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# Turkish Accession to the European Union: Shaped by Perception or Reality?

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## **ABSTRACT**

Throughout the last fifty years, Turkish-EU relations have fluctuated between positive to completely suspended, though one factor has remained consistent: the European Union's hesitation to grant Turkey full membership. While some EU member countries justify barring Turkey from their ranks for a multitude of institutional, economic, and security reasons, similar issues have been overlooked in the past when accepting the membership bids of countries such as Spain, Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria. Why has Turkey in particular faced such sustained opposition from EU citizens? Is this opposition based on misinformed perceptions or an actual “clash” of cultures between the EU and Turkey? This project comparatively analyzes European public opinion and the “actual” cultural differences between Turkey and the EU, as measured by data from European Values Surveys, to conclude that EU citizens' skepticism of Turkish accession is perhaps not very misplaced after all.

## **KEYWORDS**

Turkey, enlargement, public opinion

## INTRODUCTION: THE RISE OF PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EU

Driven largely by Kemal Ataturk's vision of Western modernization for his country, Turkey first began "knocking" at Europe's door when it applied for associate membership to the European Economic Community in 1959. After nearly five decades and large scale political and economic reforms, Turkey finally began formal EU accession negotiations in October 2005. As José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, stated, at this point, it was now Turkey's responsibility to "win the hearts and minds of those European citizens who are open to, but not convinced of Turkey's European destiny" (Joseph, 2003, p. 4).

Since 2005, Turkey's accession negotiations have progressed slowly and are expected to last for at least a decade. As of September 2012, only 13 of the 33 *acquis communautaire* chapters have been opened for negotiation with Turkey. In accord with a 2006 EU Council decision, eight negotiation chapters will not be opened and no chapters will be provisionally closed until Turkey agrees to recognize the government of the Republic of Cyprus by extending the Additional Protocol of the Ankara Association Agreement to include it. The Greek Cypriot government, in response to Turkish refusal to recognize its government, has stated its intent to block the opening of another 6 chapters. In alignment with its generally hard-line position against Turkish accession, France has also declared that it will block negotiations for five chapters that directly relate to membership.

Furthermore, many news sources consider the EU Commission's 2012 progress report on Turkey to be "the harshest report" of the 14 released so far and it has been called "unbalanced" and too focused on "negative elements" by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs ("Turkey Cares Less," 2012; Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012). In it, the Commission criticized Turkey particularly on its respect for human rights, its attitudes towards the Republic of Cyprus, and the freedom of its media and political expression, expressing European frustrations with Turkey's rate of reform. The report's critical tone, especially when coupled with the EU's recent enlargements and the widespread public disapproval of Turkish accession, has led some scholars and politicians to accuse the EU of applying "double standards" and "discriminatory practices" to its accession negotiations with Turkey and to cite Samuel Huntington's famous "clash of civilizations" thesis as a means of explaining this behavior (Duzgit, 2006, p. 2; Huntington, 1993).

These accusations aside, what has undoubtedly characterized Turkey's accession process as unique has been the simultaneous development of another, particularly significant, phenomenon amongst EU member states: the rising call in both media and political discourses to remedy the EU's disconnect from the expectations and wants of the European public. Described by some scholars as the rise of populist backlash "rooted in the perception that 'the people' are being betrayed by the ruling elites" in Brussels, this movement seeks to close the gap between EU political elites and the European public, often through calls for direct public involvement in issues such as enlargement (Cuperus, 2009, p. 133; Volten, 2009; Yilmaz, 2009). Perhaps some of the most evident manifestations of this growing populist sentiment in the EU are the rise of both right- and left-wing populist political parties throughout EU member states and the French and Dutch publics' "No" votes on the 2006 Constitutional Treaty, which are often interpreted as examples of the public's reaction to "an increasingly elitist EU project" (Duzgit, 2007, p. 19).

In the wake of 2006's showing of frustration with EU elitism, France and Austria have led arguments against Turkish membership on the basis of public opinion. In October 2004,

French President Jacques Chirac introduced his wish for compulsory referenda in France for future EU enlargements. The issue was revisited in 2008 under the Sarkozy administration when it announced its intent to amend the French Constitution in a way that would require a referendum on EU enlargement if the candidate in question held a population greater than 5% of the EU's total population. While the French Senate ultimately rejected this amendment, during the 2008 legislative election campaign in Austria, coalition parties did agree to hold a national referendum should Turkey's accession negotiations be completed. This sentiment was echoed in 2011 by Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann, who stated that, "even in the case of a positive decision after negotiations...we will organise a referendum in Austria on this topic" ("Austria Mulls," 2011).

The looming threat of referenda in both France and Austria and the arguments that Brussels continues to make EU-wide decisions without the engagement of the European public has led to rising pressure on politicians to not ignore their citizens' wishes in regards to EU policy. In 2006, the European Commission added a new section to its enlargement section in its regular Eurobarometer surveys, "The question of Turkey," possibly in an attempt to better gauge and react to public opinion towards Turkey and its accession. With this introduction of public opinion as a more salient factor of consideration when evaluating enlargement policy, understanding the EU's attitude towards Turkish accession has become decidedly more complex. No longer exclusively an exercise of elite decision-making, the issue of Turkish enlargement is now influenced by EU citizens' perceptions and sentiments.

#### **UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EU**

As such, a comprehensive understanding of public opinion regarding Turkish EU membership and how it is formed is needed in order to understand the complexities of Turkey's accession. Data and analysis from various Eurobarometer reports will be employed to analyze European Union-wide opinion trends regarding Turkey's accession. Eurobarometer surveys are conducted in two waves per year and consist of approximately 1,000 face-to-face interviews of persons over fifteen years of age in each existing EU member state (this number varies from 503 interviewees in Cyprus to 1,526 in Germany). This paper's analysis will be limited to citizens in the current 27 EU member states, given that their opinions are the relevant ones in regards to future enlargement policy.

A survey conducted by the Center for European Studies of Boğaziçi University in Istanbul in partnership with the Autonomous University of Madrid and the University of Granada under the coordination of Professor Hakan Yilmaz is also used to provide information on trends in wider European attitudes towards Turkey. This survey, conducted in September 2009, samples 5000+ respondents from France, Germany, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom on the Turkish question in "manifold dimensions." Although it does not collect data from all EU-27 Member States, the five countries sampled present varying and conflicting outlooks on Turkey that are largely representative of the EU-wide debate on Turkey.

According to Eurobarometer opinion polls from 1992 to 2008, public support for Turkish accession is not only low, but it is also declining (See Appendix 1). The variable used to measure EU citizens' support for Turkish membership is the following question, presented in various Eurobarometer reports from 1992 to 2008: "For each of the following countries, would you be in favour or against it becoming part of the European Union in the future?" Respondents could respond with either "in favour," "against," or "don't know."

Support peaked in December 1992 with 41% of EU citizens backing Turkish membership, but it steadily dropped to just 31% by April 2008. From 2000 onwards, support for Turkish membership has remained relatively constant, if somewhat declining, varying between 28% to 35% of EU citizens. The share of contesters, on the other hand, has steadily risen from 47% in 2000 to 55% in 2008, suggesting that many “don’t know” respondents have switched to the opposition view over the last decade.

When comparing these attitudes towards Turkish membership with those towards other countries, it is clear that not only is support for Turkey’s membership relatively low but that it cannot be attributed to general “enlargement fatigue.” EU support for Icelandic, Swiss, and Norwegian membership at this same time (2008), for example, was very high, with 71%, 77%, and 78% of Europeans supporting the accession of these countries respectively. Even Balkan countries, such as Croatia (52%) and Macedonia (40%), and Ukraine (43%) enjoyed higher levels of support for membership than Turkey.

Of further note, 2008 support for Turkey’s membership was far from uniform between EU member states (See Appendix 2). Austria, the Republic of Cyprus, and Germany expressed the least amount of support for Turkish accession, with only 7%, 11% and 16% of their citizens backing the candidate member state respectively. Luxembourg, France, Greece, and Italy are also amongst Turkey’s least supportive critics. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain have the highest levels of support, with 61%, 49%, and 46% of their populations supporting Turkey’s membership bid.

While these Eurobarometer figures definitely show that EU citizens have weak and diminishing support for Turkey as future member state, it does not specifically depict how Europeans perceive Turkey, other than as incompatible with the EU. A more detailed set of questions about Turkey that first appeared on a Eurobarometer survey in 2006, however, provides greater insight into exactly how Europeans view Turkey. First seen in Eurobarometer 64.2 (fieldwork done in 2005), relevant questions that the EC posed to EU citizens included:

QA45. For each of the following please tell me whether you totally agree, tend to agree, tend to disagree or totally disagree:

- Turkey partly belongs to Europe by its geography
- Turkey Partly belongs to Europe by its history
- Turkey’s accession to the EU would strengthen the security in this region
- Turkey’s accession to the EU would favour the mutual comprehension of European and Muslim values
- The cultural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are too significant to allow for this accession
- Turkey’s accession would favour the rejuvenation of an ageing European population
- Turkey’s joining could risk favouring immigration to more developed countries in the EU
- To join the EU in about 10 years, Turkey will have to respect systematically Human Rights
- To join the EU in about 10 years, Turkey will have to significantly improve the state of its economy

In 2006, 54% of EU citizens agreed that Turkey partly belongs to Europe by its geography and only 40% agreed that Turkey belonged to Europe on the basis of its history. In 2007, these figures both rose to 56% and 41% respectively, showing that a majority of EU citizens support Turkey's place in Europe on a geographical basis but not based on its history. A minority of EU citizens believed that Turkey's accession to the EU would help improve security in this region in 2006 and 2007, with only 35% and 36% of citizens answering positively to this question. The consensus was also negative regarding the question of whether Turkey's accession would favor the comprehension of European and Muslim values, with only 38% and 37% of EU citizens answering believing this statement to be true in 2006 and 2007 respectively. In fact, a majority of EU citizens believe that the cultural difference between Turkey and the EU member states are too significant to allow for its accession. 55% of EU citizens expressed this belief in 2006 and this number increased to 61% by 2007. There was little division among EU member states in regards to the view that Turkey's accession would not be very important for the rejuvenation of the EU's population either, but a definite majority of EU citizens do believe that Turkey's accession would risk favoring immigration to more developed EU member states, with 63% and 66% of Europeans expressing this fear in 2006 and 2007 respectively. Finally, almost all EU citizens, 83% in 2006 and 85% in 2007, agree that Turkey will have to systematically improve its respect of human rights and significantly improve its economy, 76% in 2006 and 77% in 2007, before it can accede (European Commission, 2006, 2007).

These trends suggest that, broadly speaking, Europeans have trouble seeing Turkey as culturally compatible with the European Union. EU citizens do not believe that Turkish accession would have a positive effect on cultural understanding, widely believe that Turkey is actually too incompatible with the EU culturally to become a member, believe Turkey's history places it outside of Europe, and believe it does not meet the economic and human rights standards required of EU members.

In general, these perceptions of Turkey can be divided into three main levels of analysis: the post-modern evaluation of Turkey's ability to uphold the liberal democratic principles of the EU, the utilitarian analysis of Turkey's material costs and benefits to the EU, and the cultural interpretation of Turkey's "Europeanness." As Antonia Ruiz-Jimenez and Jose I. Torrealblanca summarize in their publication, "European Public Opinion and Turkey's Accession: Making Sense of Arguments For and Against" (2007), these three perspectives from which EU citizens generally interpret Turkish accession can be defined as "attitudinal dimensions."

From the post-national outlook, the EU is understood as supranational organization built upon the universal liberal-democratic values outlined in its founding treaty: "human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights... pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men" (Treaty on European Union, 1992). Thus, from this outlook, accession is evaluated on the assumption that enlargement should be determined by a candidate's adherence to these universal principles. In contrast, when evaluated with an instrumental outlook, materially measurable costs and benefits (i.e. economic, security, immigration, budgetary, institutional) of Turkish membership are rationally weighed in order to present whether Turkish accession would be beneficial or detrimental to the EU. Finally, from an identitarian outlook, the EU is understood as a defined community united by common values, culture, identity, and traditions. From this view, EU citizens' attitudes towards accession are shaped by the perceived cultural and identity compatibility between applicant states and the EU.

After categorizing each Eurobarometer 64.2 (2005) question regarding Turkey's accession by which of the three attitudinal dimensions to which it appeals, Ruiz-Jimenez and Torreblanca calculate the degree to which each attitudinal dimension influences the formation of EU citizens' perceptions of Turkey by using a statistically significant scale. With 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important, in the EU-25 the identitarian outlook appears to most strongly impact EU citizens' sentiment towards Turkish accession, with an average significance of 3.1. Utilitarian considerations are the next most influential on how Europeans form their judgments on Turkish membership with an average of 2.9, and the post-national outlook is the least significant, with a mean of 2.7 (Ruiz-Jimenez & Torreblanca, 2007, p. 10).

This data indicates that EU citizens' outlooks on Turkish membership are "more likely to be based on elements connected with culture, history and geography than with costs/benefits or universal principles such as democracy and human rights" (Ruiz-Jimenez & Torreblanca, 2007, p. 11). However, while issues about identity and culture are most strongly correlated to shaping public opinion about Turkish accession, it is a post-national understanding of the European Union as a community based on universal and democratic rights that is most strongly connected to generating support for Turkish accession. This helps explain why public support for Turkey's accession is so low: on average, the outlook most likely to inspire support for Turkish membership is the least-important attitudinal dimension in actually shaping Europeans' perceptions of Turkey's accession while the attitudinal dimension least likely to inspire support is the strongest.

This conclusion is also supported by survey results from the Civil Society Dialogue Between EU and Turkey University Grant Scheme taken in 2009. According to this survey conducted under Professor Hakan Yilmaz, 40% of survey respondents agree that mostly cultural factors influence their attitudes towards Turkey, while only 27% said economic and 26% said political factors influenced their attitudes towards Turkey. For those citizens who opposed Turkish membership, the influence of cultural factors was even greater, with 45.6% of respondents saying that cultural factors influenced their negative attitude towards Turkish accession (Yilmaz, 2009).

Yilmaz's survey also reveals that 38.9% of European respondents found the statement, "culturally speaking, Turkey is a Muslim country...not compatible with the common Christian roots," to be a compelling argument against Turkish accession. For those respondents opposed to Turkish membership, 51.5% found this argument the most influential. The fact that this question emphasizes the Muslim and Christian traditions of these two societies as culturally relevant suggests that 38.9% of Europeans identify Turkey as incompatible with the EU based on religious differences.

Unlike the Eurobarometer, which leaves "cultural differences" undefined, Yilmaz's survey also offers some insight into the factors that may shape European respondents' definition of "culture" by posing questions regarding respondents' opinions on Turks' family ties, respect for the elderly, individualism, respect for the rights of others, tolerance, rationality, peacefulness and reasonableness, cleanliness, and sexual freedom.. In general, respondents interestingly reported their belief that these elements are relatively similar in Turkish and European society.

While a third of respondents believe that Turks and Europeans have equally strong family ties, 46.5% reported the belief that Turkish society is more strongly characterized by strong family ties. In terms of peacefulness, reasonableness, and sexual freedom, however, most



survey respondents believe that Europeans more strongly exhibit these traits. On the other hand, most respondents perceive that Europeans and Turks equally exhibit individualism, respect of the rights of others and of the elderly, tolerance, rationality, and cleanliness. This is interesting because it suggests that when confronted with specific cultural characteristics, EU citizens largely do not identify Turkey as being radically different from their society. This indicates that EU citizens' relatively positive perceptions of specific cultural factors in Turkey are independent from the formation of their negative conceptions of Turkey's cultural compatibility with the EU, suggesting that perhaps many EU citizens do not consider specific societal characteristics when evaluating "cultural" compatibility between Turkey and the EU, but instead rely on a more abstract, and perhaps unquantifiable, conception of "culture."

The societal characteristics widely seen by Europeans as common to both societies also happen to be largely post-modern in orientation, incorporating universal liberal values such as tolerance and respect. Given that these types of factors have the least sway over peoples' perception of Turkey's accession process, this trend suggests that even though most respondents' view the two societies as compatibly manifesting these characteristics, it does not particularly sway their opinions towards Turkish membership and helps explain why so much opposition is still found across the EU.

Yilmaz also asks an interesting question regarding the values that respondents associate with "European Identity" on his survey. While this does not directly reveal how survey respondents regard Turkey, if these values represent European identity, many survey respondents may perceive Turkish society as incompatible with these values given that both this survey and Eurobarometer data show that EU citizens widely believe Turkey is incompatible with the EU due to its cultural identity. Of the values respondents associated with European identity, the four most cited were "Democracy and Human Rights" (43.3%), "economic development and social welfare" (42.2%), "tolerance for different points of view and ways of life" (21%), and "equality between men and women" (20.6%). Thus, a major factor driving opposition towards Turkish accession may be the perception that Turkey is largely incompatible with these fundamental values associated with European identity.

In summary, while all the data regarding EU citizens' perceptions of Turkey illustrates great variation amongst member states, it also illustrates some EU-level trends in public opinion. First, support for Turkish accession is low relative to other candidate countries and former candidate countries. This support has also largely been on the decline for the last decade. When more closely examined, European perceptions of Turkish accession appear to be most strongly shaped by cultural and identity-based factors and are the least influenced by post-modern considerations. Given that post-modern understandings of the EU and accession process are the most likely to generate support for Turkish membership, the widespread opposition to Turkey's membership bid is partially explained by the fact that this outlook is the least significant in shaping opinions towards Turkish accession overall. Yilmaz's survey results give some indication of what identity-based characteristics EU citizens perceive as particularly incompatible with Turkish society, such as Europe's greater levels of sexual freedom, peacefulness, reasonableness, its standards of democracy and human rights, economic development and social welfare, tolerance for different points of view and ways of life, and equality between men and women.

### **PERCEPTIONS OR REALITY?**

Given the growing significance of European public opinion in shaping EU policy and



that EU citizens' opinions about Turkey are largely based on how they perceive Turkey's culture and whether or not it is seen as being compatible with the EU's, "fundamental cultural differences" between Turkey and the EU are of "decisive importance," as former German Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, observed (Dixon, 2008, p. 682). However, do perceptions of cultural difference guarantee that differences actually exist between these two societies? Or are these perceptions rooted in misperceptions and stereotypes held by EU citizens about Turkish society? If EU perceptions of Turkey's culture are based on actual differences between Turkish and EU societies, Turkey may still have an opportunity to alter EU public opinion regarding its membership by reforming its society to align more closely with EU values or by changing how information about Turkey is conveyed to EU citizens. If EU perceptions of Turkish culture do not align with actual differences between the two societies but are shaped by intangible factors, then it is unclear how precisely Turkey can influence European public opinion regarding its accession.

In order to evaluate if the perceptions of EU citizens discussed above are founded in real differences between Turkish and European societies, Turkish and EU member states' aggregate responses to the 1999 and 2008 waves of the European Values Survey will be compared to illustrate differences in values held by each group of citizens. As a control for determining whether the values measured in Turkey and the EU are relatively similar or divergent, the values of EU member states with traditions of Orthodox Christianity will also be measured separately. These member states, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece, are specified by Huntington as being part of the "Orthodox" civilization, which is more like the "Western" civilization that the EU is largely comprised of than the "Islamic" civilization that Turkey straddles (Huntington, 1993, p. 30). This is simply one example of a control that could be used to better compare Turkish and EU data results, but one that is often cited by scholars and conveniently also questions Huntington's widely debated civilization thesis. Since these three Orthodox states have already successfully completed the accession process and are EU member states, the value differences exhibited between them and the whole EU must present a level of value differentiation that still allows for the degree of cultural compatibility needed to join the EU. Thus, if Turkey's values are relatively similar to those of the Orthodox citizens, it can be assumed that Turkey does not differ too drastically on these values to deny compatibility with the EU.

Drawing upon various scholars' definitions of "culture" (Yilmaz, 2008; Huntington, 1993; Weber, 1922; McLaren, 2007; Nugent, 2007) and the values outlined in the guiding principles of the Treaty on European Union, questions from the European Value Surveys (EVS) will investigate political values, religious values, tolerance values, and values regarding gender equality as outlined in Table 1.

For the sake of brevity, the results from this EVS analysis will be summarized and data will be confined to the Appendix section (see Appendixes 3-16).

Politically, Turkish citizens appear to evaluate democracy very similarly to those of the EU, particularly in an abstract context, but have a greater acceptance for authoritarian values. Given their strong degree of support for democracy, Turks' tendency to support authoritarian values may merely reflect a more conservative populace than the EU average or its history of military defense of secularism, suggesting that its affinity for authoritarian values may be insignificant. Furthermore, Turkey seems only relatively more authoritarian than Orthodox member states, also suggesting that its greater support for authoritarian values is not entirely incompatible with the EU. The similarities between Turkish and EU

values regarding democracy are particularly notable since, as evidenced by Yilmaz’s survey data above, “Democracy and Human Rights” is considered a fundamental value associated with European identity by 43.3% of European survey respondents, suggesting the similarity in these particular values is highly significant.

**Table 1. Question wording and span of value factors for EU member states and Turkey: European Values Survey (1999–2008)**

Value Factor		Question Wording
Political Values	Abstract evaluations of Democracy	Q: Could you please tell me if you agree strongly, agree, disagree, or disagree strongly? Democracies have many problems but it’s better than any other form of government.
		Q: Would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country? Having a democratic political system.
	Specific evaluations of Democracy	Q: Could you please tell me if you agree strongly, agree, disagree, or disagree strongly? Democracies aren’t good at maintaining order.
		Q: Could you please tell me if you agree strongly, agree, disagree, or disagree strongly? In democracy, the economic system runs badly
	Authoritarian Values	Q: Would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country? Having the army rule
		Q: Would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country? Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections.
Religious Values		Q: How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following? Politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office.
		Q: How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: Religious leaders should not influence government decisions.
		Q: Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?”
Tolerance		Q: On this list are various groups of people. Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbors. Immigrants/ foreign workers
		Q: On this list are various groups of people. Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbors. People of a different race.
Gender Relations		Q: For each of the following statements I read out, can you tell me how much you agree with each. Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person.
		Q: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement. When jobs are scarce, men have more right to a job than women.
		Q: For each of the following statements I read out, can you tell me how much you agree with each. A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children

In terms of religious values, there are a higher percent of citizens who are religiously active in Turkey, but a relatively similar proportion of citizens in both Turkish and EU society who are practically never religiously active. This suggests that, aggregately, religious values are more prevalent in the Turkish population than in that of the EU and that religion plays a greater role in everyday life in Turkey, similar to trends found in Orthodox society. This higher level of religiosity in Turkey supports the fact that Turkish citizens are also significantly more likely to consider belief in God as important in political leaders than EU citizens, suggesting a higher tolerance for indirect religious political rule. However, Turks and Europeans exhibited very similar levels of support for religious leaders influencing government decisions, suggesting relatively similar degrees of intolerance for religious political rule and desire for secularism in both societies. Overall, however, it appears that Turkey can be considered to maintain relatively more religious values than the EU, illustrating a fairly perceptible difference between the values held by each society.

Combined trends from EVS questions regarding tolerance suggest that Turkish citizens have less tolerant values towards minority groups than both EU and Orthodox citizens, an extremely significant cultural divide between the two societies given that the EU is community comprised of many different ethnic groups, supports free internal immigration, and specifically outlines “tolerance” as a founding principle of the Union in the TEU. Furthermore, as reported in Yilmaz’s survey, “tolerance for different points of view and ways of life” is a value that 21% of surveyed Europeans associate with European identity, suggesting that the divergence in this value has particular weight.

In regards to gender relations, Turkish citizens appear more likely to believe that a woman’s place in society is in a maternal capacity or the home (they also believe that women prefer this) while EU and Orthodox citizens see women as warranting greater independence and preferring the workplace. The size of the divergence between Turkish and both EU and Orthodox citizens’ gender relation values is drastic, illustrating a true divide in the opinions about gender relations between these two societies. As demonstrated earlier by Yilmaz’s survey data, Turkey’s more “traditional” view of women is particularly notable since “equality between men and women” is often considered a defining feature of European identity.

### **EXAGGERATED DIFFERENCES: THE RESULTS OF A POPULIST MOVEMENT?**

Analysis of EVS 1999 and 2008 wave data indicates that Turkish and EU citizens have very similar values regarding democracy, in both an abstract and specific context. However, Turkish citizens express more authoritarian and religious values than EU citizens and are less likely to express tolerance towards minority groups or value gender equality. This suggests that actual cultural differences do exist between Turkey and the EU, most certainly in regards to tolerance and gender relations and to a lesser extent in regards to religion’s influence on government. On the other hand, Turkey and the EU appear perfectly compatible in regards to their views towards democracy. How does this compare to EU citizens’ perceptions of Turkey?

EU citizens seem clearly aware of the divergence between their own and Turkey’s views towards tolerance and gender relations. EU citizens’ unanimously agree that Turkey must improve its respect for human rights before its accession can be accepted and are relatively skeptical about whether Turkey’s citizens value tolerance to the same extent as they do. This perception is evident in the rhetoric found across the EU concerning Turkish treatment of the Kurds and fears about Turkey’s (and Islam’s) repression of women.

EU citizens also seem to perceive that Turkish citizens possess more authoritarian and stronger religious values than Europeans, but perhaps to a greater extent than is true. Authoritarianism, which indicates a willingness to sacrifice personal freedom and individualism for order and obedience, is measured by peoples' support for despotic means of governance in this study. Turks are admittedly far more supportive of military rule than Europeans, but also have a unique history in regards to military rule, which suggests this may not be illustrative of just authoritarianism in Turkish society. This is particularly true given that Turkish support for a strong leader who doesn't have to deal with parliament is at the same levels found in Orthodox EU member states, indicating that their authoritarian values may not be so far from those found in the EU. 39.5% of EU citizens, however, perceive that Europeans are more individualistic than Turks, while only 7.6% of Europeans see Turks as being more individualistic than Europeans (Yilmaz, 2009). This perception that Turks are more authoritarian than EU citizens is perhaps a bit exaggerated, given that Turkey is no more authoritarian than several of existing EU member states.

Furthermore, as illustrated, 38.9% of Yilmaz's EU survey respondents expressed the perception that Turkey's Muslim values make it incompatible with the "common Christian roots" of the EU (Yilmaz, 2009). This suggests that not only do 38.9% of European citizens perceive their Christian roots as powerful enough to culturally define the EU, but that Turkey's identity as a "Muslim country" is a leading factor in its incompatibility with the EU. In reality, a third of EU citizens report that they never attend religious services, only 20% of Europeans attend religious services at least once a week or more, and citizens across the EU unanimously support secular governance, suggesting that religiosity is not a significantly important factor in most Europeans' lives or identities. Furthermore, while Turkey is indeed 99.8% Muslim, 27% of Turks report being religiously inactive (only 5% fewer than in the EU) and Turks also show a strong commitment to secular governance (EVS, 2008). This suggests that Turkey's religiosity is not completely incompatible with that of the EU, given that both support secular societies and the EU is grounded upon the separation of church and state and religious freedom.

Doubts about Turkey's compatibility with the democratic values of the EU are perhaps the most flawed perceptions that EU citizens possess about Turkish culture. Turkish citizens express relatively equal, at times greater, support for democratic values relative to EU citizens. As seen in data from Yilmaz's survey, 43.3% of Europeans associate "Democracy and Human Rights" with European identity, the most cited value given. Since EU citizens also consistently reject Turkey's compatibility with EU identity, identity considerations being least strongly correlated with EU support for Turkish accession, many EU citizens must see Turkey as being incompatible with European views on "Democracy and Human Rights" since this value is so strongly associated with EU identity. As evidenced by the strong Turkish support for democratic values, this perception is clearly misguided.

Ultimately, EU citizens appear perhaps slightly overly pessimistic about the cultural incompatibility of Turkey and the EU. While Europeans' perceptions of Turkey as significantly less tolerant than EU society would allow are relatively accurate, EU citizens appear to often overstate the differences between EU and Turkish levels of authoritarianism and religiosity and entirely misunderstand Turkish citizens' commitment to democratic values.

Much of the gap between Europeans' perceptions of Turkey and the realities of Turkish society can likely be explained by EU citizens' lack of knowledge about Turkish culture and the persuasive and culturally based arguments employed by a growing number of populist-

like, extremist political parties across Europe.

According to Yilmaz's survey, 50% of European respondents report being "not informed" in regards to their subjective information level about Turkey (2009) and a 2006 Eurobarometer report measured that 68% of EU citizens do not feel well informed about economic ramifications of enlargement (European Commission, 2006). This self-reported lack of knowledge about Turkey is an obvious indicator that many of the perceptions held by EU citizens in regards to Turkish accession may be founded on lack of understanding.

In addition to this general lack of knowledge about the Turkish accession process and Turkish society in general, EU citizens' sources of information suggest that Europeans are not being exposed to a balanced and informed debate about the merits and drawbacks of Turkish accession. 71.3% of EU citizens report getting information about Turkish accession via "news and commentaries on the television and radio" and 55.9% report "news commentaries in the newspapers and magazines" (Yilmaz, 2009). This means that a large portion of Europeans get their information about Turkish accession from the European media, which "on the whole tends to paint a rather negative image of Turkey" (Tocci, 2008, p. 267). At its worst, driven by commercial logic, the European media largely reports "stereotypes, sensationalism, and alarmism" in regards to Turkey in an attempt to sell their products (Tocci 2008, p. 267). Less dramatically, media from across the EU tends towards the "culturalizing" of political issues regarding Turkey and report about Turkey's EU accession in the context of Islam, "focusing on tragic incidents or crises, and linking these back to the depiction of Turkey as the unknown 'other' and its inability to conform to 'European standards of civilization'" (Tocci, 2008, p. 268).

This tendency of the European media to appeal to stereotypes and cultural focuses when reporting about Turkey is particularly influential in shaping EU citizens' support for Turkey's membership bid given that identity-based arguments are the most likely to influence public opinion regarding Turkish accession, and the least likely to inspire support. This means that the cultural and sensational information frequently disseminated to a large proportion of EU citizens is more likely to impact their views on Turkey than, for example, scholarly articles which present post-national and instrumental arguments for or against Turkish accession.

Identity-based arguments that strongly impact EU citizens' opinions towards Turkey are also employed by a growing number of far-right, populist-like political parties across the EU. Far-right parties in every member state examined tend to resolutely oppose Turkish accession, generally on the grounds of religious and cultural differences. Subsequently, anti-Turkey political rhetoric can be found across the EU, from extreme parties such as the Lega Nord in Italy, the FPÖ in Austria, the Dansk Folkeparti in Denmark, the Mouvement pour la France, the Law & Justice in Poland, and LAOS in Greece (Tocci, 2008, p. 266). Given that 30.7% of EU citizens report getting information about Turkey from their political leaders, the identity and culturally based arguments coming from these radical parties find a relatively significant audience and are particularly effective in fueling opposition towards Turkish accession given the salient nature of culturally and identity-based arguments (Yilmaz, 2009).

## **CONCLUSION**

Across Europe, growing disenchantment with the elite driven decision-making process of the European Union has led to calls for the engagement of the EU public. Populist-like parties have sprung up across EU member states and greater attention is beginning to be

paid to public opinion on issues like EU enlargement. In tandem with this growing attention to mass opinion, Turkey's bid for EU membership has seen low and declining support from European citizens. Perceived as culturally incompatible with Europe, Turkey has been labeled an outsider by many EU citizens, suggesting that Huntington's predicted "clash of civilizations" could in fact be true.

However, when the values held by Europeans and Turks are analyzed through European Values Surveys, it is clear that a highly disruptive cultural divide between the two societies does not exist across the board, but that certain cultural differences have been dramatized and have led to the common misperception that Turkey's cultural values are irreconcilable with European civilization. This widespread misperception can be easily traced to the general lack of knowledge that EU citizens seem to have about Turkish society and the EU enlargement process. Identity-based rhetoric from far-right political parties across Europe and the "culturalizing" of news from European media sources further distort EU citizens' understanding of Turkish society and its accession process.

The more the debate on Turkish accession is driven by these identity-based arguments, the more likely it is that European public support for Turkey's EU membership will decline. As long as right-wing parties control the debate over Turkish accession and European media presents biased reports of Turkey, EU citizens will likely remain misinformed about and negative towards Turkey. In order for Turkey's EU membership to gain citizen support in the EU, accurate information about Turkey must be circulated and a balanced debate over Turkish accession must be facilitated, where post-nationalist and instrumental arguments are discussed and not overshadowed by identity and cultural concerns.

#### **AUTHOR'S NOTES**

This paper represents an abridged discussion of a larger research thesis I completed under the guidance of Professor Laura Henry at Bowdoin College: "Turkey and the European Union: A Clash of Misconceptions?"

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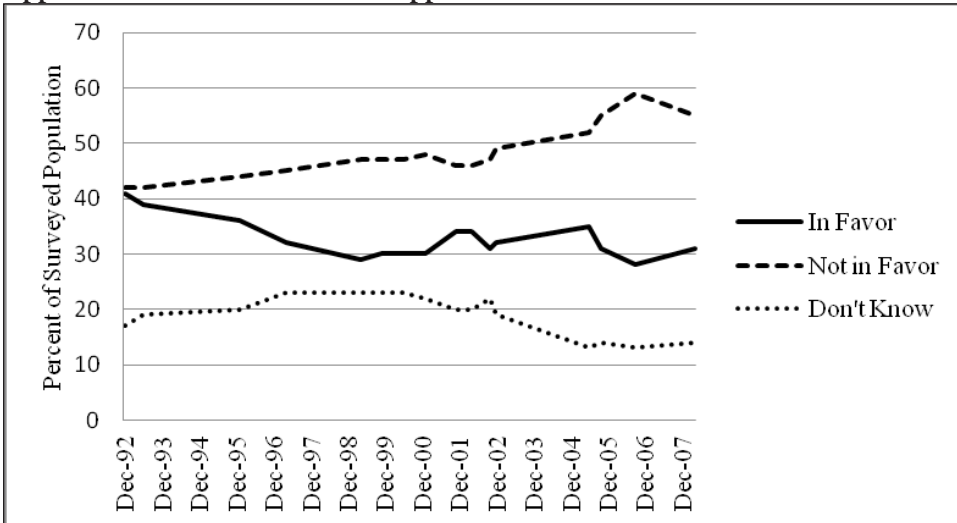
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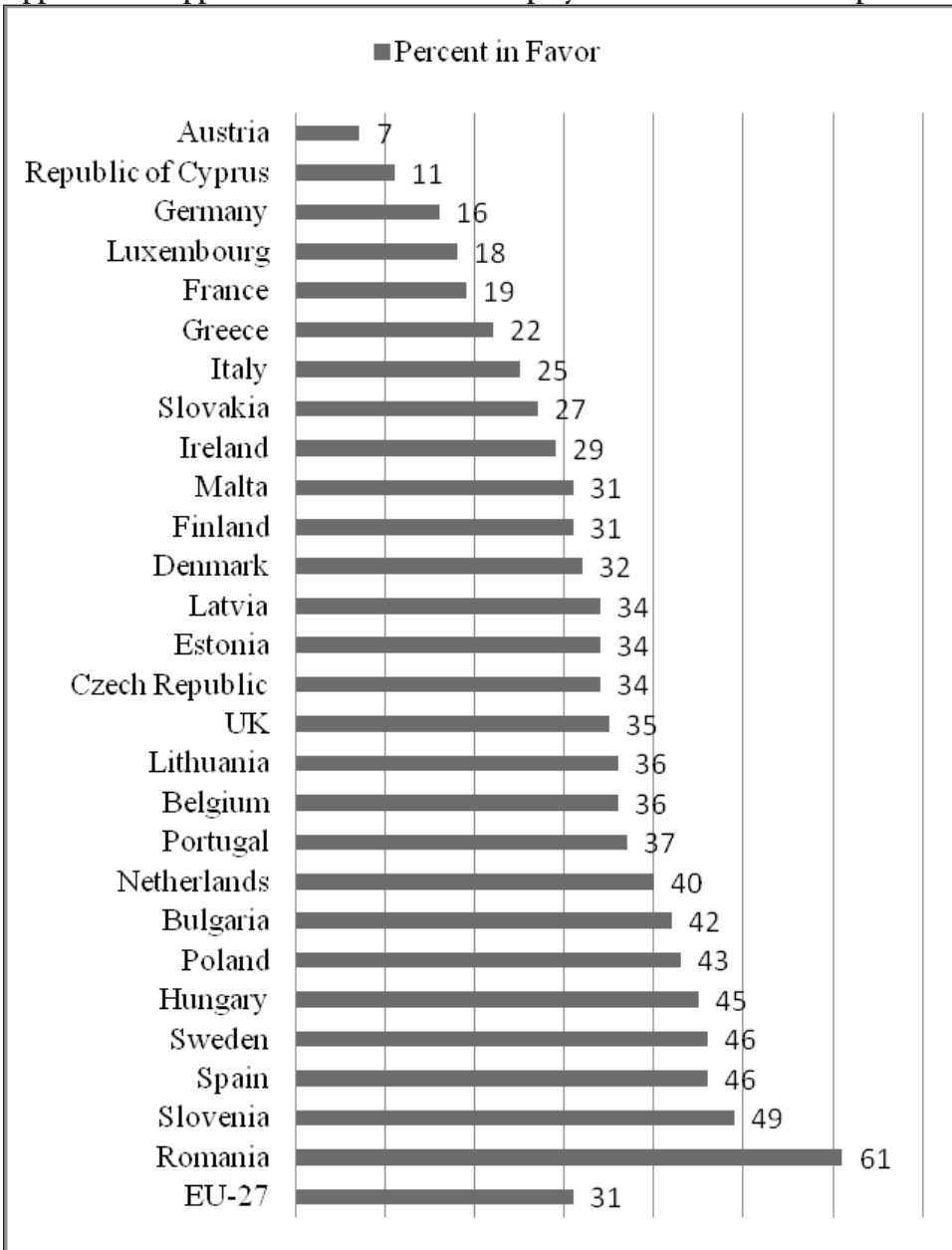
**APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1. EU Member State Support for Turkish Accession**



Data source: European Commission. "Eurobarometer 37-70." *Standard Eurobarometer (1992-2008)*. [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb\\_arch\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_arch_en.htm)

## Appendix 2. Support for Turkish Membership by EU Member State in April 2008



Data source: European Commission. "Eurobarometer 69." *Standard Eurobarometer* (2008). [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb\\_arch\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_arch_en.htm)

**Appendix 3. Percentage of EU citizens who mentioned that they wouldn't like to have "people of a different race" for neighbors.**

	1999	2008
EU	9.3	13.3
Turkey	33.9	42.7
Orthodox	21.8	17.4

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.

**Appendix 4. Percentage of EU citizens who mentioned that they wouldn't like to have "immigrants/foreign workers" for neighbors.**

	1999	2008
EU	9.8	17.1
Turkey	45.4	48.7
Orthodox	19.4	18.1

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.

**Appendix 5. Percentage of EU citizens who sees "having a strong leader who doesn't have to deal with parliament or elections" as "very good" or "fairly good."**

	1999	2008
EU	24.6	30.5
Turkey	66.1	61.6
Orthodox	40.1	60.9

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.

**Appendix 6. Percentage of EU citizens who sees "having the army rule the country" as "very good" or "fairly good."**

	1999	2008
EU	5.1	7.9
Turkey	24.7	33.2
Orthodox	16.3	14.2

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.

**Appendix 7. Percentage of EU citizens who sees "having a democratic political system" as "very good" or "fairly good."**

	1999	2008
EU	93.2	89.3
Turkey	91.7	90.1
Orthodox	91.2	91.2

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.

**Appendix 8. Percentage of EU citizens who “agrees strongly” or “agrees” that “democracy may have problems but it’s better than any other form of government.”**

	1999	2008
EU	93.2	91.5
Turkey	87.9	92.9
Orthodox	86.4	88.9

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.

**Appendix 9. Percentage of EU citizens who “agrees strongly” or “agrees” that “Democracies aren’t good at maintaining order.”**

	1999	2008
EU	25.3	33.3
Turkey	32.7	38.3
Orthodox	39.0	46.5

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.

**Appendix 10. Percentage of EU citizens who “agrees strongly” or “agrees” that “Economic systems run badly in democracies.”**

	1999	2008
EU	24.8	33.6
Turkey	30.1	35.6
Orthodox	45.2	51.0

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.

**Appendix 11. Percentage of EU citizens who “agrees strongly” or “agrees” that “Politicians who don’t believe in God are unfit for office.”**

	1999	2008
EU	12.1	18.2
Turkey	62.3	66.2
Orthodox	38.1	40.3

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.

**Appendix 12. Percentage of EU citizens who “agrees strongly” or “agrees” that “Religious leaders should not influence government decisions.”**

	1999	2008
EU	70.4	64.2
Turkey	72.3	63.4
Orthodox	72.6	68.3

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.

**Appendix 13. Percentage of EU citizens who “agree” that “When jobs are scarce, men have more right to a job than women.”**

	1999	2008
EU	19.3	18.8
Turkey	61.8	60.0
Orthodox	31.5	27.8

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.

**Appendix 14. Percentage of EU citizens who attend religious services “never, practically never.”**

	1999	2008
EU	32.7	31.6
Turkey	32.3	27.1
Orthodox	12.7	11.7

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.

**Appendix 15. Percentage of EU citizens who attend religious services “more than once a week” or “once a week.”**

	1999	2008
EU	20.2	19.9
Turkey	39.1	34.1
Orthodox	16.1	19.0

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.

**Appendix 16. Percentage of citizens polled who “Agree strongly” or “Agree” that “A job is alright, but what most women really want is a home and children.”**

	2008
EU	57.9
Turkey	89.1
Orthodox	77.4

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.

**Appendix 17. Percentage of citizens polled who “Agree strongly” or “Agree” that “Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person.”**

	2008
EU	80.6
Turkey	71.8
Orthodox	86.8

Source: European Values Surveys 1999–2008.