

## TURKEY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION: DIVERGENT DISCOURSES?

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**Abstract.** *It has become almost axiomatic to argue that the prospect of Turkish accession to the European Union (EU) poses unprecedented challenges to its cohesion, its institutional structure, and to its identity.<sup>1</sup> No country has waited longer to open negotiations with the EU, and no country has embarked on negotiations with such a distant prospect for those negotiations being concluded. Our purpose here is not to consider the wide range of problems faced by Turkey in these negotiations, or even to make a judgement on whether these negotiations will, or ought to be, successful. Our objective is to consider public opinion in the EU, and in Turkey with a view to isolating perceptions on both sides that may be complicating factors in an already intricate relationship.*

**Keywords:** *Turkey, accession, public opinion, Cyprus, Kurdish minority*

### Introduction

In many ways, the question of Turkish membership of the EU provokes in a more profound sense a number of issues that have become salient since the enlargement of 2004. The first of these is the extent of the divergence between public opinion and elite opinion in the EU member states. The saga of the European Constitution highlighted ways in which EU elites seemed to have lost touch with their constituencies. This was most painfully illustrated by the fact that the Constitution which was intended to “re-connect” the people with elites actually resulted in a rejection by referendum in two of the “original Six” member states. The reaction to that rejection, leaving aside several

unconnected causes behind it, has led to considerable soul-searching in the Commission on how to cement public support for the EU in a number of domains. The second and third issues made more prominent by the prospect of Turkish membership of the EU are the still unanswered questions of what actually drives support for EU integration and, by extension, enlargement. On the one hand it is often argued that integration is driven by rational calculations of mainly economic advantage. Thus, legacies of past hatreds can be overcome if the price is right. Such an argument lies at the heart of Franco-German reconciliation which was based on the belief that the hatchet ought to be buried because it was beneficial to both parties (in a security and economic sense) for that to happen. On the other

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<sup>1</sup> See M. Emerson et al. ‘Just what is this ‘absorption capacity’ of the European Union?’ *CEPS Policy Brief* No.113, 6 October 2006, where it is argued that Turkish accession poses a particular challenge to the EU’s absorption capacity, the latter concept being usefully deconstructed in the article.

hand, this view is often opposed by those who argue that integration is based on a sense of common identity; and that rational calculations of advantage always must be mediated through the underlying tensions or linkages that characterise two or more national communities. Clearly also, the two views merge and can be seen as interdependent when it is suggested either that rational calculations of benefit, once they materialise, will create a common sense of purpose and eventually an identity, or *vice versa*. On the other hand, a common identity already in existence for other reasons, may delay, divert or hasten integration as for example in the case of Britain whose integration with Europe (although obviously beneficial) was diverted and delayed by misplaced attachments to the USA and the Commonwealth.

In the case of EU-Turkish relations these two “engines” of support for integration are being tested in a more robust environment. Rational calculations of benefit, mutual or otherwise, are not clear cut; and arguments around identity which might and, in other cases have, successfully, overcome the shortcomings of rational explanations for integration, are much more shaky here. Indeed, it is often argued that a lack of common cultural identity between Turkey and the EU is precisely the reason why this step in the enlargement process is a “step too far”.

Public opinion in the EU and Turkey, respectively, is obviously far from homogeneous across space, or static across time. It varies along at least three dimensions: chronological, geographical, and political. Over time, we have seen marked changes in support for Turkish entry with opinion in Turkey and the EU declining generally in the years since the

2004 enlargement. Secondly, geography plays a part in the sense that there are significant variations between different regions in Turkey and, even more so, between different member states of the EU; and finally there are clear-cut differences in support for Turkish entry between political parties in both the EU and in Turkey; and by extension between different groups in society such as farmers, industrialists, or (in Turkey) the military.

Our simultaneous analysis of public opinion in the EU and Turkey has important policy implications. If opinion varies strongly between EU member states, it will be necessary to address issues that are important to publics in different national settings, and there are issues which may vary quite markedly. Within Turkey also, the increasing hardening of opinion towards membership needs to be addressed in terms relevant to the frustrations felt there. This may require an approach quite different from that needed in the EU to address negative sentiments. The EU ‘absorption capacity’ argument, which is used partly to justify resistance to Turkish entry, needs also to be explained since opposition to the entry of countries like Croatia or Montenegro is much less uttered. Is this simply a function of their size, or are there deeper cultural and historical pressures at work?

In this paper, our argument proceeds in three stages: firstly we outline the principal trends in public opinion in the EU towards the prospect of Turkish accession and we emphasise the contrasts between member states and therefore the difficulty in adopting an EU-wide approach to overcoming these variations. We also draw attention to the fact that Turkish accession has become a

kind of 'scapegoat' issue around which problems endemic to European society are being debated. Secondly, we aim to analyse the opinion towards the EU within Turkey, emphasising variations between groups in society. Here again, the difficulty of persuading Turkish opinion is seen specifically in the context of principally external factors that mould public attitudes: the Cyprus question, and the progress of the accession negotiations themselves, issues whose impact on Turkish opinion tends to be quite direct. Thirdly, we make a comparison between motivations behind support in the EU, and support in Turkey, for Turkish accession, with a view to assessing whether there is sufficient popular support to underpin this major step forward in European integration. Even leaving aside the need to hold referendums in some countries on the question of Turkish accession, it would be unwise for a major step of this kind to be undertaken without broad popular support in the EU. It is not, however, possible to predict what public opinion will look like in ten or fifteen years time, but our contention is that any steps taken by member-state governments should be rooted in popular acquiescence, if not outright enthusiasm, and that our task today is to identify fears and failings that need to be overcome in the meantime.

### Opinion in the European Union

It has been established beyond reasonable doubt that popular support in the EU for Turkish accession has declined steadily over the past three

years. This has placed some pressure on governments, and especially on those which publicly welcomed the opening of accession negotiations in October 2005. While governments may feel constrained by path dependency considerations – commitments once entered into cannot easily be set aside – it is difficult for them to ignore the negative implications of public opinion that has for several reasons become less enamoured of Turkish entry.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that public opinion has ever been very enthusiastic. What we have seen, since 2005, is an attempt by the EU, acting as a kind of proxy for EU governments, to slow down the pace of negotiations even though these have hardly had a chance to gather any momentum. There are several convenient pretexts that the EU negotiators can rely on to delay the progress of negotiations; but the Cyprus question has probably been the most prominent recently. Public opinion is less constrained than governments and, moreover, it can feed on less rational arguments, on prejudice, and on putative linkages between the specific issue of Turkish accession and more generic ills facing the EU such as unemployment, inflation, housing shortages, and racial tension. These latter problems would almost certainly exist, and have existed, irrespective of any prospect of Turkish accession, but they provide, however irrationally, scapegoating possibilities: it is always easier to assert that problem X or problem Y will be aggravated by Turkish membership of the EU, than to prove the contrary.

Variations between member states

<sup>2</sup> In the summer of 2005 a Eurobarometer poll found that 52% of Europeans were against Turkish accession, and 35% in favour. This was seen to be embarrassing for Britain which, while lecturing its partners on the need to 're-connect' with public opinion, was apparently itself out of touch with the hostility to Turkey in countries like France, Germany and Austria. Britain was due to take over the Presidency in the summer of 2005, and chair the opening of negotiations with Turkey in October. See *The Times* 19 July 2005.

regarding public opinion and Turkish accession are quite marked; and this makes it difficult to generalise about 'EU public opinion' towards Turkey. For example, in September 2005, over 50 percent of Hungarians were reportedly in favour of Turkish accession, while barely 10 percent of their Austrian neighbours were of the same opinion<sup>3</sup>. What complicates the picture further is that motivations behind support for Turkish membership of the EU vary among EU member states. If we take even a brief snapshot of public opinion (in late 2005) we see how diverse is the nature of support for, and opposition to, Turkish membership. In Germany, for example, public opinion tends to be predominantly opposed to Turkish membership and this antipathy stems primarily from high unemployment coupled, at least in the public mind, with the existence of a well-established Turkish minority to whom many economic ills can be attributed, however unjustly. An idea of 'privileged partnership' emerged from Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats but, as Chancellor in a 'grand coalition', and President of the EU in the first part of 2007, she adopted the more statesmanlike role of pursuing the accession negotiations as honouring an EU commitment, but also insisting that Turkey satisfy all the accession criteria before any deal is done. Germany is Turkey's most important economic partner in the EU with a volume of trade amounting to 14 billion euro annually. Fourteen percent of Turkey's exports go to Germany, and 17 percent of German exports to Turkey. Three million Germans visit Turkey annually, and 2.5

million Turks live in Germany. France has the highest percentage of Muslims (7 percent) of any country in the EU and this also contributes to an aversion among the public to contemplate early accession by Turkey to the EU. French and German public opinion is almost equally opposed (75 percent in each case) to Turkish entry, and the motive is very similar: high unemployment. There is a difference in that whereas the Turkish minority in France is often said to be "invisible" and is subsumed into a more general fear of Muslim immigration, the Turkish minority in Germany is very visible; and tends to overshadow any wider concerns about the Moslem community. In France, these apprehensions have been exacerbated by the still-fresh memories of urban rioting in many French cities. In the Netherlands, public opinion is also divided over the question of Turkish accession and again the opposition to Turkey stems from antipathy towards Muslim minorities which in this case was exacerbated after the murder of the filmmaker Theo van Gogh. In Greece, there is a wide disparity between public opinion and government policy. The latter is keen to 'mend fences' with Turkey although Ankara's attitude towards the Cyprus issue remains a stumbling block to this official policy of reconciliation. Public opinion is less enlightened and the Ottoman rule over Greece for 400 years leaves behind a legacy of anti-Turkish sentiment: only a quarter of Greeks believe that Turkey should have a place in the EU. The country that is most opposed to Turkish accession is Austria. Here we see both historical and cultural factors and currently rational assessments relating in

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<sup>3</sup> Eurobarometer 63 (2005).

particular to Austria's contribution to the EU budget. Opinion polls suggest that Austrians are in any case more aware of the disadvantages than advantages of membership. In 2005, 'enlargement fatigue' had taken hold in the EU and was alive and well in Austria: only 21 percent supported the accession of Bulgaria, 17 percent the accession of Romania, and only 10 percent the accession of Turkey (the lowest support for Turkey in the EU). Austrian opposition to Turkish entry to the EU is age-related: younger people tend to be more in favour than their parents' generation. This is however only relative. Three out of four young Austrians oppose Turkish entry; while 82 percent of these over 55 feel the same way.<sup>4</sup> These highly negative attitudes may be linked to fears about the domestic economy. Unemployment is the single biggest concern to Austrian voters, two-thirds of whom cite this as their foremost preoccupation.

Among countries that are supportive of Turkish entry, it is worth mentioning Hungary, Britain, Italy, Spain and Poland. Although Hungary was under Ottoman rule for 150 years there is little anti-Turkish sentiment in the country and over half the population is in favour of Turkish accession, making Hungarians the staunchest supporters of Turkey in the EU. In Britain, there is support by the government and to a lesser extent from the population for Turkish entry. This support (the second highest in the EU) is linked to foreign policy visions that look upon Turkish secular democracy as a potentially stabilising force in the volatility of the Middle East. Some observers, somewhat cynically perhaps, attribute British support for Turkish

membership to a belief that it will ensure that the more federalist ambitions of the EU never come to fruition. Moreover, there are commercial links between Turkey and the UK that will benefit from membership. Italy also sees Turkey as a key actor in the Middle East and does not underestimate commercial opportunities that might flourish from closer contacts within the framework of EU membership. Spanish citizens, and their government, favour Turkish membership of the EU for both economic and geopolitical reasons. Spain is a major recipient of Muslims from North Africa (legal and otherwise) and therefore has a broader concern to create conditions around the Mediterranean basin in order to reduce flows of south-north migration. Polish support for Turkish membership is based on the belief that the Atlanticist tendencies of the EU would be strengthened and, in particular, that the membership of Turkey in NATO, and the pro-American line (more tenuous recently) followed by Ankara would resonate well with Poland's foreign policy orientations within the EU which occasionally come under pressure from other member-states.

As we have already seen, there is considerable diversity among EU member-states as regards the topic of Turkish accession. It has been argued that these divergences are linked to national preferences for various outcomes to the European integration process itself. Thus, national reactions to Turkey's efforts to satisfy a wide range of demands being made on it have been met with distinctly different degrees of approbation among EU governments. This can be attributed to the fact that the debate is not really about various 'hoops' through which Turkey is

<sup>4</sup> Eurobarometer 63 (2005).

compelled to jump, but whether Turkish accession would help or hinder the vision of Europe's future that is endemic in the national psyche.

A comparison<sup>5</sup> between France and Germany, on the one side, with Britain on the other, makes clear that their respective attitudes towards Turkish membership are expressed in a different conceptual language, and based on divergent, even contrasting assumptions. In Germany, we have a country whose own statehood and evolution has been identified, almost symbiotically, with the progress of European integration. Support for EMS, EMU, the euro and a European Constitution, have all reflected and reinforced Germany's belief that a Europe based on its own federal political model will be best for Germany, and for Europe. Economically, the EU has served Germany well and the Single Market project can also be seen as creating exactly the conditions in which Germany's export-oriented economy can thrive. Reactions to the prospect of Turkish accession are couched therefore in terms of the EU's future destiny. Turkish entry is resisted strongly on the grounds that it will damage the future political integration of the EU, and that it would be incompatible with the deepening and strengthening of the EU institutional architecture. Moreover, Turkey is rejected on cultural grounds because it is assumed that social integration of a European demos is precondition for the political *approfondissement* of the EU.

In France, similar but not identical preoccupations predominate. There are objections to Turkish accession on grounds slightly different from those that

prevail in Germany. Again, however, the over-riding concern is the *finalite politique* of the EU. In the French view, France's own influence can be best maintained within a Europe that is itself compact, coherent and coordinated. The Eastern enlargement of 2004 is already seen as a contentious issue and France's position in the EU since 2004 is already seen as much diminished. French fears about Turkish entry revolve around prospects of a weaker institutional framework and the dilution of a 'Christian Europe' on which a future European identity, and therefore deeper political integration, are seen to depend.

In Britain, there are significant contrasts with both France and Germany. Indeed, one could argue that the starting point of the debates is quite different in the two respective cases. For example, in contrast to the French assertion that eastern enlargement in 2004 made a further enlargement both impossible and undesirable, the British view is that as 2004 has already loosened the cohesion of the EU it will be easier, and more desirable, to absorb Turkey in ten or fifteen years time. This is a challenge that the EU institutions can easily manage. On the cultural argument, the British view is that to perceive the EU as a 'Christian club' is mischievous nostalgia and that the *de facto* multicultural character of many EU countries (not least Germany and France) makes easier, and possibly more desirable, the addition of a predominantly Muslim country. To Giscard's remark that Turkish entry would signify the 'end of Europe', a leading British newspaper replied that these were the 'ugly prejudices of the ancient regime.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, A Wimmel, *Beyond the Bosphorus? Comparing German, French and British Discourses on Turkey's Application to Join the European Union*, Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, 2006.



They are also profoundly stupid'.<sup>6</sup> While French and German opinion tends to see Turkey's size and geopolitical location as rather problematic for the EU, British opinion acknowledges them as assets: the border with Iraq; a young population; and substantial military forces within NATO, are all seen as potentially valuable to the future of the EU as a global player. In general terms, British opinion sees the 'federalist dream' as already obsolete, and therefore the German or French argument that Turkish accession would put this 'dream' at risk, cuts little ice in Britain where currents of Euroscepticism run strong in both major parties.

Although France is not the country most opposed to Turkish entry, its significance in the EU debate has become significant for several reasons. Among these are the residual backwash effects of the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty. At the time, it was widely claimed that the no vote was a vote against Turkish EU membership. The French Government had already promised a referendum on Turkish accession and this tended to reinforce the same belief. However, opinion poll analysis after the referendum demonstrated that Turkey was not a major explanatory factor in voting trends. Secondly, Sarkozy's election has made more 'official' the French view that Turkey should not be admitted to the EU. Instead, Sarkozy has suggested a 'Mediterranean Union'<sup>7</sup> where Turkey would play a leading role. This is in accord with his belief that the EU does not represent simply a set of values, but also a geographical entity. The extent to which

Sarkozy can, or will, obstruct accession negotiations remains open to question. Even Germany has committed itself to pursuing the negotiations while floating the idea of a 'privileged partnership'; the Commission is determined that the EU mandate to negotiate in good faith should be honoured; and France's partners will remind Sarkozy that a Turkey anchored firmly within the EU orbit, is more likely to be politically stable, and economically prosperous, to the advantage of all EU countries. Sarkozy's appointment of Bernard Couchner (an advocate of Turkish accession) as Foreign Minister may seem like a ray of hope, but it is not certain that Couchner will remain for ever in his new role. Thirdly, it appears on reflection that the debate about the EU in France uses Turkey as a type of proxy scapegoat for many unresolved or problematic issues inside France. It has recently been suggested<sup>8</sup> that almost all the arguments used to challenge Turkey's eligibility for EU membership were connected to internal French concerns. These arguments reflect France's bewilderment at needing to readjust its own integration policies in an enlarged European Union. Already, since 2004, France has seen its pre-eminent position within the EU eroded by East and Central European countries some of whose governments were surprisingly assertive, and failed to kowtow (as Paris evidently assumed they would) to what Rumsfeld later famously called "Old Europe". Within the EU institutions, and in the face of increasingly liberalised economic policies emanating from Brussels, French

<sup>6</sup> See *Financial Times* 6 December 2002.

<sup>7</sup> K. Barysch, 'Sarkozy, secularism and Turkey's European future', *CER Bulletin* No.54, July 2007.

<sup>8</sup> 'The Franco-Turkish Relationship in Turmoil' Ankara: EDAM January 2007, v.

attitudes towards enlargement were riddled with anxieties for which Turkish accession became a convenient whipping boy. French perceptions of inadequacies of their social organisational model, their institutions, and their political culture, have led to a mood of self-searching. In this context, Turkey may have been used as a convenient 'counter-model' to stimulate the debate on the French performance.<sup>9</sup> 'Our impression remains that the French are debating essentially with themselves, and about themselves, and using Turkey only as a vehicle for self-centred reflection'<sup>10</sup>.

### Public opinion in Turkey

There have been significant changes in Turkish political life, especially after the Helsinki Summit which elevated Turkey's bid to candidacy status. The Justice and Development Party (JDP) government which came to power in November 2002, worked on the harmonisation packages, as they were called in Turkey, aimed at balancing the Turkish legislation with the *acquis communautaire*. However, in 2007, starting from March, Turkish political life experienced an extraordinary phase which has been observed by the international actors closely. Starting on 16 April 2007, masses of people in the streets of several cities i.e. Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Manisa and so on demonstrated against the government and the EU showing concerns and deep mistrust. The rallying cry in these demonstrations focused on protection of secularism and the discontent with the EU. People showed their discontent

towards the government's candidate for the presidency, whose wife is wearing a headscarf, but also showed their discontent towards the EU. The crowds chanted "No to the EU, No to the USA, Independent Turkey".

In the last five years JDP succeed in changing the Cyprus policy, opening accession negotiations with the EU, stabilising the economic growth with a strong fiscal policy. However, growing debate in the EU on the open-endedness of the EU transformation of Turkey, disappointment at the EU process, and over the emphasis on the conditional nature of the negotiations brought a considerable decrease in the public support towards the reform processes and the EU. It is expected to see a decrease in the enthusiasm towards the EU as the reforms take place in a country on the way to the membership. However, it is observed in the Turkish case that the support for the membership decreased very rapidly over a short time, from around 75 percent to around 50 percent. Although in all the candidate countries it has been observed that the public support for the membership decreases as the process speeds up and starts to affect people's lives, the Turkish case cannot only be explained in relation to the realisation of the reforms, the process of change and difficulties brought together with this process. The effect of the exclusion of the civil society from the process and the reforms enforced by the state did not satisfy the public, the negative comments on Turkey's reform process, the "incapacitated" policy making process of the EU in the Cyprus issue,

<sup>9</sup> 'The Franco-Turkish Relationship in Turmoil' Ankara: EDAM January 2007, ix.

<sup>10</sup> 'The Franco-Turkish Relationship in Turmoil' Ankara: EDAM January 2007, x.



the fluctuations in the relations between the EU and Turkey, EU's decision on freezing eight of the negotiation chapters, and the effect of domestic politics on EU issues as experienced in other countries influences the drop in public support. Another element in this support drop has been the attitude of the army in this process. Although the Turkish Armed Forces did not reject the EU membership, the demands of the EU is seen as against the Turkey's national interests. Besides, Turkish Armed Forces being one of the most trusted institutions in the country, their influence is considerable on the public. Increase in nationalism, not only in Turkey but also in Europe and increase in the anti-American attitude also have effect in this support decrease.

In this paper, in accordance with public opinion studies in Turkey, the decrease in the enthusiasm of the Turkish people towards the EU and the support for the membership are examined especially after the realisation of the candidacy status, while the age, gender and political party affiliation of the respondents, as well as the time periods during which support for EU accession is higher, are all considered influencing factors.

### **The mass demonstrations in Turkey**

The JDP, who came in power in November 2002, worked for a number of legislative reform packages/ harmonisation packages starting from February 2002, introducing changes to the country's political system. In 2003, several more reforms were introduced, including two democratisation packages on political parties, the fight against

torture, freedom of press, procedures for setting up associations, and the property rights of non-Muslims.<sup>11</sup> Other reforms related to non-Muslim communities include addressing specific conditions pertaining to legal problems regarding real estate held by community foundations, recognition of non-Muslim groups which were not listed in the Treaty of Lausanne, and allowing places of worship to be built by all religions and faiths in the country. The reform package, which entered into force in July 2003, lifted Article 8 of the anti-terror law, thus expanding the freedom of speech and of broadcasting in Kurdish. Reforms undertaken on the Kurdish issue also include amendments to laws dealing with teaching of foreign languages, paving the way to the opening of Kurdish language courses. This reform package also includes changes in laws to permit parents to give their children Kurdish names, and a partial amnesty and reduction in sentences for persons involved in the activities of an illegal organisation. Furthermore, implementation of a project to return those displaced by the conflict to their villages has continued. Other reforms include the expansion of the freedom of expression including prohibition of closure of printing houses. Also, the procedure for the dissolution of political parties has been made more difficult, and the official definition of propaganda in connection with the terrorist organisations was amended.

Similarly, there have been changes in the freedom of peaceful assembly and association such as reducing the age limit for organising demonstrations, allowing civil society organisations to organise

<sup>11</sup> K. Dervis, M.Emerson, D.Gros, S.Ulgen, *The European Transformation of Modern Turkey*, Brussels: CEPS 2004, p.19.

meetings and demonstrations that fall outside their scope, bringing restrictions on governors to postpone meetings, reducing restrictions on membership in civil society organisations; reducing restrictions on making announcements, allowing usage of foreign languages in their international contacts and unofficial correspondence, and so on. In May 2004, the Constitution was amended to bring it into harmony with the previous democratisation packages. The democratisation package in 2004 repealed a provision that had allowed the Secretary General of the National Security Council to nominate a member of the High Audio Visual Board<sup>12</sup>. There have been other reforms to decrease the role of the military in the political sphere, such as: relegation of the advisory function of the National Security Council, removal of the representative of the National Security Council from the Board of Cinema, Video and Music, appointment of a civilian to the post of Secretary General of National Security Council and removal of the military representative from the Higher Education Board. In 2005, Turkey passed two essential legislations, the Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedures Law. These developments were welcomed by the European Commission as well. Until the issue of Cyprus came into the picture, once again, the relations between Turkey and the EU seemed on track and support for the membership in Turkey has not been an issue in domestic politics.

In addition to the fluctuations in relations with the EU, the presidential elections became an issue in the domestic affairs in 2007. Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül's candidacy to the presidency is seen as a symbol of political Islam and thus

incompatible with the country's secular character. The organised demonstrations were a reflection of widespread concerns about secularism, which is the foremost defining characteristic of the Turkish regime. However, some rallying cries in these demonstrations are more of a concern for this paper. The rallying cries focused on opposition to Turkey's EU membership for sovereignty reasons, and to privatisation and foreign investments. The huge demonstrations seemed to be merely secularist in character, yet a strongly nationalist, pro-military and anti-EU discourse was also equally existent.

### **Decline in support for EU membership**

Turkey's EU membership has been seen as an important gain for Turkey especially in terms of economic benefits in 2002, as observed in the public opinion polls conducted by the Istanbul University Communications Faculty Academic Media and Public Opinion Research Group in Istanbul. 21.1 percent of the respondents believed that economic development would derive as an important gain from EU membership.

This research also showed that 59.7 percent of the people were in favour of EU membership in the province of Istanbul and 39.1 percent were not. In the years before 2002, the support was around 56 percent. In the same year, the public support for EU membership was 76.35 percent in the whole country. However, there has been a very rapid decrease in the enthusiasm towards the EU in a very short time span. From 2002 to 2006, the support for membership went down

<sup>12</sup> The High Audio Visual Board was established after the 1980 coup and became a useful platform for the military to control the media on such topics as Islam, ethnic minorities and Communism.

What would be the gain of Turkey if it becomes an EU member state?	%
Economic development	21.1
Human rights	5.9
Increase in trade	4.2
Decrease in unemployment	3.7
Free movement of people	3.5
Increase in the social life	3.5
Democracy	3.2
Increase in the education level	2.1
Increase in respectability	1.5
Political gains	1.3
Increase in the cultural richness	1.2
Development of tourism	1.0
Understanding of the rule of law	0.8
Increase in the welfare	0.5
The support of the EU member states	0.4
Migration	0.3
Gain in every aspect	0.2
Opening up to the outside world	0.2
Increase in military force	0.2
Development of the industry	0.2
Equal income distribution	0.2
Improvement of Turkey's relations with other countries	0.2
Other	1.9
No answer	42.6

Figure 1 - Benefits of EU membership

from 76.35 percent to 57.41 percent. Furthermore, the percentage of support in the youth population went down to 55.33 percent from 84.96 percent in the same period.

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The percentage of the people who want EU membership (%) <sup>13</sup>			
	2002	2004	2006
General Public	76.35	64.82	57.41
Youth	84.96	83.24	55.33

Figure 2 - Support for EU membership

In this decline, the over-emphasis on the open ended negotiations, the issue of trust and religion and 'the clash of civilizations' rhetoric played a considerable role. Public opinion polls showed a common belief that the EU had been reluctant towards Turkish membership because of the religious

<sup>13</sup> "Turkey's Socio-political profile in the process of European Union", August –September 2006. Public opinion Poll conducted by Prof. Dr. İbrahim Armağan, Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, İzmir

differences. The percentage who believes the EU is excluding Turkey because of religion was 63.1 percent. In 2005, this percentage was 41<sup>14</sup>.

As long as the people believed in the possibility of EU membership, support for the membership and enthusiasm towards the EU was high. However, the decrease in the level of trust in the EU, emphasis on open ended negotiations, rhetoric such as special partnership, absorption capacity of the EU and the possible referendum in France and Austria in the case of Turkish membership played crucial role in this decline.

The developments in the Cyprus issue also discouraged the people as far as the EU is concerned. Cyprus sitting astride trade routes that link Turkey to the world is crucial in its internal and external politics. Also, the island has been considered vital for the country since Cyprus is only 70 km from the Turkish coast and is the biggest island to its East, controlling access to ports in the region. Cyprus is seen as the exit point for oil and natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, and this increases the significance of the island not only for Turkey, but also for the other actors involved. In particular, after the agreement on the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, the island became even more important. Besides, Cyprus has become the number one priority in the negotiations with the EU. The JDP government is aware of the fact that Cyprus is a significant problem in the relations with the EU, especially after

the EU membership of Southern Cyprus. It is a common belief in the Turkish government that the EU is obliged to recognise Northern Cyprus.<sup>15</sup> Information gleaned from interviews<sup>16</sup> suggests that the understanding in the government is that the EU has ignored international agreements in the membership of Cyprus and is not acting neutrally on this issue. The London/ Zurich agreements appointed Turkey, Greece and the UK as the guarantors for Cyprus and they should be consulted in any development regarding the islands' political status.<sup>17</sup> It is believed that the EU did not seek the opinions of the guarantor countries in the membership of the Southern Cyprus in 2004. The Turkish government believes that the Cyprus issue should have been solved before October 3, 2005, which was the agreed date to start negotiations between Turkey and the EU.<sup>18</sup> However still, JDP government had more flexible and tolerant views on the Cyprus issue than the previous governments. In December 2006, although the JDP resisted EU's demands on opening the ports to the Greek Cypriots for a year, just before the meeting of EU leaders on December 14-15, 2006, the Turkish government proposed to open one seaport and one airport to traffic from Cyprus. Until December 2006, Turkey insisted that EU would end the economic isolation on northern Cyprus. The possibility of the relations with EU to freeze due to the Cyprus issue, forced the JDP to propose opening

<sup>14</sup> "Avrupa Birliği ve Türkiye İlişkileri", 15 March - 5 April 2002, Istanbul University Communications Faculty Academic Media and Public Opinion Research Group, Istanbul.

<sup>15</sup> Nevzat Yalçıntaş and Vahit Erdem, interviews by author, Turkish Grand National Assembly, January 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Interviewees' names are not given here, due to the fact that they hold administrative positions (experts/advisors on EU Affairs in Turkey - EU Joint Parliamentary Committee, OSCEPA Committee, and Secretariat General of EU Affairs). Interviews were conducted in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, December 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Nevzat Yalçıntaş and Vahit Erdem, interviews by author, Turkish Grand National Assembly, January 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Vahit Erdem, interview by author, Turkish Grand National Assembly, January 2005.

couple of ports to Southern Cyprus and in return Turkish government wanted the same number of ports to be opened for the Northern Cyprus. However, this proposal did not find acceptance at the EU level and EU foreign ministers decided to freeze eight negotiation chapters<sup>19</sup>. This process, starting with the referendum on the Annan Plan up to the proposals by the Turkish government, had already created impassioned discussions in the domestic politics. On top of this, the rejection of the proposal by the EU increased the mistrust towards it more than ever and eventually led to a sudden drop off in the support for membership as well as in the belief in membership.

The speeches of member state leaders such as France, Austria and Germany against Turkish membership occupy an important place in the public debate, and the recognition of the Armenian genocide in a number of EU member states including France decreased the belief in a membership which was seen as an economic gain. In particular, using the Union – by reference to its “incapacitated” foreign policy decisions in the relations between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots – in domestic politics shows the lack of trust towards the EU. As the support for membership goes down, the belief in the membership goes down as well. Only 33 percent of the respondents believe in the possibility of membership. It had been observed that people’s belief in Turkey becoming a member of the Union in the near future is low, while more than 55 percent do not believe in membership. Not only the belief, but also the percentage of the people seeing Turkey’s membership as a must decreased considerably. In relation, the number of the people considering that Turkey should not become a member also increased, as Figure 4 demonstrates.

Will Turkey become a member of the EU in the near future? <sup>20</sup>	
	%
Yes	33
No	59.3
No answer	7.7

Figure 3 - Belief in Turkey’s EU membership

What do you think about Turkey EU membership process – With which of the following statements would you agree? <sup>21</sup>	%/2002	%/2003	%/2004	%/2005	%/2006
Turkey should become an EU member	56.5	58.7	67.5	57.4	32.2
It does not matter whether Turkey becomes a member or not	14.6	19.7	12.5	18.2	33
Turkey should not become a member	17.9	9.1	8.7	10.3	25.6
No answer	11	12.5	11.3	14.1	9.3

Figure 4 - EU membership as a must?

<sup>19</sup> These chapters are free movement, finance, agriculture, fishery, transport, customs, foreign policy and services trade.

<sup>20</sup> A&G Arastirma, May-June 2007, available at <http://www.agarastirma.com.tr/ab.asp>, accessed on 08.07.2007

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

The main problem seems to be trust – or more likely the lack of it - towards the EU. Already in Turkey feelings of mistrust have been developed towards the western powers. Regardless of the political orientation of the parties and the people, reference to the First World War, the last years of the Ottoman Empire and the Independence War are observed throughout the years. One example where this reference reveals itself is the parliamentary debate:

History repeats itself. Elements, which shaped the international relations in the early 1900s, continue shaping international relations today... Europeans continue their old policies on Turkey, the Middle Eastern neighbours continue to stab us from behind and our European friends' attitude towards the smear campaigns against us are all very similar to the ones in the Ottoman era. We have to respond to these immediately as we did before in the 1920s.<sup>22</sup>

Europeans memorised some of the words, they keep using them. Violent Islam, special partnership, open your borders, close your borders, don't cough, don't walk, change your legislation, and so on. .... Very similar to the policies towards Ottoman Empire earlier, the minorities are again being used for their own agendas. Today, Armenians are being used by

the European "friends". Earlier French could not find any other group that would work for their imperialist aims. Therefore, they did not just arm the Armenians but also located them in administrative positions as well. They sent the Armenians to the regions from where the Brits were withdrawing... French owe the Armenians for all their losses in the First World War. Therefore, now they are passing legislation related to the so-called Armenian genocide.<sup>23</sup>

Government is aligning its own economic policies to the IMF and other international organisations. This is very similar to the policies of the Ottomans in the last years of their era.<sup>24</sup>

These days we see a trend in European countries to start a smear campaign towards Turkey. It is sad to see these friends supporting these campaigns...<sup>25</sup>

From 2003 up to 2006, there has been a considerable decrease in the support to the EU membership in the Republican People's Party (RPP), from 81.7 percent to 69.2 percent. In JDP, although the support decreased, it did not drop as dramatically as in the case of the RPP. As seen in Figure 9, JDP supports the membership but RPP and Nationalist Action Party are less keen on supporting the EU membership. The Democratic People Party's (DPP) support has been always high for European Union

<sup>22</sup> E. Yalcinbayir, MP from the JDP, 6th Meeting of the TGNA on 11.10.2006, TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, vol. 131, <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem22/yil5/bas/b006m.htm>, accessed on 14.12.2006.

<sup>23</sup> O. Öymen, MP from the RPP, 8th Meeting of the TGNA on 17.10.2006, TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, vol. 132, <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem22/yil5/bas/b008m.htm>, accessed on 14.12.2006.

<sup>24</sup> A. O. Güner, MP from the TPP, 64th Meeting of the TGNA on 13.02.2002, TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, vol. 86, <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem21/yil4/bas/b064m.htm>, accessed on 14.12.2006.

<sup>25</sup> 92nd Meeting of the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 23.04.2006, TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, vol. 117, <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem22/yil4/bas/b092m.htm>, accessed on 14.12.2006.



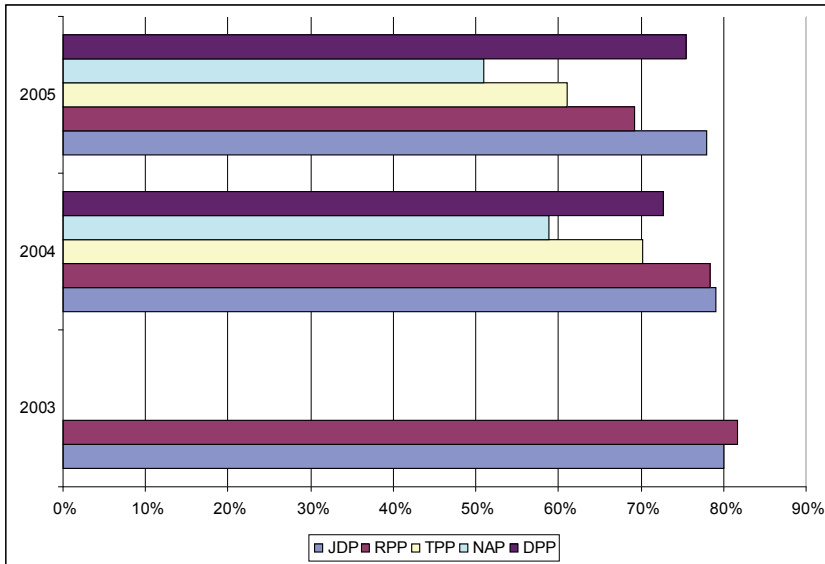


Figure 9 - Political parties and support for EU membership

Source: Pollmark Arastirma<sup>26</sup>

membership, due to the belief that the EU holds clout over improving Kurdish minority’s rights. Therefore, it can be noticed that the DPP is the only party showing an increase in the support for membership.

Among the people, various adages—such as “Only a Turk can be a friend of a Turk”—and jokes reveal the mistrust either consciously or subconsciously felt towards the European countries and the Union.<sup>27</sup> This can be also observed in the public opinion polls. From 2005 to 2006 there is a considerable decrease in the level of trust towards the EU. According to the same

study, gender and the education level make a difference in the trust issue. Men trust the EU more than women do (Figure 6) and as the education level increases the percentage of the people who do not trust the EU increases (Figure 7).

Do you trust the EU? <sup>28</sup>		
	%/2005	%/2006
Yes	17.5	7.2
No	61.4	78.1
No answer	21.1	14.7

Figure 5 - Trust

<sup>26</sup> Data is taken from Pollmark Arastirma, October 2003, November 2004, November 2005 Public opinion polls.

<sup>27</sup> There is a very common joke that deals with the problem of trust towards the EU in Turkey. There are three countries knocking at the EU door and only the ones which will give a correct answer to the question it was addressed will go in. The question for Romania is “When was the atomic bomb first used?” and the country responds correctly. The question for Bulgaria is “Where was it first used?” and Bulgaria gives the right answer. When it was Turkey’s turn, the question was “Can you list all the names of the people who died in Hiroshima, and also provide their addresses?”. This little joke speaks about the problem of trust between the two parties very clearly. When these kinds of feelings are backed by reports such as that written by Simon Serfaty in Policy Watch, they become even more evident.

<sup>28</sup> A&G Arastirma, May-June 2007, available at <http://www.agarastirma.com.tr/ab.asp>, accessed on 08.07.2007.

Do you trust the EU? <sup>29</sup>			
	% Men	% Women	% Total
Yes	8.2	6.3	7.2
No	74.9	81.1	78.1
No answer	16.9	12.6	14.7

Figure 6 - Gender differentiation in trust

same line, increased education level leads to less support for EU membership.

There have been several reasons why the public opinion polls showed a negative attitude towards the Union. As expected, in the candidate countries the transformation process and acceptance of the EU *acquis* are painful undertakings. The adaptation period takes more time and effort than changing the legislation

Do you trust the EU? <sup>30</sup>				
	% Primary School	% High School	% University	% Total
Yes	7.3	8.1	4.6	7.2
No	70.7	78.8	88.5	78.1
No answer	22	13.1	6.9	14.7

Figure 7 - Effect of education on trust

What do you think about Turkey EU membership process – With which of the following statements would you agree? <sup>31</sup>				
	% Primary School	% High School	% University	% Total
Turkey should become an EU member	24.7	35.8	34.5	32.2
It does not matter whether Turkey becomes a member or not	35.3	33.8	26.4	33
Turkey should not become a member	21.3	25	34.5	25.6
No answer	18.7	5.4	4.6	9.3

Figure 8 - Effect of education on seeing the EU as a must

In relation to the trust in the EU, public opinion shows that men, 29.9 percent, are less against the EU membership than women are, 36.2 per cent.<sup>32</sup> Also, in the

and harmonising it with the EU principles and rules. In the mean time, it is an expected outcome of this course of action to witness in the public opinion polls a drop in sympathy as regards the EU.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

The changes in the political and legal systems create a conflict of interests of the parties -public, civil society and economic actors- which in turn creates fluctuations in the support for the EU. Especially issues such as minority problems, terrorism, and religion which are sensitive and controversial create public debates centered on the EU and EU's demands. In the Turkish case, examples of these debates may be seen in the amendments required in the terrorism act, and minority rights, specifically the Kurdish minority.

Secondly, the changes in the legal system, especially the possibility that the EU could express comments on decisions given by the Turkish courts, represented divisive issues in Turkey. Turkish public began to realise that the EU is not only an economic union, but it also holds political and legal aspects. The realisation of this fact raised questions as regards sovereignty and independence. As observed in the demonstrations, people focused on these two phenomena which are seen against the existence of the republic.

The press is playing a more active role after the Helsinki Summit. The effect that intensive media coverage on EU topics and EU itself bears on the people cannot be underestimated. The news, covering political developments as well as statements by the EU member state leaders, focus on the public opinion polls in the EU and generate public debate in Turkey. The negative outcomes of the public opinion polls in the EU member states as regards Turkish accession highly influence the Turkish polls.

More essentially however, the Cyprus issue has had a crucial effect on the public in Turkey. As detailed

above, accession of the Republic of Cyprus, although it has been divided, created a very negative opinion in the Turkish public about the EU. Cyprus is seen as a national security matter, and issues related to national security, such as indivisibility, sovereignty and minority rights added to an already existing mistrust towards the European states and generated low public support for the Union.

All in all, it is believed that the trust issue is the leading problem in the relations of Turkey with the EU. In Turkey, a state which was founded after a war against the European states, the continued fear of "the other" and the subsequent references to the Ottoman Empire, World War I and the Independence War, lower public support as regards EU accession. It is believed therefore that public support may only be boosted with the establishment of trust between these two entities.

### Conclusion

Our investigation of public opinion in the EU and Turkey, respectively, confirms that two distinct discourses are taking place. The debate in Turkey is centred on rather different issues than those that preoccupy the public in the EU. When examining public opinion in Turkey, what was immediately obvious was the extent to which support for Turkish membership of the EU has drained away in the last few years. Whereas we saw that 76% of Turks supported membership in 2002, this figure had dropped to 57% in 2006 (Fig. 2). It is true to say that a similar decline has been seen in other EU candidate countries, as negotiations

get under way and public opinion tends to become more critical as the realities of membership begin to come into focus. However, in the Turkish case, this explanation is not sufficient, partly because cynicism about the *idea* of membership has begun to surface, and partly because the negotiations have not, in any case, progressed to a point where detailed implications of membership are popularly understood. Disillusionment with the idea of Turkey *needing* to be a member of the EU has increased: in 2002, 56 percent thought Turkey should be a member; in 2006 this had dropped to 32 percent. Likewise, those thinking that it 'does not matter' if Turkey joins the EU or not, rose from 15 percent in 2002 to 33 percent in 2006. This apathy towards EU membership makes life difficult for any government in Turkey wishing to pursue it. While it could be argued that apathy in Turkish public opinion strengthens the hand of Turkish negotiators, what seems more likely is that EU governments will exploit the apathy to their own advantage. It will certainly make it easier for governments in France or Germany to justify a lukewarm reciprocity in negotiations.

Our investigation of public opinion in the EU revealed a number of contrasting implications. Firstly, opinion generally has hardened against Turkish accession.

This can generally, if inaccurately, be attributed to separate, but connected, problems of 'enlargement fatigue' and 'absorption capacity'. Secondly, there is a wide gap in some EU member states between government policy and public opinion, on Turkish accession: Greece being a good example. Thirdly, there is also a wide divergence between levels of support for Turkey among the EU member states: we noted strong support for Turkish accession in Hungary and Britain; and strong opposition in Austria and France. This unevenness in support for Turkish accession is made more problematic by the variety of motivations that lie behind it. It is difficult to imagine the European Commission, for example, being able easily to construct a coherent 'information policy' on Turkish accession that would resonate comfortably with the publics of all the member-states. Fourthly, and most crucially, we have argued that in the EU, but not in Turkey, the debate is not about the merits or otherwise of Turkey *qua* Turkey. Instead the debate is about more fundamental questions relating to the future shape of the European Union. In a sense, Turkish accession is being used as a proxy to discuss problems internal to some member-states, as well as divergent visions of where the EU is going.

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