Economic Community (1957), the European Community (1967) and the European Union (1993). It would be beneficial for the peoples of the Middle East to consider the development process and the gains achieved as an example to follow. It would be beneficial for the peoples of the Middle East to return to the glorious days of old, cease their bickering, fighting and differences, and instead focus on cooperation. It would be beneficial to apply the development process of the European Union to the Middle East.

Indeed, at the same time as Europe, Islamic countries came to recognise their relative backwardness. Consequently, the concept of the European Economic Community, which would become known as the Common Market, was proposed in the 1960s. In order to achieve this objective, a series of measures have been implemented since that time. The initial initiative was the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which comprises 57 Muslim countries. It was established in 1969. In 2011, the organisation was renamed the Organisation of Islamic Unity. In accordance with the resolution adopted at the 1973 meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the Islamic Development Bank was established on 20 October 1975. Subsequently, institutions were established to facilitate integration, including the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, the Islamic States Broadcasting Organisation and the International Islamic News Agency. At the present time, all these organisations are operational. Nevertheless, the desired impact has not been achieved. Aware of this, Necmettin Erbakan, the Prime Minister of the 54th Turkish Government, facilitated the formation of the Developing Eight Countries (D-8) Organisation, which comprises the eight Islamic countries with the largest economies and populations. The D-8 is a global rather than a regional organisation in terms of its principles and the geographical area it covers. It has a total population of 1.1 billion (one-seventh of the world population) and a total economic size of more than 4 trillion USD. The total exports of the D-8 countries are estimated at approximately 700 billion USD, representing 14% of global trade (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). The eight largest member countries of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (D-8) possess considerable potential for trade (Hassan, 2016: 69). The fundamental premise of the D-8 is to elucidate the potential of Islamic countries, to guarantee that other Islamic countries reap the benefits of their opportunities, and to pursue development collectively. In the initial phase of the programme, areas of potential collaboration were identified based on the specific circumstances of the participating countries. The objective was to develop projects in these identified areas. In accordance with this plan, Bangladesh was to spearhead rural development initiatives, Indonesia was to focus on poverty alleviation and human resources, Iran was to prioritize science and technology, Malaysia was to concentrate on finance, banking, and privatization, Egypt was to lead trade efforts, Nigeria was to drive energy initiatives, Pakistan was to lead agricultural and fisheries development,

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and Turkey was to lead industrial, health, and environmental efforts. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the D-8 has fully achieved its stated objectives. The principal indicator of this is evident in the human behaviour precipitated by the civil war in Syria. In lieu of coexisting harmoniously, individuals belonging to the same Arab and Muslim communities, sharing a common historical background and cultural heritage, are engaged in a struggle for survival. Furthermore, those seeking to escape the Syrian civil war are attempting to migrate not to neighbouring Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain and Iraq, which are rich in oil and natural resources, and where they share a language, religion and cultural values, but to Christian European countries, which are geographically distant in terms of language, religion and culture. This demonstrates that the extant institutions and country administrations have proved unable to safeguard their own citizens.

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The establishment of the Silk Road through Tabriz, Erzurum, Tokat, Bursa and the spice routes through Basra, Baghdad and Aleppo fostered economic cooperation among the peoples of the region. Consequently, a flourishing trade and, consequently, developments in science, art and industry were recorded in this region. However, firstly, the geographical discoveries did not result in a shift in trade routes, and the importance of these routes subsequently declined. Secondly, the Portuguese, Dutch and British invaded Basra, respectively, which led to the cessation of trade and the associated social and cultural developments. The Development Road Project is of significant value in terms of revitalising this trade and other social and cultural situations that were extinguished with the cessation of trade.

The Development Road Project commences at the Persian Gulf and extends to Turkey and Europe via both road and railway. It should be noted, however, that there is also a pre-Persian Gulf route. In fact, this project forms part of a route that extends from the Far East, including countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, to the Middle East, and subsequently to Turkey and Europe. The realisation of the Development Road Project and the active use of this road will facilitate the emergence of new job opportunities, facilitate the easy shipment of goods produced and their access to markets, and stimulate the development of numerous sectors, including services, industry, health and logistics. The creation of new employment opportunities will provide a sense of security, stability and economic prosperity, which will in turn encourage those who have migrated to other countries to return, and those who currently reside elsewhere to consider relocating. Nevertheless, for this to be accomplished, it is first necessary for the countries of the region to achieve a state of supranational integration, which will entail setting aside their sectarian, linguistic and cultural differences.

The European Union has been able to achieve integration that was previously unfeasible due to the limitations of the nation-state system. This integration was enabled by the establishment of supranational sovereignty rights after World War II, which were based on economic principles. These principles include the free movement of goods, persons, services, and capital, as well as free trade and free competition. These factors of production have been crucial in facilitating the integration of Europe. Those in the Middle East and other Islamic

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countries would do well to recognise that a significant proportion of their own population is engaged in a desperate struggle for survival, seeking asylum in Europe. It would be prudent to consider that many of these individuals perish en route to Europe or are compelled to reside as refugees without any legal recourse, facing ostracism and marginalisation. To achieve this, it is imperative that the countries in question set aside their differences and work towards the creation of a society in which all individuals are willing to reside. The member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council provide an illustrative example. It would be prudent for these states to build on this example and move towards the establishment of supranational structures, such as a common currency, a central bank, integrated educational and trade institutions, a customs union, and a common army. Such a scenario is only feasible through the establishment of organisations such as the Union of Middle Eastern Countries and the Union of Islamic Countries. It is important to note that the Islamic Common Market, a concept that has been discussed since the 1960s, is a viable proposition and some of its basic institutions are already in place. The initial phase of establishing this market could be the Development Road Project. It is essential to ensure that the integration process is expanded gradually, commencing with the Middle East and encompassing not only the key players in this region but also those countries situated at a distance. Consequently, Muslims will be afforded the opportunity to recognize and assist one another in matters pertaining to politics, economics, culture and religion (Çobanoğlu, 2010). Otherwise, the prevailing state of poverty and instability in the majority of Islamic countries, particularly in the Middle East, will persist, and the region's considerable untapped natural resources will continue to be redirected towards the West, while security concerns persist.

Conclusion

In 2024, a 'Memorandum of Understanding on Joint Cooperation on the Development Road Project' was signed between Turkey, Iraq, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. This road will open the Persian Gulf hinterland to Europe via Turkey. Although it is apparently a protocol signed by only 4 countries, all countries in the Middle East will benefit from the opportunities of the road. However, for the project to work, an atmosphere of peace must be established in the region. In this context, it should be ensured that the signatures signed in this context will evolve step by step into permanent peace in the Middle East and eventually into the Islamic Common Market.

In order for the Middle East and Islamic countries to return to their former glory and to have a say in the international arena, they need to realise an EU-like integration based on supranational structure (i.e. supranational) and economic cooperation. In the absence of such a union, the exploitation, domination, dominance and absolute superiority of the Western World over the Middle East and other Islamic countries will persist. It would be beneficial for Islamic countries to adopt a more collaborative approach, sharing their respective strengths and combining their economic, geographical and cultural resources to become a formidable international force. Instead of engaging in conflict and competition, it would be more advantageous for these countries to unite and leverage their collective strengths to advance their shared interests. Once this is achieved, it will become apparent that they will be able to match and even exceed the unassailable superiority of the West in science, art, culture, politics and the military. It is anticipated that the Development Road Project will facilitate this

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realization and result in the formation of more extensive networks. Once this has been achieved, the Palestinian issue, which represents a significant challenge for the Muslim community, will be more readily resolved. Countries such as the TRNC, whose rights have been infringed upon and disregarded, will be able to reclaim their legitimate entitlements. Furthermore, all other Muslim communities facing oppression and intimidation will experience enhanced security and a sense of empowerment. Furthermore, the international achievements of Muslim scientists will increase exponentially, resulting in the conferral of prestigious awards such as the Nobel Prize for Peace, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Medicine, and Literature. Moreover, when these countries unite and become stronger, they will become a centre of attraction due to their natural resources and holy places. This will positively affect trade, tourism, education and other sectors and enrich the region.

Finally, for a prosperous, rich, peaceful and secure life, we should embrace the Development Road Project and it is important that all stakeholder actors work voluntarily for its successful realisation and mediation of larger formations.

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