



Promotion of the Civil Society Dialogue Between EU and Turkey Universities Grant Scheme

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Problems of Europeanization and European Perceptions of Turkey as a Future Member State

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European Perceptions of Turkey

as a Future Member State:

**Results of an Opinion Poll in
France, Germany, Poland, Spain
and United Kingdom**

Field Work: August-September, 2009

Sample Size: 5000+ Respondents

1) “Turkey, the Disliked Country”

Identifying a collectivity consists of producing a series of rational arguments, emotional judgments, and aesthetic choices with the purpose of distinguishing that particular collectivity from the others. Each collective identification is, therefore, an exercise in boundary drawing, separating the insiders from the outsiders, “us” from “them, and “we” from “the others”. Some recent studies on European identity have shown that Turkey is treated as an “other” in the mental maps of many Europeans. Hence, according to an important cross-country qualitative study on European identity, carried out on behalf of the European Commission, the respondents have drawn a clear line between those countries that they believe form an “integral part” of Europe and those that do not:

The attitudes observed in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany and Austria present relatively similar traits. As in the countries of the South of Europe, the idea comes across that there is a sort of moral duty to admit countries which historically and culturally form an integral part of Greater Europe and with which one’s country has in the past sometimes had just as strong ties as with certain existing Member States. ... However, the candidacy of Turkey is much more problematic in this regard and even raises absolute opposition.¹

In recent years, identity-based arguments opposing Turkey’s accession to the EU have been loudest and strongest in France and Germany, compared to the other major EU

¹ *OPTEM, Perceptions of the European Union: A Qualitative Study of The Public’s Attitudes to and Expectations of the European Union in the 15 Member States and the 9 Candidate Countries, prepared for the European Commission, 2001, p.141. Available online at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/quali/ql_perceptions_summary_en.pdf.*

member countries. As we shall see below in the Eurobarometer surveys, in both countries public opposition to Turkey's EU membership have been much higher than the EU25 average. In both France and Germany, leading centre-right parties - the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) in France and the Christian Democratic parties (CDU/CSU) in Germany - have officially positioned themselves against Turkish EU membership, on the grounds that Turkey is not a European country. Instead, they have proposed what they called a "privileged partnership". The UMP-dominated French parliament went so far to pass a constitutional amendment, subjecting Turkey's EU membership to a public referendum. Turkey became one of the hottest issues during the French debates around the European constitutional treaty in late 2004 and early 2005, so much so that in the rhetoric of many French politicians saying no to Turkey and saying no to the EU Constitution became intractably linked. Some right-wing groups based in France, calling themselves "European Citizens' Resistance Campaign", even started a campaign to 'Cross Turkey off the Euro Map'. 'Turkey is not part of the European bloc by any stretch of imagination, be it on sociological, historical, geographical, cultural, political, or religious grounds,' argued the campaign leaders. They called upon the European citizens to show their opposition to Turkey 'by marking Turkey with a red cross on all your banknotes, in the bottom right-hand corner of the map of Europe at the verso of every Euro'. They did not forget to add that "your banknotes remain legal tender which cannot be refused!"²

² See <http://uk.rayezlaturquie.com>.

Hrant Dink, the Armenian-Turkish journalist who recently lost his life in a terrorist attack in Istanbul, said at a conference on EU-Turkish relations that, at the emotional level, what was binding the European Union and Turkey together was not love but fear. What he meant by this was that the two sides did not have any particular willingness to live together, but could not separate their ways either, out of the fear that the costs of divorce would be greater than the costs of marriage³. A similar opinion was voiced by Marc Galle, a former member of the European Parliament and co-chair of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee in the early 1990s, who wrote a book entitled *Turkey, the Disliked Country*.⁴

A number of opinion polls conducted in Turkey and Europe have yielded data that lend support to the views of Dink and Galle. Hence, in a survey conducted in mid-2006 by the US-based Transatlantic Trends, people in nine selected EU member states (UK, France, Germany, Netherlands, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain) were asked to rank certain countries on the basis of how much “affection” they feel for them, with “0” signifying no affection, and “100” full affection. Among the nine EU member states included in the survey, Turkey happened to be one of the least liked countries with an average “affection grade” of 42, above only Palestine (38) and Iran (28). For example, Germany's affection rate for Turkey was 43 (at about the European average) and France's

³ H. Dink, “Minority Rights in Turkey on the Road to the EU”, Speech delivered at the conference “Fourth Bogazici Student Meeting on the Process of Accession Negotiations between the EU and Turkey”, organised by the Student Forum of Bogazici University’s Centre for European Studies, Bogazici University, Istanbul, 22 December 2006.

⁴ M. Galle, *Sevilmeyen Ülke Türkiye [Turkey, The Disliked Country]*, Bilgi Yayınevi, Ankara, 1995.

was 38 (well below the European average). European affections towards Israel (43), China (46) and Russia (47) remained low but still above that for Turkey⁵.

One concrete result of the apparent lack of affection for Turkey on the part of the European publics is that Turkey is the least wanted country when it comes to EU Enlargement, even ranging below some Balkan countries, such as Serbia, which have only been given 'potential candidate' status. According to a Eurobarometer poll taken in the spring of 2006, when asked if they would oppose or support Turkey's membership in the EU once Turkey complies with all the conditions set by the European Union, close to 50% of the respondents in EU25 said they would be on the opposing side, while the supporters remained at about 40%. German opponents to Turkey's EU entry reached a record level of about 70% while French opposition to Turkey remained at the high figure of nearly 55%. Only 27% of the German and approximately 40% of the French respondents said they would be in favour of extending EU membership to Turkey.⁶

⁵ Transatlantic Trends, *Top Line Data 2006* (fieldwork coordinated by TNS Opinion, interviews conducted 5-24 June 2006). Available online at www.transatlantictrends.org.

⁶ European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 255/Wave 65.2, Attitudes towards European Union Enlargement*. (Fieldwork March-May 2006; Publication: July 2006). Available online at http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/index_en.htm.

2) European Perceptions of Turkey: Summary Results of an Opinion Poll in France, Germany, Poland, Spain and United Kingdom

The “Turkish question” has been haunting Europe for some time, most visibly since October 2005, when the accession process of Turkey was given an official start. One of the arguments, which has been frequently voiced by the opponents of Turkish accession, was that the European publics did not want Turkey to join the EU. Though the “public opinion” argument has been very much used, there has been very little empirical evidence of what exactly the European publics wanted to do about Turkey.

This research project was aimed to uncover the level of information, the sources of information, the images, and the attitudes of European publics with regard to Turkey, Turkish people, and the accession of Turkey to the EU. Some of these issues had been previously addressed by other surveys, including the Eurobarometer polls. This survey differs from the previous ones in that it specifically addresses the Turkish question in its manifold dimensions.

The research was designed and conducted by the Centre for European Studies of Bogazici University, Istanbul, in partnership with the Autonomous University of Madrid and the University of Granada. The project coordinator was Prof. Dr. Hakan Yilmaz, the director of the Centre for European Studies at Bogazici University. The field survey was conducted in September 2009. The project was financed by the EU under the EU-Turkey Civil Society Dialogue program (CFCU-TR 0604.01/03).

Some of the interesting findings of the survey can be summed up as follows:

It's a matter of leadership! Many respondents pointed to the statements of their political leaders as their major source of information and opinion regarding Turkey. Hence, public opinion seems to be shaped by politics, rather than the other way around.

It's a matter of culture! One major finding of the survey is the intense "culturalization" of the Turkish case. In other words, though the European publics see "economic welfare" and "democracy", two seemingly non-cultural factors, as the major components of European identity, cultural norms and values come to the fore when they form their opinions regarding Turkey.

It's a matter of generations! Age turns out to be a critical factor determining European attitudes towards Turkey, younger people, between the ages of 18 and 24, being much more supportive for the Turkish accession and the support rate sharply declining with rising age.

It's a matter of left-right divide! Supporters for Turkish accession are heavily concentrated on the centre-left and Green sides of the political continuum. Those on the centre-right are opposed and those on the far-right are outright hostile to the idea of seeing Turkey in the EU.

It's a matter of law! European publics seem to be quite sensitive to the argument that it would be wrong for the EU to violate the "pacta sunt servanda" principle and stop the accession process of Turkey.