

Cultural Implications of Cooperation between Turkey and EU

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Introduction

1963 was a turning point in the history of Turkey. After that point, Turkey was to have closer interactions with the EEC. And in 1999, Turkey would acquire a candidate status, which would make Turkey a prospective member state of the EU. However, these achievements were not linear and today the disputes still exist between the EU member states and Turkey. One of these main problems is the culture.

For an entity with a dominant Christian population like the European Union, Turkish accession means a change as the majority of the Turkish population is Muslim. In addition, Turkish people were seen as the “nemesis” of European peoples through the history. Right-wing of the European parties was eager to employ these arguments as they did not believe in the fact that Turkey might become a member state of "a cultural union" like EU. Unlike the proponents of this idea, left wing was more supportive of the Turkish accession (Yılmaz, 2007). They were more likely to perceive the EU as a political institution, not a cultural one. However, the public opinion of the EU citizens on Turkey’s accession got lower over the recent years (see Table 1). Also, independent of these variables, Turkey faces a cultural challenge related to its democratic traditions and consolidation of its democracy.

For Turkey, the same problem with the EU member states continues. Some Turks are also reluctant to have close relations with the Christian EU on cultural level. A different culture like that of the European causes skepticism among the majority of the Turkish population. However, there are also supporters of the idea of Turkey, being a part of a European culture (which has been a dream since the beginning of the reforms).

Table 1 – European Union citizens’ support for Turkey’s accession (Eurobarometer)

| | In favor | Not in favor | Don’t know |
|------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 2005 | 35% | 52% | 13% |
| 2006 | 27% | 60% | 13% |
| 2008 | 30% | 57% | 13% |
| 2010 | 31% | 59% | 12% |

1. Cultural Implications for the European Union

a) Positive aspects

Turkey as a way to increase cultural influence in the Middle East

Turkey stands as an important Muslim country in the Middle East. It is unique among the Muslim Middle Eastern countries in two ways: Being a democracy and being a cultural transition point between the East and the West. According to Diamond (2003), there are two democratic countries in the Middle East and North Africa: Israel (Liberal Democracy - Freedom House score: 1,3 -) and Turkey (Electoral Democracy -Freedom House score: 4,4)¹. For EU, having a country like Turkey may mean the pathway to spread liberal democracies in the Middle East. Culturally, Turkey is between the Western values and the Eastern tradition which provides a connection between the East and the West. In addition, complete consolidation of Turkish democracy under the EU may make Turkey a shining example, a

¹ It is possible to claim that current Turkish situation is ambivalent, unlike 2002. However, Turkish Freedom House score in 2018 is still close to the 2002 figures, which can be used against this argument.

future model for the countries that demand a change in their systems. First years of the AKP government in Turkey was seen as an experiment of the combination of secularism and Islam, and set an example for other Islamic countries (Altunışık, 2005)

However, turbulent relations between the EU and Turkey may cause alienation of Turkey and search for new allies. Gerhard Schröder (EUobserver, 2017) said that the EU needs to have good relations with Russia and Turkey to secure their east and to prevent the secession of these two countries to the Chinese side. This may also mean a cultural alienation which would block this bridge.

Turkey as a chance to legitimize the values of the European Union

Cosmopolitanism is one of the core principles of the EU. Famously described in Immanuel Kant's famous treatise, "The Perpetual Peace", the notion of cosmopolitanism is an important part of the spirit of Enlightenment. A post-national Europe may take its power from this notion. As Habermas and Derrida (2003) pointed out, the main values associated with Europe ("Christianity and capitalism, natural science and technology, Roman law and the Code Napoleon, the bourgeois-urban form of life, democracy and human rights, the secularization of state and society") is no longer limited within Europe. In addition, they claim that nationalism in Europe creates possible dangers within Europe. Especially after the diversification of Europe with the Eastern Enlargement, increasing distrust proves this to be true. (Delhey, 2007)

There are two notions of Europe when it comes to the identity question: A civilization project that incorporates Judeo-Christian tradition and shared history or cosmopolitan project that emphasized on the diversity and less on the identity problems. (Baban and Keyman, 2008). First approach (mostly supported by the conservative politicians) acts as a de facto

blockade in Turkey's path to the EU or Europe completely. Turkey's future with the EU is possible with the more political approach of the second notion. This approach emphasizes the values of the European Union that roots from the universal values of the Enlightenment (democracy, human rights, cosmopolitanism etc) , instead of shared history which incorporates a more local version of the Enlightenment.

Both Turkey and the EU may benefit a shift to the cosmopolitan notion. For Turkey, membership would be possible. And for the EU, this notion, which is already in the core of the EU, may help to legitimize itself with abstract ideals of cosmopolitanism, rather than the limited identity of the shared heritage. Accession of Turkey can also be seen as a possibility for proving this notion.

b) Negative aspects

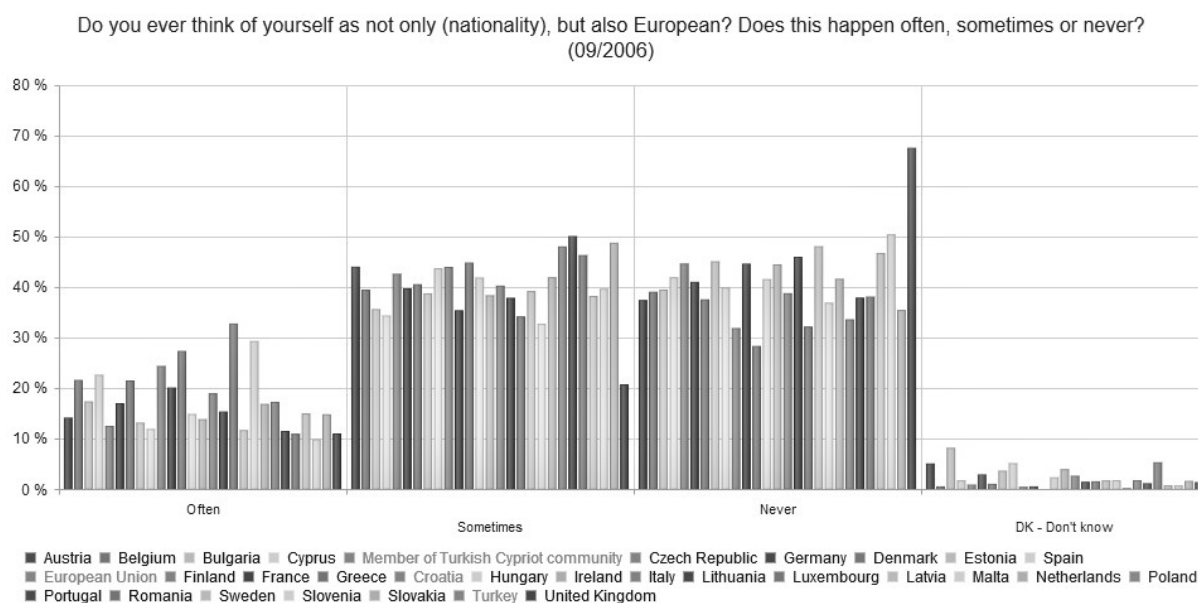
Turkey as an obstacle for future European identity

As mentioned above, the mistrust between the member states after the Eastern Enlargement lowered significantly (Delhey, 2007). The decrease in the feeling of being European (combined with local nationalities) among the public of the member states can also be observed in the EU (see Table 2). Proponents of the EU as a civilization project emphasize on the shared history and the values of the Christian Europe as a solution to this problem within Europe. An identity on historical basis should tolerate the limited differences to protect its coherence. Without a coherent identity, European Union may not have been able to legitimize its position as the representative institution of Europe. In addition, further integration can be possible with a common public support that has its roots in this EU identity.

In 2002, former French president and a conservative old guard, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing claimed that Turkey is not a European country (BBC, 2002). He also added that the

supporters of the Turkish accession are the enemies of Europe, and Turkish accession can be the demise of the EU. Giscard's concern on the future of the EU proves the civilization project proponents' fears. A different country like Turkey may not fit into the perceived future of the EU and cause stagnation within the integration.

Table 2 - Feeling of Europeanness among the member states (Eurobarometer)



Turkey as an outsider

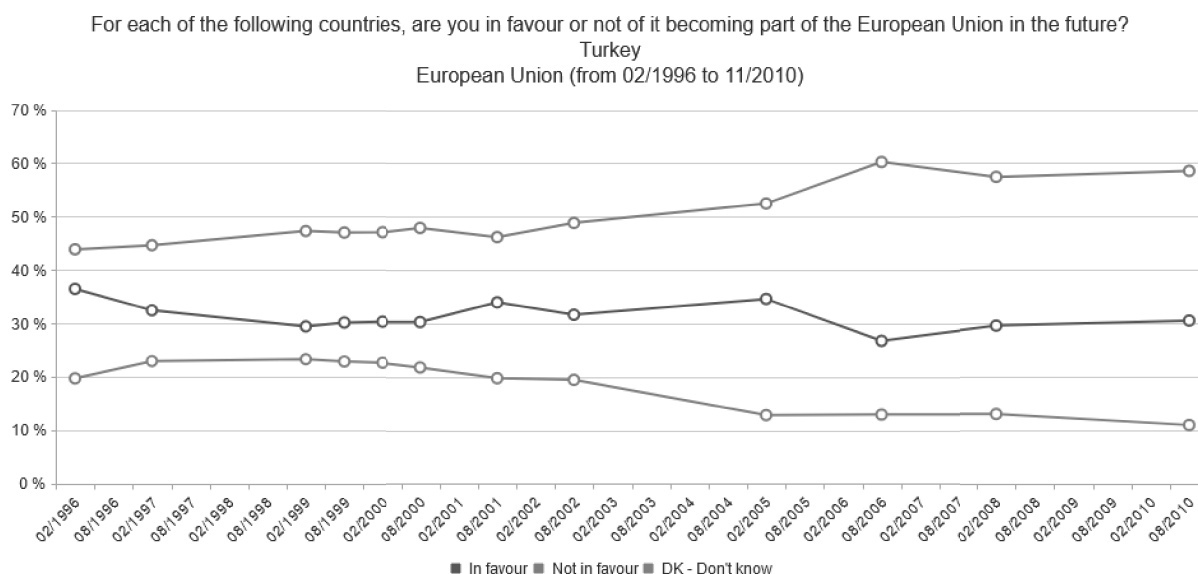
For a long time, the European identity was unified under one key idea until the foundation of the ECSC: Christianity. Having Judeo-Christian traditions, even in the mindset, was a necessity for the traditional notion of Europe. And this idea was backed by the right-wing for a long time.

Even the European institutions have inspirations from the past. Many projects of the EU are named after the first unifier of Western Europe, the Carolingian king of Franks, Charlemagne. The European Union is perceived as a continuation of Charlemagne's legacy, a dream of a united Europe under Judeo-Christian culture. The European tradition pulls its strength from its exceptional past including Greco-Roman roots, Renaissance, Reformation,

Age of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. In contrast, Turkey is mostly the nemesis of Europe as the Islamic Ottoman Empire during that era and remains as an observer to progress within Europe. This difference between the EU and Turkey cannot be overlooked and Turkey is not perceived to have performed well as a future member state in the European public opinion (see Table 3)

In addition, AKP's role as an Islamic party in Turkey raises questions on the secular position of Turkey. As secular state is an important value in the modern European identity, AKP government's Islamic approach can be seen as a problem.

Table 3 - European Public Opinion on Turkish accession to the EU between 1996 and 2010
(Eurobarometer)



2. Cultural Implications for Turkey

a) Positive aspects

Chance to prove the legacy of Atatürk

After the foundation of the republic, westernization and modernization of Turkey gained huge momentum under Atatürk's reforms. This legacy of westernization continued with the supporters of Atatürk's dream. The European Union as a gateway to the West may give Turkey an opportunity to become a completely western country. In addition, the European Union also holds a unique role as the symbol of the Western values, Europe.

However, marginal shift during the early 2000s may be seen as an exception to normal expectations. In early 2000s, the AKP government showed great support to the Turkish accession to the EU, while the secularists were skeptical about the further integration. (New York Times, 2007)

Consolidation of Turkish democracy

European Union has a reputation for safeguarding democracies, which was both achieved during the Mediterranean Enlargement and the Eastern Enlargement. The European Union standards on democracy set in the so-called Copenhagen criteria (more specifically *acquis communautaire*) push the candidates to take measures and improve their current situation in human rights and democracy.

Combined with the conditionality of the EU, Turkey did some reforms such as removing death penalty, changing anti-terror legislation and providing certain rights for Kurdish minority. The drastic change of Turkey between 1999 (candidate status) and 2005 (opening of accession talks) provided a better democratic environment for the Turkish public.

The proponents of better democracy in Turkey benefited from sharing democratic values with the EU.

b) Negative aspects

EU as a Christian Union

In 2017, Erdoğan accused the EU of starting a "crusade" against Islam and claimed that "a battle has started between “the cross and the crescent” (Deutsche Welle, 2017). The reaction against the refusal of Dutch and German representatives to let Turkish politicians campaign in their own countries and ECJ's decision on headscarves can be seen as a manifestation of negative cultural perception of the EU. For some Turks, the EU reminds the rivalry against Christianity that has existed since the first Islamic conquests. The EU is compared to the multinational armies of the Crusades, and differences between the cultures are emphasized.

In public opinion, the EU still holds an important place, but unable to achieve a monopoly. According to the survey of Economic Development Foundation (2017), the EU holds the first place in the preferred economic partnership (% 27.8) and the second place in the preferred political partnership (%24. 1). Russia and Turkic Republics hold the second place in the economic field (19.3%) and the first place in political partnership. These statistics show that Turkish people see other alternatives for Turkey other than the EU (including culturally closer Turkic Republics).

Conclusion

Cultural area of the Turkish membership to the EU stays as a controversial topic within the European Studies. The concept itself heavily relies on the perception of the future identity of the EU. This identity issue may influence the choice of the future governments

between the European intergovernmentalism and federalism. And as long as this identity issue exists, Turkey's membership will always be a problem.

Recent refugee crisis awakened the right wing nationalism in some parts of Europe which staunchly defends the civilization project perception of the EU. This recent development means that Turkey's popularity within the EU's public as a future member would stay low. A volatile international arena means that estimating Turkey's future with the EU in the cultural area can be harder to measure.

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