

# The Politics of Othering: an Antidote to the European Identity Crisis?



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# Introduction

Tantalus, son of Zeus and king of Sipylus, is a figure in the Greek mythology most famous for his exile from Olympus, home of the Greek gods, and his conviction to a perennial punishment and the eternal malevolence of the gods.<sup>1</sup> His torment, consisting of both temptation and frustration, could be used as a metaphor for the Turkish position vis-à-vis Europe. As Meltem Ahiska (2003) asserts, in the Turkish struggle to join the European Union, Europe is considered to be both as an object and a source of frustration for Turkey's international ambitions. Her perpetual efforts to achieve acceptance from the European community for the past sixty years is just the tip of an iceberg. Indeed, this is the history of a century-long relationship marked by stereotypes, vivid debates and discrepancies in perception.

Grounding my approach in the semantic analysis of Beyza Ç. Tekin - who brilliantly assessed and examined the contemporary political discourse shaped by historical representations of the Turk in the French collective imaginary – this paper will demonstrate how Europe's own perception of the Self influences its foreign policy and attitude towards its historical Others. By focusing on the representations of Turkey in the European social imaginary, the present research paper carefully analyzes the Self/Other dynamics within the context of the political debates on Turkey's quest for European Union (EU) membership. By providing a brief

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Greek mythology, Tantalus was punished by his father, Zeus, for tricking the gods and offering them human flesh in his own banquet. Tantalus, therefore was thrown out of Olympus and after he died he was punished for eternity and condemned to spend his whole afterlife in the underworld, Tartara. His agony consisted in standing forever waist-deep in a pool of water, with a fruit tree full of ripe fruit right over him. Yet, no matter how hungry or thirsty he was, whenever he bent down to drink the water, it would all magically drain away, and whenever he reached up to pick some fruit, the branches would lift up out of his reach. Despite this perpetual suffering he was dead already and for this reason he could never die, travailing between temptation and frustration for eternity.

introductory survey of a selection of political texts,<sup>2</sup> I will assess the importance of the role of identity in the formation of political interests in the realm of International Relations.

The research question in this paper is twofold: How has othering Turkey contributed to the construction of European Collective Identity? And: What does Europe's ambiguous attitude towards Turkey tell us about the current status of the EU's Self-perception? In order to demonstrate Turkey's constitutive role in the formation of EU's identity, the present inquiry will rely on a socio-historical analysis of the ways in which the Turkish Other has been represented in the EU political discourse. The theoretical framework adopted for this analysis belongs to the constructivist tradition. By openly acknowledging the importance of the situational context within which discourse is formed and transformed, the current research refers to the present and to the past as equally important elements of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. This methodological choice relies on the conviction that the past is reflected in the present, shaping both our reality and the intricate and varied ways in which we understand it.

Hence, the first part of the paper offers a historical and social contextualization of the EU-Turkey relationship, exposing the dual image of 'the Turks', as friends or foes in the European social imaginary. The following chapters focus on the different European political attitudes towards the idea of Turkey's EU membership maintained during the negotiation process in the post-Helsinki period. Moreover, by critically scrutinizing political speeches and articles, the next chapter shows how the questions about Turkey's Europeanness or non-Europeanness are assessed through three different approaches: essentialist, functionalist and pragmatist. The fourth and final chapter of the research is devoted to the discussion of the

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<sup>2</sup>The texts and speeches selected for this analysis are extracted from European political journals. Such sources are already translated and adapted by B. Ç.Tekin (2010) in her manuscript: "Representations and Othering in Discourse: The construction of Turkey in the EU context".

overall findings, arguing that political interests and attitudes are deeply influenced by the in-group identity perception of the European Self and that the alterity attributed to Turkey, implicitly contributes to its construction.

The discussions regarding Turkey's possible accession to the EU have been intensively reviewed at a both international level and local level - taking over the Internet, the newspapers, even the national television and radio. Furthermore, despite the historical value of the Turkey-EU foreign policy affair, what makes the disconnection highly intriguing is its recently acquired identity dimension. This new angle of perception aroused a conspicuous interest among the most prominent leaders, who sought a new social engine for their political campaigns. Despite its geographical proximity to Europe, the constant political and socio-economic interactions and its manifest enthusiasm to engage in the developing regional integration process with the Old continent, Turkey's "Europeanness" has always been questioned and doubted by Western Europe. The idea of Turkey being included or even considered as an actual member of the European project is an ideological breaking point between the two, which for over a century has generated constant discussions and rekindled old irreconcilable rancor.

From the very beginning of the European integration process in the 1950s, Turkey's candidacy for membership has represented a highly complex and enigmatic matter, the contents of which have changed over time. The contours of these complexities have reflected the international political priorities at stake, as well as the various exigencies of powerful actors (Tekin, 2010). Since 1959, Turkey was one of the first countries to seek cooperation with the young European Economic Community (EEC). However, its request to join the ECC was merely addressed within the framework of an "association agreement" called the Ankara Agreement which was ratified in 1963. Such agreement aimed to establish a progressive

“Customs Union” between the European Economic Community and Turkey. It was designed with the intent to achieve a closer coordination of the respective economic policies and to “promote the continuous and balanced strengthening of trade and economic relations between the Contracting Parties”.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this first partnership attempt, which accepted economic cooperation, the European Union has always been openly cautious and maintained an arm’s-length relationship with its Anatolian neighbor. In fact, it was not only until forty years later, at the Helsinki European Council in 1999, that Turkey finally saw the confirmation of its eligibility for EU membership. This event represented a turning point for the EU-Turkey relations since, for the first time, the debate concerning Turkish candidacy had moved to a more concrete realm. This olive branch extended by Europe seemed to signal a turning point. No longer would Europe’s perception of Turkey as “non-European” prevent Turkey from joining the European Community. However, Turkey’s sense of relief proved to be short lived as more obstacles soon appeared in its path towards integration. Indeed, severe critiques of the Turkish form of government, which did not meet Copenhagen’s political and economic criteria, again obstructed the formal recognition of Turkish candidacy for accession.<sup>4</sup> Questions were raised about the country's level of civilization and compatibility with European values and principles of human rights, somewhat demonstrating that European public opinion still considered Turkey to be too foreign. Prospect for future negotiations faded away.

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<sup>3</sup> Preamble (Article 2 and 4b) of the Ankara Agreement Establishing an Association between the European Economic Community and Turkey (Signed at Ankara, 1 September 1963).

<sup>4</sup> According to the European Commission’s official website: “The accession criteria, or Copenhagen criteria (after the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993 which defined them), are the essential conditions all candidate countries must satisfy to become a member state. These are: (i) political criteria: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; (i) economic criteria: a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition and market forces”- available at [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/glossary/terms/accession-criteria\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/glossary/terms/accession-criteria_en).

The case of Turkey and its potential admission to the European system served as a catalyst which opened a public debate on the issue of what European identity implies and on which grounds it should be framed (Gole, 2005a)? Political talks about Turkey's integration fostered an unprecedented wave of objections particularly strong among the French public, but also in the Netherlands, Germany and Austria, and eventually spread all around Europe. Questions such as "what is Europe?" and "who is European?" created discord as countries struggled to define what aspects of identity were essential to their regional project. The process of constructing a collective identity for Europe soon became a political agenda in and of itself which greatly influenced the future of the European Union as a whole.

It is interesting to appraise the main reasons behind the European public's rejection of Turkey's membership, as they consist of three varied arguments which developed over time and included concerns about Turkey's values, geographic distance, and its potential impact in steering the future of the European project. During the 1970's, the main differences that derailed Turkey's accession focused on social and political matters. These issues included the poor legislation concerning human rights violations, the repression and consequent retraction on the promise of Kurdish citizenship, the increasing militarization of Turkish political life, the Greek-Cypriot perennial conflict, and the absurd denial of any Turkish involvement in the atrocious Armenian genocide. These stances all placed Turkey at a remarkable distance from the EU in terms of the political and humanitarian principles which many Europeans believed were at the heart of their nascent regional project (ibid).

In 2002, however, the discussion shifted towards more geographical considerations. Questions, about where to draw the exact European borders and establish the topographical limitations of what was to be considered as part of the European community, emerged from the speeches of many European political elites. Many of these arguments pointed out the

“absurdity” of considering Turkey, even in exclusively geographical terms, a legitimate member of the European Union. According to the European far right, if Turkey was included someone could scrupulously argue “then why not Russia?” Moreover, expanding Europe’s Eastern border, would mean becoming direct neighbors with poor, unstable, and tumultuous countries such as Iraq, Iran, and Syria; a widely unpopular prospect amongst European citizens.(ibid).

Besides geopolitical considerations, the eventual accession of Turkey into the EU also worried most democratic institutions, such as the European Parliament. The large number of Turkish citizens would mean that their votes would play a critical role in making substantial decisions about Europe’s future. This fear was determinative in the negotiations talks regarding Turkey’s EU membership. Europe’s concerns about the demographic qualities of Turkey were further aggravated by the predominant demographic of Muslims in the Turkish population. Turkey, indeed, is a country with a large Muslim majority, and the Christian majority states which constituted the EU shared concerns over the potential entrance of more than 50 million “Muslims” into their political, economic and social sphere. Moreover, looking at the direction that the developing integration process was taking, in becoming more and more intrusive in the state-members’ domestic affairs, the idea of such Islamic influence represented an additional uncomfortable change for most conservative European countries (ibid).

Hence, inherent differences regarding cultural, religious and political views significantly framed the political and social environment within which the respective negotiations were advanced. Within this context, the othering of Turkey actively contributed to the process of defining the European Identity. In fact, the imminent threat associated with Turkey’s accession generated a desire to reinforce and protect the essence of Europeanness. The



urgency to clarify the cultural and civilizational boundaries of the EU is both the cause and the result of a century-old yet current, European identity crisis (ibid).

## **Literature Review**

### **The Making of a Collective Identity.**

The concept of Collective Identity, intended as a shared sense of belonging within a specific social group, may be encompassed within a broader constructivist discourse concerning the creation of the social imaginary of a society (Al Raffie, 2013). According to Delanty and Rumford (2005), social discourses are shaped within a defined socio-cognitive structure in which people construct and adapt their social understanding and world-views by using different cultural imaginaries, frames, familiar symbols and codes. Societies, when trying to define their own world perspective and apprehend the composition of their own social fabric, tend to rely on shared repertoires of justification which are articulated in the context of particular “social imaginaries” (Castoriadis, 1987). Such collective imaginaries incorporate different norms, values, tools languages, modes and procedures - all peculiar elements of a well-defined and consolidated community - which not only keep a society together but shape and homologate their perceptions of reality (Castoriadis, 1997). As Castoriadis (1997:7) argues “there is a magma of social imaginary significations” which are continuously constructed and deconstructed while influencing our understanding of our social sphere. “Who are we as a collectivity? What are we for one another? Where and in what are we? What do we want; what do we desire; what are we lacking? Society must define its ‘identity’, its articulation, the world, its relations to the world and to the objects it contains, its needs and its desires... The role of imaginary significations is to provide an answer to these questions.” (Castoriadis 1987: 147).

The act of collecting figures and meanings assists the society in creating and adjusting itself and contributes in defining its collocation in the world. Therefore, a society’s imaginary can be defined as a compendium of cultural and historical interpretations convenient for the reality of which it conceives and harmonized through its own cultural orientations

(Castoriadis, 1997). Such images are constantly transformed and informed by history or more correctly by our subjective reading of history. Therefore, social phenomena are framed and perceived culturally and historically under the lens of society's imaginary, which contributes in the formation of a shared but distinct collective identity (Tucker, 2005).

As William E. Connolly (1991) assesses in his analysis on identity politics, identity only exists in relation to the "other", which means that when we define the identity of a specific group, we also identify the differences which separate it from the surrounding sphere. Searching for identity entails differentiating oneself from what is not, therefore, when dealing with identity politics we are implicitly inclined to create differences (Benhabib, 1996). In the relational realm, these differences are converted into otherness and serve as a tool to establish and secure identity based self-certainties (Connolly, 1991). To this extent, Durkheim's theory on the social division of labour explains that the delineation of an in-group requires the identification of the relevant out-group(s). Therefore, the Self/Other dichotomy is essential in the creation of collective identity, recognized as such by both the individual as well as the collective (Neumann, 1999).

In the context of international relations, the cardinal nexus between the Self and the Other is anchored to sociological and historical perceptions that are constructed through time. The inevitable link to social-historical contexts is reflected in modern international relations and explains the formations of multiple Others in opposition to what is considered as belonging to the Self. Therefore, when we study international politics, we are essentially studying the

politics of making the Other (Shapiro, 1988) or as Guillaume (2002: para. 22) suggests: the politics of alterity.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, Todorov (1982/1999) in his manuscript, “The conquest of America. The Question of the other”, by studying of the sociological aspect of the discovery of the American continent, demonstrates that a multilayered analysis is necessary when trying to assess the relationship between the Self and the Other. He argues that the interpersonal contact between different social groups represents a moment of exchange where it is possible to confront the imaginary, where each collective can marry their perceptions of the other with reality. This represents a precious source of knowledge and serves both the Self and the Other in discovering and deepening their mutual understanding of one another and consequently themselves. Furthermore, in his analysis, Todorov (1999) introduces a multilevel approach through which it is possible to identify three different aspects in the approach of the Other. The first one is known as the axiological level. Taken from Greek “axia” meaning value, this level scrutinizes the inherent worth of the subject and contemplates the hypothesis of whether the Other is considered to be superior or inferior in relation to the Self. It supposes that the first step towards a recognition of the Other consists in an evaluation of its characteristics in order to decide whether it is better or worse than the Self (Hansen, 1998). The second, the praxeological level, is established on more factual grounds (“praxis”) and concerns the degree of separation perceived of between the Self and the Other.. This level varies depending on the outcomes of the previous evaluation made at the axiological level.

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<sup>5</sup> The politics of alterity is a concept significantly developed by Xavier Guillaume in his work, “Foreign Policy and the Politics of Alterity: A Dialogical Understanding of International Relations” (2002). As the author claims such notion was constructed within the meta- theoretical framework of of constructivism in the field of International Relations. According to his dialogical understanding, “the social world is constructed through an interweaving of mutually-responsive discourses between several agents” (p.12). In order to apprehend agents' identities, the politics of alterity provides an interpretative tool, thank to which - “by discerning their expressivity, contextuality and relationality” (p.15) - is possible to analysis the multifaceted process of identity formation within the discipline of International Relations.

Therefore, the decision regarding the inherent value of the Other helps establish its proximity with the Self. How should “We” approach the Other? What kind of attitude should “We” maintain when confronting “Them”? Depending on the evaluation made at the axiological level the corresponding praxeological actions may suggest either neutrality, indifference, submission or assimilation toward the Other (Stjerno, 2001). At this point, the Self may decide to either embrace the Other’s value or instead impose his own values upon him. In other words, the Self can choose if he needs to assimilate or domesticate the Other or even to consider it as an extension of the Self (Tekin, 2010). At the third and last stage, known as the epistemic level, the attention shifts toward the actual degree of knowledge that the Self has on the Other. Do “We” know “Them”? Are we knowledgeable enough of the “Other’s” identity?

In the reality and especially in the realm of international relations, there is a customized tendency by the public, usually manipulated by their own political elites, to demonize the Other in the attempt to construct and reassure the identity of the Self. In this regard, the twentieth-century philosopher, Jeffrey T. Nealon (1998), provides an interesting analyzes about the many ways society deals with the ethical understanding of a different community. In his work, “Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity”, he argues that ethics require action and a positively constructed attitude towards different identities. While passive resentment, besides being unproductive, also tends to exasperate our refusal or inability to understand difference. In fact, as Connolly (1991) points out, an extremely negative perception of “others” is a “temptation rather than a necessity” (p.8).

Moreover, the perception of the Other, as well as the Self, is not static but continuously informed and transformed over time. Therefore, especially in the field of international

relations, an old enemy may turn into a precious ally and vice versa, accordingly to the relevant existing circumstances and historical developments (Wendt, 1994).

## The Role of Collective Memory in the Perception of the Self and the Other.

There is an extensive corpus of literature which illustrates how the perception of the Turkish Other was perceived of within European political discourse since the early days of the Ottoman Empire. How this dynamic of perception and othering has developed over centuries has received significant political and historical attention (Tekin, 2010). By constantly trying to differentiate themselves respective to the Turkish and European other, their own identities were constructed accordingly. Therefore, as Robert Schwoebel (1972) asserts, the impression of the Other has been a determining element in the formation of the collective identity of both groups. Consequently the evolution of the imaginary of European society regarding the Turks functions as a mirror in defining and shaping so called “Europeanness”.

The Ottoman Empire has long occupied a central role in the European political order. Due to its non-Christian tradition, it has always been portrayed as an antagonist in the traditional metaphors, representations, images, and memories of the Europeans. Indeed, the Ottoman Empire was commonly used by the Europeans as the worst example of civilization (see Landweber, 2001; Kaiser, 2000). The use of this kind of language to identify Turkish society derives from past experiences and historic imaginaries which are imprinted in the collective memory of Europe. Collective memory “preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity”(Olick, 2011:213). Therefore,

memory in this instance has an identificatory function which determines the way in which a society perceives of itself - "we are this"- or its opposition (Mol, 1976). The importance of such a concept and its influence on social imagination can be appreciated in Halbwach's (1992) studies. According to his analysis, collective memory is the result of a popular reconstruction and rearrangement of the past within the collective framework of a specific society, whose ways of representation are highly affected by the present social milieu. Collective memory is always informed and relates its judgment of the past according to contemporary circumstances. Therefore, the past within the memory of a collectivity "is not preserved, but is reconstructed on the basis of the present" (Halbwach 1992:40). Consequently history is remodeled and integrated with individual memories, which provide the collective memory with particular subjective elements that reality does not necessarily boast (ibis). De facto, the collective memory of a society significantly shapes its identity and determines the way it is seen by the surrounding social groups and by its own components. Hence, the way the Self/Other relationship is represented in the memory of a collectivity explains much about a society's relation with history and its attitude in dealing with its past (Assmann, 1995).

Based on the assumptions stated above and acknowledging the selectivity with which memory operates, Halbwach (1992) concludes, each society has different collective memories, which affect their social imaginary and direct their behavior in the interactive sphere of international relations (Assmann, 1995). Therefore, it is cinch to understand the origins and the reasons behind the political discourses that revolve around Turkey's possible entry into the European Union. Through their selective and "myopic" reading of history, each argumentation is built upon different memories and images which are reflected on the political debates affiliated with Turkey's potential annexation (Servantie, 2003:183).

## Europe's Social Imaginary of Turkey: a Historical Overview.

This study, conducted by using a historically-grounded approach, aims to provide an analysis of how the Self/Other, intended as socio-political phenomenon which has always characterized the relationship between Turkey and the European Union, has developed since the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. However, the historical dimension provided here is not to be considered as the focal point of this research, but rather a necessary tool in order to offer the appropriate background information on Turkey's EU membership debate. Stating Chilton's (2002) accurate reflections, in order to fully understand the nature of the discourse, it is fundamental to understand the prime purpose and original causes of its very existence. To accomplish this, a historical analysis and a more profound knowledge of the socio-political context is required (pp. 154-155).

As it was mentioned in the previous section, images and representations of the social imaginary of a specific collectivity are informed and shaped by the society's understanding and subjective interpretation of history. Moreover, historical imaginaries highly reflect people's perception of the present which is often embedded in today's political discourse. (Tekin, 2010). The evolution of the otherness, affiliated to Turkish society within European historical imagination, needs to be examined in retrospect. When trying to analyze the historical heritage at the heart of the political discourses orchestrating the debates about Turkey's annexation to the EU, questions about the construction and the development of such rhetoric need to be advanced. The historical image of the Turks and its designation as Europe's inferable Other, has its roots in the collective memory of the European society which, according to Spinelli's (2005:491) words concerning historical scrutiny, has now

become a “never stifling awareness tool”. When considering the historical legacy of the old Eurasian society, issues regarding religious and cultural differences between the two collectives and their linked ethical concerns, result in the fluid nature of their relationships and their continuous transformation throughout history. The constant alteration of the Self/Other nexus can be compared to a “pendulum in motion”, shifting from negative to positive and vice versa, depending on the existing international political climate (Tekin, 2010:27). In order to assess the multiple images associated to each party - correlated to their political character, religion, culture and civilization levels - a historical landmark needs to be established. For the purpose of the present analysis and for its practicality, the starting point in studying this century-long affair will coincide with the decadence of the Ottoman Empire, also known as the Tanzimat period of the nineteenth century.

Throughout the Medieval age, the image of the Turk was principally conceived of as the main opponent of Christian Europe. In fact, the contacts and exchanges with the Turkish society were mostly related to economic interests and trade opportunities (Göçek, 1987). Moreover, the, already limited in scope, confrontations were obscured by the frequent military clashes during the age of the Crusades (Daniel 1997). The Turkish Other was therefore primarily perceived of in reference to Islam and thus Turks were consequently seen as the infidel Muslims, “the cruel and blasphemous aggressor of Christendom, the infidel occupier of the holy sites” (Tekin, 2010:28). In sum, Turkey during the Ottoman Empire was considered the emblem of ignorance, blasphemy, violence and religious recklessness (Kaiser, 2000: 8).

Following the dissolution of the Turkish Empire, the constitution of the Turkish Republic in the Anatolian heartland, and the abolition of the Ottoman monarchy, more realistic and neutral opinions about the Turks and their society were developed and a clear shift in Europeans attitudes could be observed (Howard, 2016). De facto, with the turning of the



nineteenth century the main aspects of confrontation were rather societal and political than religious. The principal differences between the two civilization were embedded in debates contemplating the form of government, moral values and enlightenment ideals such as freedom, scientific progress and fundamental rights status. Nevertheless, the European social imagination regarding Turkish society was still defined within “the specter of Oriental despotism” (Grosrichard, 1998:3). Oriental despotism was used to describe a political system of absolute domination where the despot was the only authority in power and where the subjects were considered his servants and property. Within this political frame, individual rights and the idea of legitimacy of power, were still rejected if not completely ignored (ibid). This kind of rhetoric predominated the public debates then in Europe when referring to the Turkish society. This is also one of the main reasons behind the shared idea of civic backwardness of the Orient (Kaiser, 2000). To this extent, the Turkish otherness was used as an evaluation parameter for European governments to measure their own level of civilization. Hence, the Turkish Other served as an antipode model to promote the European Self.

With the turn of the nineteenth century, a clear shift in Europe’s attitude towards Turkey followed. The century-old image of the Turks’ monstrosity, considered as the incarnation of the devil, has faded almost completely after the Empire’s dismemberment. The fear associated with the Ottomans during the Middle Age had been converted into a an image of absolute degradation and inexorable decline. What had remained from the lost Empire served as a reassurance of superiority for Europe which at this point looked at Turkey as “*L’homme malade de l’Europe*” - the sick man of Europe (Anamur 1986: 503; Moussa, 2006).

However, with the development of transportation facilities and the consequent intensification of economic exchanges, an unprecedented predilection and curiosity towards the mysterious Orient emerged among European travellers. With the inauguration of the *Orient Express* -

which soon became an intercultural bridge that connected the Occident capital of Paris with the old town of Costantinopoli, the indisputable cloister of the Anatolian civilization - a vivid interest flourished among enthusiastic travellers and researchers (Dumont, 1982). This bizarre kinship and attraction for the Orient contributed in the cultivation of oriental studies and the collection of first hand memoirs which soon became part of a new literary stream known as Orientalism (Ulađlı, 1998). As Said (1979:170) brilliantly put it: “the Orient of memories, suggestive ruins, forgotten secrets, hidden correspondences and an almost virtuosic science of being” suddenly became a source of inspiration for European intellectuals. Additionally, the rising interest perceived in most European countries, soon materialized into a real and active involvement in “la question d’Orient” - the Eastern question - referring to the vacillating destiny of the old Ottoman territories (Ulađlı, 1998:41). Orientalism at that time became a mean for European intellectuals to familiarize and acquire knowledge about the Orient without having ever stepped on those lands. The “sick man of Europe” was now considered a valuable cultural and anthropological resource.

Starting in the 1830s, a strong turkophile movement emerged in most European metropolis, promoting the idea of “the good Muslim” (ibid). An extraordinary sentiment of friendliness was disseminated all across the old continent by the late nineteenth century, which certainly challenged the Western presumption of unquestionable superiority. According to the writings of voyager-philosophers of that period, Turkey or more in general Islam was considered the “mythical antipodes of an Occident, whose modernity seemed too banal” (Dumont 1982: 350). Thus apparently, towards the end of the nineteenth century until the outbreak of the First World War, the image of the Turk became rather appealing if not amicable.

As we can see, Europe’s image of Turkey was fluctuant and ambiguous:

“The Turk is noble and good; he has the sense of justice and loyalty; one will never see him ill-treat animals, and treason is odious to him. But he resents injustices, injuries, and humiliations, and he never fails to take revenge on the first occasion” (Guides d’Isambert and Joanne 1902, cited in Dumont 1982).

On the one hand, Turkey has long been described as an agglomerate of cruelty, intolerance and violence, underlying its civilizational backwardness and genetical inferiority. Islam was considered opposed to Christianity and malefic by nature, while approving gender discrimination, slavery and ignorance (Todorov 1989: 400). On the other hand, such animosity and sentiment of repudiation and the extreme degree of barbarity attributed to Turkish society, and more broadly to the Islamic cult, was radically opposed by sympathetic movements which, instead, appraised the Oriental culture and charm while discarding the prosaicism and hypocrisy of the Occident as well as the self-proclaimed supremacy of Christian dogma.

Ultimately though, the negative stereotypes attached to the Turkish Other in past centuries continued to dominate the main political debates and to affect the public of most European countries in the following twentieth century. We can see this especially in the shared resentment and frustration generated by the dismemberment of once great European Empires and their consequent transition into new and less grandiose modes of political arrangement. The widespread loss of former colonies and territories is widely considered to be a contributing factor in the dissemination of crude religious stereotypes that pervaded European contact with the otherized Turk. Political instability and identity driven anxiety amplified old colonialist attitudes which resulted in the adoption of destructive discourses, according to which each race should live within the administrative frame of its own old faith (Driault

1917:400). Self-determination discourses deformed and incorporated into nationalist propaganda spread across Europe. The situation progressively degenerated to the point that Europe's post colonialists perception were now incapable of imagining the others into her own vision:

We hear that other Asian races such as the Hungarians adopted European manners and deserve to enter into the European family. But it is because since the Middle Ages they were Christian, and that Christianity was the only combining force between different people [...]. The Turks on the contrary remained Muslim [...] they only accentuated their Asian character, and they look more alien and more barbarian than ever. [...] The Turk misled Europe on his true feelings; because he has an innate, incurable disloyalty [...]. In fact, Turks cannot be absorbed in European civilization since they are not capable of being assimilated [...]. (Driault 1917: 407–409)

Such severe considerations towards the Turkish Other were partially abandoned and gradually vanished in light of the reforms undertaken during the 1920s and the birth of the Turkish Republic. In fact, the abolition of the Sultanate and the following institution of a parliament within the new Ankara-based multiparty democracy regime - which interrupted 623 years of monarchical Ottoman rule - led to the international recognition of Turkey's sovereignty. The new image of Turkey as a modern international power gradually approaching Western universal values of freedom and democracy provoked a structural fracture in the European social imaginary. The "*nouvelle Turquie*" was seen now with sympathy as it had gained its seat in the international rank among the other Occidental powers (Duhamel, 1954).

## A Fragile European Identity and an Unstable Union: Socio-Political Context of EU Integration.

In the 1950s, following the atrocities of the Second World War, the creation of a European Community was seen as the only feasible solution able to break the vicious circle of war and destruction which had devastated the Old Continent (Anon, 2017). The creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952 represented a pivotal moment in the European federal history. The European Economic Community and European Atomic Energy Community followed right after. By the 1960s a club of six - Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and West Germany - came together constituting the basis of the first ever European political integration project. Such ambitious and pioneering vision was not free of contingencies and the first doubts about the direction that this regional organization was taking started to become increasingly louder. Moreover, the subsequent enlargements of the European community further aggravated an already complex situation which eventually culminated in its first identity crisis.

The political instability dominating the European landscape reflected a deeper fracture within the newly formed regional body. Long-ignored identity dilemmas were finally reaching the surface while enhancing the perennial struggle of the member states in finding their place within a growing EU ( Bell, 2002:228). The profound transformation that the European public had to confront, such as the industrial revolution of their societies as well as other extraordinary phenomena, including illegal mass migration, caused the re-approachment of complacent right wing parties. Conservative movements, disseminating all over Europe, started to gain significant political and electoral power which allowed them to bring cultural essentialist ideals of racialized nationalism from the old colonialist traditions back to the table

(Mayer and Sineau, 2002). Therefore, the collective sentiment of fatigue which pervaded most European members during the integration process, resulted in the “lepénisation des esprits” of the European project which promoted a singular facet of nationalism rooted in the pan-European identity. The immigration challenge and the failure of the Union to successfully cope with a new surge of diversity provided a favorable environment for the outset of a new hostile political attitude. The extreme anti-muslim prejudices that were spawned from this dynamic provided the antecedent for what is today commonly termed as Islamophobia. (Wieviorka, 2002).

## **Methods and Approaches**

The approach used in this research in order to study the identity formation of Europe and its perception of the Turkish Other, in the context of Turkey’s accession to the EU, is primarily a constructivist one. The present study moves from the belief that identity formation and their understanding are significantly influenced by the social constructions and reconstructions of the Other suggested by the political discourses. Therefore, the chosen methodological framework derives from Foucault's theoretical approach of Critical Discourse Analysis. Such choice, concerning the analytical methodology of this study, belongs to the constructivist tradition and aims to study the way social representations construct reality. In other terms how discourse create meanings (Hall, 1997). The Critical Discourse Analysis “examines not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power” (Hall 1997: 6). According to Foucault’s works, “L’Archéologie du Savoir” (1969) and “L’Ordre du Discours” (1971), discourse, intended as specific structure of language, and the conceptual framework within it is

developed, can manipulate the ultimate meaning and consequently the social understanding of a particular topic (Crawshaw & Tusting 2000: 25). An equivalent conclusion can be extracted from Stuart Hall's definition of discourse, according to which a discourse is intended as a mode of representing a certain topic in a deliberately planned manner which does not only shapes its content and interpretation but, he adds, also "limits the ways in which the topic can be constructed" (Hall 1992: 291). Therefore this approach of analysis takes into consideration the role of power in representing, modeling and deconstructing knowledge within discourse. Similarly, the construction of identities within the collective imaginary are subjective to the politics of discourse often manipulated and monopolized by questions of power (Tekin, 2010).

Moreover, the Critical Discourse Analysis considers the ways in which language is deployed when involved in "social relations with power and domination, and ideology" (Fairclough 2001: 229). In modern democracies language is often been used as a tool through which power is exercised. Political scientists, such as Fairclough (1992) and Wodak (1996), consider language as a form of social practice, critical to the configuration of the political process. Therefore, it is essential for the scholar community to be able to recognize and decode the subtle use of language, incorporated in political discourses which implicitly suggest social destructive ideologies such as nationalism and racism (Crawshaw & Tusting 2000: 27).

Besides, the political relevance, this method is largely used in the historical analysis of representations, identities and subjectivities. The discourse-historical approach emphasizes the importance of the temporal context within which discourse is constructed, introducing a socio-cognitive aspect in its analysis (Reisigl & Wodak 2001). The historical contextualization of discursive construction of collective identities represents a common practice in contemporary scholarship and provides the analysis with a solid and pertinent

documentation (de Cillia et al. 1999). By predominantly addressing the historical dimension of discourses, this historical-oriented approach “integrates all available information on the historical background and the original sources in which discursive events are embedded” (de Cillia et al. 1999: 156).

The source materials used for the present research include both primary and secondary resources. For the purpose of this study will be reviewed theories and approaches mostly by scholars, integrated with texts and talks by European politicians. In order to understand the evolution of the narrative’s formation regarding the Turk and the Turkish identity, historical texts will be contemplated as well as 20th century Orientalists writings will be scrutinized in the attempt to contextualize the dissolution of the century-old Ottoman empire and the emergence of the modern Republic of Turkey. Moreover, newspaper articles and online commentaries regarding significant debates revolving on Turkey’s EU membership odyssey, which prevailed in the international arena during the relevant timeframe, have been selected. The three political momentums that scan the present analysis are, firstly, the Helsinki Summit in 1999 at which for the first time negotiations about Turkey’s full- EU membership were officially discussed. Secondly, the beginning of accession negotiations with Turkey by the European Council, which took place in 2005. Lastly, the suspension of such negotiations by the European Parliament, in 2016, over human rights and rule of law violations.

## **Discourse Analysis**



# European Public Attitudes in the Debate of Turkey's EU

## Accession.

Considering the social and political context in which Turkey's quest for EU membership was advanced, the European debate on Turkey's EU candidacy could not have been refined in a positive and propositive manner. On the contrary, the initial reluctance and shared skepticism of the European community towards its Muslim neighbours, mirrored an already grave and turbulent horizon. Understanding the political climate persisting during Turkey's EU annexation quest, is crucial in order to comprehend the key components of the discursive framework within which the corresponding negotiations took place. For this reason, the present section will examine the evolution of Turkey's perception in Europe and the latter's attitude towards the idea of an eventual unification of the two collectivities, in retrospect. Such analysis will consider the events occurred starting from 1999, when the Helsinki European Council decided on the potential candidacy of Turkey as a full member of the European Union, confirming its eligibility until 2016, when the European Parliament voted to suspend the negotiations over social and political concerns.<sup>6</sup>

As it became clear from the previous historical analysis, the relationship between Turkey and the EU has often been of a contentious nature one. Such dispute is reflective of the old controversies linked to the century-old Occident/Orient schism and which revived in the contemporary political debates regarding Turkey's international role. Turkey formalized its application for EU membership in 1987 yet informal economical strings with the Union were already established since 1959. Since the very early stages of the European integration

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<sup>6</sup> In fact in March 2016, "the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says freedom and democracy have 'no value' in Turkey amid arrests and military crackdown". The Independent. 18 March 2016.

process, EU's position regarding its ties with Turkey had always depended on general security concerns. Indeed, the Association Agreement between Turkey and the European Economic Community, signed in 1963, was nothing more than a strategic move to ensure national security against one of Europe's greatest others, the Soviet Union (Soutou, 2004). The evident ambiguity of Europe's behaviour in dealing with Turkey's aspirations can be explained if we take into account the ways in which the EU conceived itself and the different implications that such interpretations implied. As Soutou (2004:923) argued, as long as the European Union is understood as a merely intergovernmental institution which main focus is the cooperation between states, then Turkey is encompassed in such system. Yet if the idea of Europe is constructed under more civilizational-cultural terms and its ties rely on the common European historical and cultural heritage, then Turkey's annexation is less likely to be accepted. The duality of Europe's official position towards Turkey's integration was clearly expressed by the then prime minister of France, Jean-Pierre Raffarin (2004), who, at the question regarding French attitudes towards Turkey's aspirations, commented:

“We can summarize the story as follows: the response of France, was rather “no” when we thought of European construction, and rather “yes” when we thought of the balances of the world.” (Raffarin, A ssemblée Nationale, 14/10/2004).

As the European integration process was advancing and the internal disputes regarding political sovereignty of the state members were progressively settled, the public opinion on the Turkish matter became more tolerable and gradually moved towards a more favorable inclination. Such positive shift in the European attitude started in the late 1980s and persisted until the end of the twentieth century, when the official confirmation of Turkey's eligibility

for EU membership was finally delivered, in occasion of the Helsinki Summit in December 1999 (Semo & Viro, Libération, 16/12/2004).

The Helsinki Summit was supposed to represent the beginning of a new chapter for the historically troubled relationship between Turkey and the EU. Instead, the post-Helsinki period witnessed a radical change particularly manifest in the speeches of many European political elites. A more hostile tone was used to discuss Turkey's candidacy (ibid). As Semo and Viro (Libération, 16/12/2004) put it, the European politics experienced "a switch from a well-entrenched turcophilia to some kind of a turcophobia ". With the turn of the following century, the European's reticence became even more explicit, especially among sovereignists and extreme right movements which took the debates to a public level involving mass media and social digital platforms.

"Europe died in Helsinki, while deciding to allow Turkey to enter the European Union" (de Villiers quoted in L e Figaro , 14/01/2000).

The Helsinki Summit has therefore created a schism in Europe's public opinion between those who still believed in the legitimacy of Turkey to become part of the European family and those, instead, who were more reluctant and skeptical about the real motives hidden behind Turkey's quest and the possible consequences of such enlarged Union.

By the following European Summit, which took place in the Danish capital in December 2002, turcosceptical sentiments had spread amongst most state members, increasingly affecting the opinion of their citizens. This time, however, the main discourse behind the collective negative attitudes against Turkey's vocacy for membership, introduced a new dimension of the issue, altering and expanding the nature of the discussion (Lequesne, 2006).

Initially the discourse of Europe's parliamentary right was mostly entrenched in culturalist-essentialist grounds, stressing the lack of common civilizational heritage and the inherent irreconcilable differences which divided the two factions (Nikolaidis, 2003:61). Such position was endorsed and exalted also by the Church which emphasized the importance of the century-old Christian tradition in Europe. In fact, according to the Vatican's view then, Turkey's entrance to the EU would put the European culture at risk. Cardinal Ratzinger, who presided over the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith from 2005 to 2013, argued that Europe is united by its "culture which gives it a common identity. [...] and the roots which formed this continent are those of Christianity." (Catholic News, 2005).<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the religious question was further aggravated by Giscard d'Estaing<sup>8</sup> comments - "the most Roman Catholic of all French Presidents of the Fifth Republic" (DNA, 01/12/2002) - who openly opposed Turkey's annexation on religious grounds, affirming that there is no place for Islam in the European Community and suggesting the existence of a "hidden agenda" behind the Islamists government of Turkey (Chenal, 2004:16)

Eventually, the opposition's attention shifted from identity and religion issues towards more functional and pragmatical considerations. Geographical incongruities between the two regions and concerns about the practical consequences - that the admission of a highly populated country, such as Turkey, into the Europe's political system would have - on the concrete future of the European project, took the discussion into a different level and dimension (Lequesne 2006: 30). Moreover, impending questions about the real capacity of Turkey to eventually meet the democratic political standards of the Union and to actually

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<sup>7</sup> Alain Duhamel calls Valéry Giscard d'Estaing "The most Roman Catholic of all French Presidents of the Fifth Republic" (DNA, 01/12/2002) .

<sup>8</sup> Valéry Giscard d'Estaing is a French centrist politician who served as President of the French Republic from 1974 until 1981.

accomplish the required social reforms, especially regarding human rights and the rule of law in the near future still remained (ibid).

“Turkey is not Europe. It is not Europe neither by its culture, neither by its territory, nor by its history [...]. June 13 say no to Turkey in Europe and say no to a Europe of immigration”. (Akagül & Vaner, 2005: 53–54).

The Far-right xenophobic arguments combined with the proliferation of eurosceptical movements within the EU, significantly shaped Europe’s relationship with Turkey and the future of the negotiation process, formally initiated in 2004 (Akagül & Vaner, 2005). By instrumentalizing the fragilities of the nascent European political system - further challenged by contemporary global issues, such as terrorism and the ongoing immigration crisis, prominent political leaders managed to popularize a more “closed, racist, and xenophobic conception of the nation” and therefore promote their own view on how the European Union should advance (Wieviorka 2002: 134).

Emblematic is the case of France’s opposition - where turcoscepticism goes hand in hand with nationalism and extreme right parties. In fact, in the realm of the French Islamophobia<sup>9</sup>, Muslims became the much needed scapegoat for the shared social and economic malaise that has troubled France as well as other European countries in the past couple decades. The rise and manifestation of this post-modern form of cultural-oriented racism, defined by Etienne Balibar (1991:21) as “racism without race”, served as an auto-referential dimension. To put it into a more cultural-essentialist perspective, contemporary racialized nationalism could be

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<sup>9</sup> Intended as a particular form of racism, particularly common in the Western societies, and it depends not only on physical differences of the victims but also in their cultural peculiarities (Wieviorka 2002: 139).

considered as a way through which the European Self attempts to construct its identity with reference to the Muslim Other (Silverman, 1999). This explains the obsession of France, along with other EU members, with the preservation and according to some extremists views, the non-contamination of their national values as well as their European civilizational values considered as personal of the Self (Tekin, 2010).

## Analysis of the European Social Imaginary of Turkey:

### Essentialists, Functionalists and Pragmatists Argumentations.

Therefore, when identifying and then analysing the main topics, dominating the public and political debate over Turkey's EU prospects, three distinct yet often overlapping argumentation clusters emerge. Such tripartite division, introduced by Nicolaidis (2003:59), rests on the different nature of the issue on stake that each discourse group seek to tackle.

#### Essentialist Argumentations.

The first one considers the inherent differences between Turkey and Europe on merely essentialists grounds. As it was mentioned in the previous sections, culturalists-essentialists arguments, present especially in most opposition's political campaigns, categorically denied Turkey's Europeanness, sustaining that such differences, due to their very nature, are impossible to overcome or even try to ignore. Within such argumentations, is possible to distinguish two main streams: one regarding geographical considerations and the other primarily focusing on cultural and historical discrepancies. These "congenital" and therefore irreversible divergences, respond to the imminent need of Europe to establish its own

boundaries, in order to define and secure its identity (Torréblanca 2005). Therefore, essentialist discourses and questions regarding Turkey's actual Europeanness serve to such purpose.

This is not a European country by geography, it is Asia, through Asia Minor. It is not a European country by history, it is the Ottoman Empire that destroyed Byzantium and sought to subjugate Europe. [...] And especially it is not a European country by religion since it is a Muslim country. Because, let us say so clearly, Islam is not European. (Bruno Mégret, MNR, personal website, 24/05/2005a).

The discussion regarding the physical proximity or distance of Turkey can be classified as the less politicized and problematic one. In fact, Turkey's apparent belonging to the geographical perimeter of Europe can be articulated under the scientific objectivity of the "science" of geography (Tekin, 2010). Such assertion has been speculatively used by both political sides to persuade the public's opinion. From the opposition's side, the deployment of such stratagem became clear during the Copenhagen talks in the Summit of 2002, where according to their view, Turkey's objective distance is self evident of its unquestionable non Europeanness and therefore its quest of EU membership should be categorically denied.

Obviousness, common sense and geography should have been enough, at the beginning in 1963, to say to Turkey that it was a large country, located 95% in Asia Minor, and that it has a vocation to play a major role in its region and to have close relations with the EU, but not to become its member. That would not have been injurious. Europeans would not have to call upon, forty years later, contestable

cultural or religious arguments, to delay the hour of truth. (Hubert Védrine, PS, former Minister for Foreign Affairs, *Le Monde* , 06/12/2002).

Therefore, thank to these topographic considerations, the opposition seemed to have found its trojan horse in trying to appear “ethically correct” in disapproving Turkey’s EU vocation. However, the very same scientific features of geography, which for the opposition represented a source of assurance and upon which it consolidated its confidence and strength, were instead manipulated by those in favor to confute the validity of the geographical criteria as a reliable or even legitimate method of assessment. Indeed, the main counter argument to this regard was that geography is by definition a human science, constructed upon human decisions over political and historical pressures (Tekin, 2010).

What challenges us and proves extremely awkward resides in the invocation of the geography to justify a refusal, or a hesitation, but with no geographical argumentation. [...] geography is a frightening and obscure instrument of power. (Eric Glon & Patrick Picouet, *Le Monde* , 31/12/2004).

Therefore, geography doesn’t “enjoy” the absolute scientific authority of other positive sciences. Hence, the assumed objectivity and political neutrality preached by many opposition parties was not the case. In other words, geographical criteria were as ambiguous and suspicious as any other political argument because of its flexible nature.

It is a pity [...] the limits are not given by nature, but are cultural productions rooted in precise historical contexts, to serve particular ends, these limits are



likely to be modified and must always be questioned. (Pascal Clerc, *Le Monde*, 19/11/2002).

Furthermore, it was often claimed that Europeanness was not only about geographic borders but also about civilizational features. History and culture could not be left out of the equation if we had to discuss about what being European entails and the common values attached to it. According to many leading academics and intellectuals, Turkey not only should be considered part of Europe - as much as other relatively distant candidates like Cyprus who entered the Union in 2004 - but as Jean-Daniel Tordjman (16/12/2002) declared at “*Le Figaro*” journal, it is essential in the construction of European identity, of its culture and history.

History and culture constitute a twin question that goes hand in hand with geographical considerations regarding Turkey’s motion to join the European community (Tekin, 2010).

Geography installs Turkey in Asia for 95% of its territory. And history finds it still more foreign in Europe. Two historical currents bathed our continent in turn. The first was, after the “*romanité*”, the union in the faith, in “*Christianitas*”, a union ransacked by the wars of religion. The second was the ideal of progress came from the Enlightenment, ransacked, in the XXth century, by the war of ideologies. With regard to these two currents, Turkey is alien [...] the Christian heritage at us is everywhere. This universe, you know, is not that of Turkey. The Ottoman heritage is immense, its civilization is prestigious, but it is not ours. (Claude Imbert, *Midi-Libre*, 20/12/2004).

Therefore, to the essentialist opposition, Turkey was still considered a stranger to the European historical and cultural sphere. Turkey did not share most of Europe's cultural heritage which, instead, affiliate the other members of the Union. Such sentiment was to some degree co-participated by both sides of the political spectrum, even though it is worth to note that among the more moderate parties the real bone of contention was described as "lack of common values" rather than simply "cultural differences" (Tekin, 2010).

What is worth of reflection at this point is that again, European culture and more in general European identity is considered to be a static entity, fixed in time and space. Such view is further supported by the opposition's Eurocentric readings of history, which is for them represents a form of protection and preservation against threatening exotic influences such as Turkey's. Therefore, civilizational traditions of the former Ottoman Empire are not only perceived as distinct and irreconcilable but as a severe threat to Europe's continuity and well being.

In some cases, most of which coinciding with statements of the far right or sovereignists coalitions, indelicate and imprecise religious critiques were advanced further instrumentalizing the European identity card to block Turkey's requests. To this regard, if we choose to define European identity primarily by referring to its historical - religious heritage then we must comprehend all Semitic religions present in the European landscape throughout history. In this case Islam is to be considered as an essential part of Europe's identity construction even though such roots - that visibly shaped the culture of many Southern European countries and especially the Balkans - are often disregarded or addressed by the official narratives as exceptional or incidental events which Europe eventually managed to contain (Tekin, 2010). This negative connotation, largely endorsed and sponsored by the opposition, was firmly rejected by those who, instead, conceived cultural argumentations

highly irrelevant - since Turkey was unquestionably part of Europe's history and an essential factor in its civilizational evolution.

European identity, as well as Islamic identity, are without doubt distinct in their uniqueness. However, this doesn't necessarily imply a clear separation. Neither a genetic divergence or inequality between them. As matter of fact, these two entities developed shoulder to shoulder with each other. Hence, there is a strong probability that they both have incorporated each other's values and traditions through the years. In conclusion if any identity considerations are to be made then, it must be acknowledged that both Selves wouldn't appear the way we understand them today without the direct or indirect influence of the Others. Therefore a complete division is not appropriate. A similar verdict was advocated by Maurice-Ruben Hayoun a french philosopher and historian, who correctly assessed in an interview with "Le Figaro":

After all, if Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and Moses Maimonides are rightly considered the spiritual fathers of Europe, there is nothing stopping this for status for the faithful disciples of Al-Farabi, Avicenna and Averroes being taken as such since they have also contributed to shaping the thinking and feeling of our continent. Why not examine with serenity the relationship between the essence of Islam and the European identity? (Maurice-Ruben Hayoun, Le Figaro 25/12/2002).

### Functionalist Argumentations.

The second cluster of argumentations revolves around Turkey's questionable democratic values. Democratic defiances such as its fragile governmental system and scarce human right

protection, have been largely used by the opposition to prove Turkey's ineligibility for EU membership. Therefore, in the case of Turkey, the term democracy and the corresponding shortages suggested by the opposition's discourses, imply a broader meaning of it. As a matter of fact, the concept of democracy is deployed according to its Western European connotation, which as Robert Badinter (2004) claims, goes beyond the simple existence of a parliamentary political structure or a genderless comprehensive electoral body. Impendent issues, such as the Cyprus dispute, women's rights and social status, torture and the inhuman conditions with which prisoner and refugees are treated, are all undeniable symptoms of Turkey's lack of democratic culture (Tekin, 2010).

Moreover, it has been observed that most democratic reforms have been pursued in the light of a second governmental agenda and in accordance with a hidden well-calculated political strategy and not for the sake of democracy or that of fundamental humanitarian values. "Democracy is like a train. We shall get out when we arrive at the station we want." (Der Spiegel. 30 November 2010) with this words, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the famous borderline dictatorial President of Turkey, founded the Justice and Development party (AKP) in 2003, a conservative political party draw from the tradition of moderate Islamism and which dominated the political arena for fifteen years.

To this regard, a highly contested issue, regarding Turkey's apparent engagement with democratic parliamentary political arrangement, concerns the predominant role of the army in shaping Turkey's domestic policy. The numerous military coupe d'état registered through the years, particularly the one occurred in 1980 and 1997, including the most recent interventions in 2016, were often used by the opponent narratives as evidence of Turkey's fragile democracy. The acknowledgment of the army's capacity to effectively and dramatically change the political arrangements, fed Europe's suspiciousness and cautiousness in

embracing Turkey's attempts to comply with the EU political standards. As a matter of fact, in the public debates, the army is portrayed as the real authority in Turkey's domestic politics which further aggravates the opposition's allegations regarding its democratic deficiencies.

Another source of concern for the European public regards the status of women and its condition within the Turkish society. Many opposition's argumentations sustain that, women in Turkey are deprived of their basic political rights and are poorly represented by the country's institutions especially in the more rural areas where their participation in the political life is almost completely absent (Tekin, 2010). In fact, political elites by exploiting the occurrence of extreme cases of heavy discrimination and the atrocious episodes of violence against women, such as honour crimes and forced marriages, accomplish their goal to further estrange Turkey from the European democratic reality.

Consider especially the women's rights: as long as Turkey will not give proof of a real, effective equality of the man and the woman not only at the University of Ankara or among intellectuals, but in the depths of the country, I do not conceive that the Union can open admission procedures. The equality between women and men is a fundamental principle of the Union. (Robert Badinter, PS senator, Le Figaro, 13/12/2002).

Moreover, religious and cultural symbols have often been object of political propagandas which instrumentalized islamic features such as the headscarf dispute, deployed as one more way to prejudicate the uses and customs of of the Islamic Turkish society. Such discussions have been largely exasperated by the opposition which has more than often disseminated

false accusations leading to misinformation, bigotry and injudicious animosity and discrimination.

A particular aspect regarding the inclusion of Turkey's democratic qualities into the political discourse on Turkey's EU membership is that, both the supportive and the opposition's parties treat more or less the same problematic elements yet with a complete different attitude (Tekin, 2010). Among the more favorable electorates such contingencies are seeing as temporary defects due to the necessary reforms assessment process and that, as soon as the Europeanization procedures begin, everything will be eventually settled (Akagül & Vaner 2005: 34). The opposition, on the other hand, firmly believes that such civilizational backwardness is impossible to overcome. Turkey will not be able to achieve the democratic standards of other EU members, in terms of human rights, rule of law and protections of minorities, any time soon. Such deficiencies were considered to be entrenched in Turkey's historical background and therefore inherent to the heritage of its society. Since they never participated to the European Enlightenment Revolution, they are unable to understand the civic spirit that pervaded Europe (Tekin, 2010).

A clear instance of such divergence within the political debates on the perception of Turkey's democratic inadequacies, is the case of the Armenian genocide. One of the most emblematic questions regarding the life conditions of religious minorities in the Turkish soil. As a matter of fact, the high degree of discrimination that Christian minorities, and not only, suffered, especially during the twentieth century, represented a critical factor in the determination of Turkey's compliance with the European political criteria required by the Copenhagen Agreement. In addition, since 1999, in the post Helsinki period when Turkey's EU prospects were for the first time officially taken into consideration, Turkey's lack of acknowledgment and acceptance of responsibility for the 1915 massacre against the Armenian people

represented a heated issue of discussion in Europe. The question of admittance and reconciliation with collective memory traumas and historical crimes against humanity became central to many political debates in the European arena, to the point that it almost became a fixation for many political elites and intellectuals (Demesmay & Fougier 2005:132).

Hence, the Armenian catastrophe was considered as a focal aspect in assessing the potential European character of Turkey by both political factions, yet in a substantially distinct way (Tekin, 2010). From the opposition's perspective, such atrocity committed by the the Turks was reflective of the brutality of their culture and therefore was indicative of the natural hostility that the Islamic doctrine inflicted to its disciples. Thus, in this case, historical memory was instrumentalized in order to prove Turk's non Europeanness and contrast with the values of their Europeans neighbours. The Armenian genocide served as a historical evidence for the demonization of the Turkish Other on civilizational and religious terms (ibid).

On the other side, the more favorable parties used a completely different approach to deal with Turkey's failure in meeting its "devoir de memoire". In fact, the more turkophile factions claimed that such unfortunate episode was still resolvable and that the EU could play a leading role in Turkey's acknowledgment of genocide allegations (Burdy, 2004).

It is our conviction: Turkey must democratize itself in-depth and take responsibility of its past to build a European future. Like you, we are convinced that the entry of Turkey into the European Union is synonymous with adhesion to certain values, among which are the recognition of the errors of the past for better building the future. [...] A country which finds its greatness by taking responsibility for its past –

in its darkest pages figure the Armenian genocide – as Germany could raise the head after the last war by recognizing the Holocaust. (Marie-Arlette Carlotti, Michel Rocard, Martine Roure, Strasbourg, 2004).

By supporting Europe's patronage and promoting its engagement in the Turkish cause, they saw an opportunity of renaissance of the overshadowed international image of Turkey and of Islam in general. Europe was depicted as a superior entity, successful in facing its obscure history and therefore ready to teach a lesson to the world through the promotion of its civilizational values. Despite the absurd degree of self-glorification and arrogance that such discourses echoed, this convictions dramatically spread amongst many intellectuals and outstanding political figures.

The memory is a part of civilization. The case of Armenian genocide shows that such a dialogue between Europe and the Turkish society is essential and useful for the cause of humanity. (Jean-Dominique Giuliani, President of the Robert Schumann Foundation, Le Figaro , 05/10/2004).

### Pragmatist Argumentations.

A third constellation of arguments refer to a more pragmatic aspect of Turkey's potential annexation in the EU. The geo-strategic location of Turkey represents a key factor in world's political map. The geo-political assessment of Turkey's UE membership was largely influenced by the country's conspicuous role during the Cold War, where it acted as a moderator in a bipolar system of powers. Back then Europe needed Turkey to protect itself



from the Soviet threat which is probably why Turkey felt like claiming EU membership in the first place. However, the situation today is different and so are the kind of arguments advanced by both sides regarding the strategic consequences of Turkey's adhesion.

In any case the main concern around which the political debate revolves is security, yet again the ways to achieve it according, to the two parties, dramatically differ from each other. The security issue has a dual dimension in the European's perception and it is significantly linked to their understanding of the Union's project and future. In truth, Turkey is seen an essentially Muslim country which awakes old fears and stereotypes associated with its past as Ottoman Empire and in the meantime its cultural and geographical proximity to "the axis of terror" such as Iraq, Syria and Iran exacerbates Europe's anxieties about Islamic terrorism (Tekin, 2010:145).

Regarding the first point, while the oppositions insists on the issue of inherent cultural differences and the inevitable clash of civilizations, the proponent parties reiterate the importance of keeping positive relations with the Islamic neighbours and trying to maintain a constant dialogue between Europe and the Muslim world. Interestingly, both sides acknowledge an imminent danger for Europe in either promoting or rejecting Turkey's entrance to the EU.

To say no to Turkey is a dangerous attitude. [...] Today after what we have promised, to say no to Turkey would be to contribute to rancor, divisions, mass movements which would endanger peace and mutual comprehension among the inhabitants of the planet. ( Jacques Delors, cited in Burdy 2004: 96).

The problematic adjacency of Turkey with poor, unstable and - according to some asinine claims of the most extreme right-wing or conservative parties such as the Front National - terrorists countries, would transform Europe into a new base for drugs and weapons trade, human trafficking and terrorism.

Turkey in the Union, that will soon mean to say a 100 million Turkish Europeans; no more border between our suburbs and Anatolia, from where pour in drugs of Asia, Chinese or Pakistani clandestines, networks of Al-Qaida; 90 Turkish deputies in the European Parliament against 72 for France. (Alexandre Del Valle, Le Figaro , 18/12/2002).

In the contrary, according to the proponents' point of view, such closeness is rather an asset, highly functional to the European international aspirations as the next uncontested global superpower. Moreover, amongst the other reasons, Turkey's geolocation next to some of the most prosperous energy sources makes her strategically important for Europe in her attempt to find an alternative to the Russian energy provider.

The second great tension that Europe must consider in priority is about the relations between the Occident and the Muslim countries in general. The rejection of Turkey in darkness would not be felt as a mistrust and an offence by only Turkey, but in all this vast area. Beyond the geo-strategic weight its population (close to 200 million inhabitants) and its place on the world map confer that this area, this region is the second great oil reserve of the world after the Middle East. We cannot neglect this reality. [...] Europe has thus an obvious strategic interest to strengthen its bonds with

Turkey as much as possible. (Michel Rocard, former Socialist Prime Minister, *Le Monde*, 27/11/2002).

Besides Turkey's geopolitical qualities, its population size also raised serious questions about the consequences on Europe's future nature, both in terms of identity and internal balance of power. Such concerns were connected with the general discontent about the recent Eastern enlargements, which to some opinions, significantly undermined the growth and prosperity of the Union. Regarding Turkey's case and according to the opposition's critiques, these would cause - not only a significant increase of the the Union's electorate base, further convoluting its decisional process but also - by blending together such culturally different populations, it would create an excessively heterogeneous community (Tekin, 2010). Moreover, thank to the thoughtful design of the EU voting mechanism, the demographic superiority of Turkey could and would provoke major changes to the European internal policy, altering its nature permanently. Such risk for most conservative countries was unacceptable as it is manifest in Nicolas Sarkozy words:

Turkey alone represents the equivalent of the entry of the 10 new Eastern European countries combined – that's quite something. Turkey means 71 million inhabitants – looking ahead to 2050, it will be 100 million, and given the new voting rules in the constitution, it would be the country with the most votes. (Nicolas Sarkozy, BBC, September 27, 2004).

On the contrary, from the proponent's point of view, Turkey's young and large population represented an opportunity for Europe to finally overcome its Achilles heel: the inexorable

ageing of the European population, a social malaise which has been pending for the past 50 years, decelerating the EU development and integration process, while feeding the emerging eurosceptic proclivity. The labor market and the European industries would also benefit by such rejuvenation, creating more opportunities for entrepreneurs and putting an end to today's arid and lethargic market.

Our aging, timid and satisfied continent cannot be content with the present status quo. Vis-a-vis the irresistible rise of Asia and the dynamism of the United States, we need "fresh blood", new energies. With its Asian growth rates – nearly 10 percent this year – Turkey represents for the "Old" Europe an incentive, a significant contribution. It is precisely because Turkey has a large and young population that Europe needs. (Dominique Moïsi, political scientist, 17/12/2004).

## Critical Discourse Analysis: Findings and Discussion

Through the analysis of the political arguments presented in the European debate, it is now possible to identify the prevailing logic used to assess the potential consequences of Turkey's eventual EU membership. Such analysis revealed three macro categories within which is possible to collocate the different political discourses. These argumentation clusters were divided according to their cultural, political or technical scopes. The contrasting views advanced within each of these thematic spheres were generally focused on the same critical points. Yet the way they were understood, presented and supported were decisively different. The analysis presented in the previous chapter, principally based on the explicit discourses advanced by politicians and intellectuals which dominated the public debate, represents only

the tip of the iceberg. By assessing the several arguments regarding historical differences, cultural incompatibilities, democratic deficiencies, geopolitical issues and demographic concerns, we have only started scratching the surface of a greater and deeper imbroglio lying on the imaginary frontiers of Europe and its latent identity crisis. The choice of arguments which accompany the questions on how Turkey's Eu membership bid should be managed and how Europe should be then defined, does itself implicitly determine the boundaries of how Europe decides what Europeanness really stands for (Yilmaz, 2005).<sup>10</sup>

As Fairclough (2001a) asserts, in order to achieve an adequate discourse analysis regarding a defined social issue, it is important to study both its semiotic manifestation and the historical context in which such discourse has developed. Therefore, the first step consists in analyzing what is said or written. Thus, one must in other words examine the visible facet of the problem. The next one is to break down its constitutive elements and reassess them, this time taking into consideration the external circumstances that persisted at the time of their formation.

This study tried to summarize some of the most popular linguistic devices, employed to construct Turkey's Other in the European debates within the context of the political negotiations on the future relationships of these two entities. However, what eventually became clear is that in the realm of European Integration, discussions about Turkey's belonging to the EU encloses a bigger question regarding the essence of European identity itself. Therefore, the international relations issue on Turkey's Europeanness necessarily acquires a significant identity dimension (Tekin, 2010). As it was assessed in the beginning of the present inquiry, The Self/Other dichotomy is crucial in the construction of identity. In the

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<sup>10</sup> Yilmaz, Hakan. 2005. "Introduction: Placing Turkey on the map of Europe." In *Placing Turkey on the map of Europe*, Hakan Yilmaz (ed.), 1–22. Istanbul: Bogazici University Press.

case at hand, Turkey's alterity and the socio-historical construction of its otherness play a fundamental role in the making of a collective European Identity. Hence, it is correct to assert that Turkey in this occasion is addressed as the "constitutive Other" of Europe.

Yet the political and historical context, within which such constructive strategy was used and framed by the main political discourses, is also vital in one's understanding of the Turkey-EU dilemma. What is clear from the several speeches examined here is that, the EU is primarily perceived in its cultural and geographical dimension rather than as an abstract supranational political entity or a merely advantageous economic agreement (Hülse, 2000:18). Thus, again the disputes about Turkey's potential EU membership essentially revolve around the degree of Europeanness of its society (ibid).

A major semantic strategy, largely used when discussing Turkey's belonging or non-belonging to Europe, consists in the creation of an ingroup homogeneity (Wodak, 2007). The aim of such practice is to create and disseminate a sense of unity and sameness among the state members which will eventually become the basis for the construction of a shared identity. In the example of the EU, such aura of fraternization - perceived more on cultural and historical grounds and shared religion and traditions - clearly represents, not only its sealing wax but also its symbol of distinction from other collectives. In such a scenario, Turkey is necessarily depicted as the out-group and the distant Other, for the sake of EU's identity formation (Wodak, 2001). What I find remarkable in the political discourse about EU identity is that, in defining her features and commonalities, she seems to be more worried in emphasizing what separates her from the "others" rather than what holds her together (Delanty, 1995:5). In fact, hardly ever is it mentioned in the speeches about Europeanness and common values, the political and institutional or economic differences within the Union itself. Nor the numerous wars that afflicted the European journey towards integration, which represented

some of the deadliest and most atrocious episodes in human history. On the contrary the perpetual sanctification of the in-group and its bias Self-identification with glorious cultural and civilizational values, while obscuring or even ignoring the qualities of the out-group, is part of an overall strategy aimed to establish boundaries between groups by prejudicing the “other” (Van Dijk 2000c: 81).

The extensive use of positive lexication in the representation of Europe undoubtedly implies the superiority of its own identity, constructed upon democracy, scientific progress and human rights. According to such view, the EU is the direct product of its members and therefore it is crucial to make sure that only qualified candidates can be accepted in for the sake of the Union’s virtue and international reputation. But what feature should a candidate boast then in order to be considered “euro-qualified”? This is still not clear due to the fluid nature of the EU and its ever evolving identity. For now what seems to be an important criteria of selection is the degree of dissimilarity or distance of its perceived image from Europe’s others: “as long as you are not like Them you can be with Us”.

The perpetual demonization of the Other is a popular strategy in the political discourse of the EU. Aware of the internal discrepancies threatening the balance and the well being of such fragile union, the dialectical stigmatization of the Turkish Other coupled with the perennial contrast between “Us” and “Them”, is a clear attempt to overcome such lack of unity and to drive the attention away from a questionable internal homogeneity. As Therbon (1995:37) asserts, identity is perceived of and understood in connection with its others, this implies the supremacy of the “otherness” of the out-groups over the “sameness” of the in-group itself when defining its nature. Therefore, the negative predication of the Turkish Other, in this case, is functional to the consolidation of the European Self. To put it on Delanty’s words (1995:5): “Identities are always relational and what matters is not the representation of the

Other as such but the actual nature of the difference that is constructed”, hence, what defines Europeanness “is not what its members have in common but in what separates them from the others”.

## **Conclusion**

Since the 1990s the EU has been subjected to a gradual yet constant enlargement which has further aggravated its growing identity crisis. In the constitutional Treaty of Rome it is stated that “any European country is eligible for membership to the EU” (European Neighbourhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations, 2017),<sup>11</sup> however, it does not define what being “European” means (Llobera, 2001: 179). While many intellectuals would argue that the lack of an official provision reflects the precariousness of the Union, I instead believe that this is an indicator of the bright and farsighted vision of the EU project by its founding fathers. As Hall (1992) argues in his brilliant manuscript, collective identities are fluid, flexible, numerous, actual, syncretic and constructed. Therefore, their continuous transformation is unavoidable and a printed norm that limits such a process would be meaningless and impractical if not counterproductive. Moreover, with ongoing globalization and the communication revolution, if a definition of European identity had to be established, this would have much more to do with the presence of minorities in Europe, rather than the traditional cultural or religious fixations that most conservative doctrines ferociously defend in today’s debates.

In conclusion, the major finding of this research is that European collective identity, as well as their constitutional elements - such as the “Turkish Other” - are subject to perpetual transformations and therefore are adjusted accordingly over time. Such an assertion implies

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<sup>11</sup> “Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union” TREATY ON EUROPEAN UNION.TITLE VI - FINAL PROVISIONS - Article 49 (ex Article 49 TEU).



that, since International Relations and more specifically national foreign policies largely depend on a constructed social imagination - which determines whether the Other, in this case Turkey, is considered a friend or foe of the Self - they are destined to be reflective of the relevant trends and political discussions responsible for the formation of social images.

The fact that the European political discourse regarding Turkey's EU membership bid is visibly dominated by the opposition's voices, shows how the fear of losing control over the European integration process, challenged by the recent humanitarian crisis and global transformations, prevails over the positive ideals of solidarity and democratic prosperity. The political choice to deny the acceptance of Turkey into the European family - and more generally to reject any further contact with the Islamic world on cultural and civilizational grounds - is just one of the symptoms of EU's internal identity crisis. Indeed, the imperative necessity felt by the European public to draw the cultural and civilizational borders of Europe in order to differentiate themselves from the dangerous Other, is a clear sign of collective uncertainty and anxiety. In this regard, it is my opinion that the political trend of demonizing the Turkish Other provides a catalyst for the positive Self-representation scheme aimed at alleviating the European public's current malaise. The incumbent identity crisis that the EU has continually ignored, for the purpose of self preservation and the continuity of its pioneering integration project, provides the wider context from which this issue takes its form.

The theoretical relevance of the present study could be further appreciated if collocated within the broader social plague in today's international realm. The detrimental relationship between the Occident and Orient which significantly exacerbates today's global crisis cannot be explored and explained on one level or from a single point of view. Indeed, while it is my personal choice to prefer the adoption of a more historical and social approach, I am aware

that other indexes related to economic, legal and sustainability aspects are vital for the analytical relevance of the study.

Moreover, for the sake of intellectual honesty, the findings and conclusions of the present inquiry may not be considered definitive. For this same reason any verdict cannot rely solely on one side's perspective. Turkey's voice must be included in the discussion. Therefore, a natural development of this research should include a parallel investigation on Turkey's perception of Europe, and how this has affected Turkey's attitudes towards the EU during the negotiation process.

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