An Analysis of European Identity within the Framework of the EU: The Case of Turkey’s Membership

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Abstract: Europe and European identity have been defined on different basis in different periods of history. Contemporarily European identity has been in an ongoing construction process within the EU. Especially with the end of the Cold War the importance of identity politics has increased. Discussion on the question of Turkey’s membership in terms of European identity has been effective on construction of European identity within the EU.

Key Words: European identity, civic identity, cultural identity, the “other”, stereotype.

1. The Concept of “Identity”

Identity is the way to define yourself and to differentiate yourself from the others. It is not static and it can be defined in different ways in different circumstances. Identity can not be constructed immediately, it has always been in an evolution process. During the construction of identity how it is defined by the “other”s is also important.

“Collective identity” means the attitudes, which all members of that group have in common in their thoughts and behaviour, which differentiates them from the “other”s.1 “…Identification implies belonging or membership, in turn which implies the exclusion of non-members.”2 “Every we-group implies the existence of the ‘other’s and it is based upon the distinction between ‘us’ and the ‘other’s.”3

A sense of collective European identity is accompanied by the need to differentiate “Europeans” from “outsiders”, such as communism during the Cold War, Islamic fundamentalism or Anglo-American laissez-faire capitalism.4 Contemporarily boundaries between “us” and “them” are drawn between natives and immigrants from outside Europe. Non-European foreigners were increasingly ethnicized and made “more foreign”. But if the internal exclusion of particular social groups will not be overcome, European society will have difficulty in evolving towards a post-national entity. The promotion of exclusivist

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European identity will in the long-term strengthen local nationalistic and xenophobic movements, instead of increasing a common sense of “Europeanness”.

The political identities can be defined on two main bases: a “civic” one and a “cultural” one. The “cultural” understanding refers to the sense of belonging of an individual citizen towards a particular group. The “civic” understanding refers to the identification of citizens with a political structure, which is composed of a set of institutions, rights and rules. So European identity in terms of cultural identity implies a reference to Europe as a continent or a civilization, on the other hand, in terms of “civic” identity European identity implies a reference to the EU.

2. The Definitions of “Europe” and “European Identity” in Different Periods of History

In different times of history, the concept of “Europe” has been defined on different basis. In the Middle Ages, Christianity was the main defining characteristic of European identity. In modern times after secularism and emergence of nation-state, Christianity lost its primacy. But it is still one of the important components of European identity. So, in cultural and linguistic terms, diversity is the main characteristic in Europe. In spite of some common legal traditions, religious and cultural heritages including Roman law, political democracy, parliamentary institutions, Renaissance humanism, rationalism, romanticism, there are socio-economic, cultural, national and ethnic differences among different parts of Europe such as between Northern, Southern, Western and Eastern Europe, even within the member states of the EU. This reality is reflected in the motto of the EU which is “unity in diversity”. Moreover, immigrants highly increase cultural diversity of Europe. One of the main questions that should be answered during construction process of European identity is that: Are they seen as a contribution to European identity or do they constitute the “other” of European identity?

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The boundaries of Europe have not been fixed during history. Europe is characterized by overlapping and unclear boundaries. The EU has also fuzzy boundaries, because of the ongoing enlargement processes since the 1970’s. Although the geographical borders of Europe are not objectively defined particularly in the east, it is obvious that a state without a territory in the European continent can not join the EU, even if it shares the EU’s values and norms. So, one of the limits to the openness of the European international community is the geographical content of European identity. For example, Morocco’s application in the 1980’s to the EC was declined because of this.

International organizations which carry “Europe” in their name also show that, there are no clear cut boundaries of Europe. Moreover boundaries of the EU may change according to different policy fields. For example “Schengenland” includes Norway but not the EU member the UK. This lack of clear geographical boundaries weakens efforts of the EU to be seen as a real entity by the public.

3. “European Identity” within the EU

The process of European unification was initiated by top political elites of the founding member states. In this respect, the EU may be seen as a “European elite project”. The founding fathers of the EU had the intention of establishing an “ever closer union of peoples”, which was also stated in the preamble of the Treaty of Rome.

According to Bruter, European integration has been evolved from “…an international cooperation project in the 1950’s, to a policy making project in the 1960’s, an institutionally consolidated system in the 1970’s and a system trying to foster its own identity and

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citizenship in the 1980’s and 1990’s.”

The first phase began after the end of the 2nd World War. It was a phase of Europeanisation, which was based on international cooperation that was established to build peace in Europe and avoid the resurgence of the old, bloody nationalisms. The second phase started with the signature of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. It was a phase of technical integration, when new policy areas have been progressively evolved to a new European level of government. The third phase began with the first enlargement of the EC in 1973 and the first important institutional reforms of the EC. It can be described as a period of development of the “institutional legitimacy” of the EC institutions. Since the beginning of the 1970’s the institutions of the EC started to have an increasing importance in the life of citizens and member states that, the legitimacy of these institutions started to be questioned. The last phase began with the Presidency of Jacques Delors as the head of the Commission in 1985. In this period the EU institutions started to support the emergence of a “People’s Europe.”

There is still a huge gap between the growing but still small number of intellectuals, politicians, civil servants, some academics, who are committed pro-Europeans and the public opinion of the member states. It has not been overcome till the beginning of the EC, which has been one of the main obstacles of the ongoing integration process. It can be observed in different cases especially at the ratification of treaties by referendums and percentage of participation to the EP elections. Overall turnout for the EP elections has declined gradually but steadily, since direct elections has been introduced in 1979.

Identification with the EU is mostly conditional upon the benefits. Unlike national identification, identification with the EU is unlikely to survive, if there are major policy failures. If the EU is unsuccessful in its institutional project, it is likely that the formation of a stronger common European identity will fail as well.

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16 Bretherton, Vogler ,p.225.
17 Ibid., p.228.
The economic benefits of market liberalization have been unequally distributed, so across the EU, uneducated and long-term unemployed people perceive European integration as a threat rather than an opportunity.\textsuperscript{19} It is much harder for them to identify with the EU. It is obvious that, only emphasis on the material benefits of integration will not guarantee continued commitment of European people to the process. Because, political communities are based not only on material benefits, but also on sentiment, loyalty and solidarity. If a political community is wanted to be established within the EU, these kind of emotional elements also have to be used.\textsuperscript{20}

The absence of a lingua franca and also common curriculum make the emergence of common way of thinking and common attitudes more difficult.\textsuperscript{21} Contemporarily the EU has twenty official languages. English has been developing as a de facto lingua franca in Europe. But there has been strong resistance especially from France and also increasingly from Germany.\textsuperscript{22}

The EC has made conscious efforts to encourage the emergence of a sense of common identity among its populations. EC documents emphasized on a shared heritage and a history. The approach to heritage and history emphasizes commonalities instead of uniformity or homogeneity. So the EU efforts to promote the development of a European cultural identity, does not mean imposition of clearly defined, monolithic notion of “Europeanness”. \textsuperscript{23} The development of a European identity within the EU will probably be the outcome of a long process in which both bottom-up as well as top-down initiatives will have to be used simultaneously.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{19} Bretherton, Vogler, p. 229.
\textsuperscript{21} Llobera, pp. 188-189.
\textsuperscript{24} Llobera, p.184.
The Declaration on European Identity was signed in 1973 in Copenhagen by nine member states. It referred to the “diversity of cultures” and to a “common heritage”. It also emphasizes the rule of law, representative democracy, social justice and respect for human rights as “fundamental elements of European identity”. The “Tindemans Report” of 1975 recommended a specific policy for transforming the “technocrats Europe” into a “People’s Europe” through “concrete manifestations of solidarity in everyday life.” Since 1977 the Commission with the support of the EP has developed a cultural policy, which aims to promote an awareness of a European cultural identity. This was given formal recognition by the Heads of State or Government at the Stuttgart and Milan European Councils in 1983 and 1985. In 1983 the “Solemn Declaration on European Union” was signed by the EC heads of government in Stuttgart, which invited member states to “promote European awareness and to undertake joint action in different cultural areas.” Moreover the “People’s Europe” department of the Commission hired a professional public relations company to analyse “motivational dynamics relating to Europeanization”. So marketing approaches have been also used “with the aim of selling Europe to the public as a brand product.”

Especially in the second half of the 1980’s the European integration process was under the joint push of Jacques Delors, who was the President of the Commission from 1985 to 1994, also Helmut Kohl and François Mitterand shifted towards the construction of a “People’s Europe”. The decision was taken at Fontainebleau Summit in 1984 to appoint an ad hoc “Committee for a People’s Europe” (Adonnino Committee), whose task was to support European cultural integration by promoting EC’s identity and its image both for its citizens and for the rest of the world. The Adonnino Report of 1985 includes proposals for Europe-wide audio-visual area with a European multilingual TV channel, a European Academy of Science to highlight the achievements of European science and the originality of European civilization in terms of wealth and diversity, a Euro-lottery whose prize money would be

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31 Bruter, p.84.
awarded in ECU. In addition to these, this report proposed the formation of European sports teams, school exchange programmes and introduction of a stronger European dimension in education etc. In addition to these, creation of European postage stamps was suggested on which there are portraits of EC pioneers such as Monnet and Schuman. It was stated that, they may be beneficial in the invention of Community history. This Committee also supported the adoption of initiatives, which included an EC passport, EC driving license, EC emergency health card, EC border signs, EC flag and the financing of an EC TV channel to promote “the European message”. Most of these proposals have been realised during European integration process within the EU.

Since Delors presidency of the Commission and in particular since the Single European Act (SEA) in 1987, the EU has started to express openly its belief “in the influence of European experience on the development of a European identity.” Especially emphasis on programmes towards the youth shows that, the EU institutions think that, the emergence of a European identity will occur through the emergence of a new “European culture” among young generations, who did not experience a time of war. In the Maastricht Treaty, a “common cultural heritage” was mentioned, but there was not any attempt to define a “European identity”.

According to Shore, what is needed is “the creation of a ‘European consciousness’ that will transcend national divisions” and mobilize the European citizens towards “a new image of themselves as ‘Europeans’ rather than nationals.” This view was also stated in some EU reports, which called for more active policies in culture, including the arts and media, information, education, tourism, sport and heritage. In 2001, the Commission issued a White

32 Ibid., pp.44-48.
34 Brutner, p.32.
35 Delanty, p.350.
36 Shore, “Transcending the Nation-State?: The European Commission and the (Re)-Discovery of Europe”, p.476.
Paper on European Governance, which emphasized the reinforcement of “European identity and the importance of shared values within the Union.”

On the other hand, national identities are still dominant in Europe. The main distinguishing characteristics of the EU from the nation-state are the absence of a shared language, a uniform media, common education system and a central state structure. Surveys show that, people in Europe prefers maintaining their national identity and sovereignty, but increasing number of people have European identity in addition to their national identities.

With the evolution of the EU from primarily an economic organization to a political union especially after the Maastricht Treaty, the discussions about European identity have been accelerated. It is argued that, European integration process reached its limits and for further integration, there is a need for the construction of a European identity. Especially with the enlargement process towards the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), answering the questions of “where are the end points of Europe?” and “who is European?” became much more complicated. The Treaty of Rome states that “any European country is eligible for membership to the EC” but it did not specify what “European” means. Especially the membership of Turkey is one of the most complicated questions in this process. The redefinition of Europe and European identity within the ongoing integration and enlargement process of the EU becomes much more important to understand, who will be included or excluded from the integration process of the EU in the near future.

With the end of bloc politics, there has been a growing concern in identity politics in the post Cold War era. During the accession process of the CEE countries to the EU, they used the rhetoric of “returning to Europe”, which refers to the idea that “each belongs to a pan-European cultural community.” Even a distinction between Central Europe and Eastern Europe was constructed in the post Cold War era to accelerate the candidacy of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. These show that, although these countries were still in their

39 Shore, Building Europe: The Cultural Politics of European Integration, p.64.
40 Llobera, p.179.
41 Bretherton, Vogler, pp.241-244.
same geographic location, with the effect of different circumstances their identities can be reconstructed.

European identity has been still in a construction process during the ongoing integration process within the EU. The EU may construct a forward-looking identity based on shared commitments to termination of conflict and continued democratization of the European continent. So the main emphasis of the EU should be the common prosperous future. Because, the past of Europe was full of divisions and conflicts among different nations of Europe.

The enlargement processes since the 1970’s have affected on construction process of European identity within the EU. Especially the introduction of eligibility criteria (Copenhagen criteria) leads to a delineation of political and cultural boundaries between the excluded and the included, which provides the definition of collective identity of the EU. Moreover the difficulty in obtaining access to that community increases its perceived value among the outsiders. The admission criteria of the EU affect not only candidate country’s identity, but also the definition of the EU itself.

4. The Effects of European Identity on Relations between Turkey and the EU

There has been a widespread stereotype of Islam and Turks in Europe which can be traced back to the Crusades and the long struggle with the Ottoman Empire. Although Turkey has a secular system, democratic regime and it respects the values of the EU; these stereotypes about Turkey have negatively affected Turkey’s relations with the EU. Turkey’s predominantly Muslim population and the integration problems of Turkish immigrants especially in some of the EU member states such as Germany and Austria are some of the main arguments of the people, who are against Turkey’s membership.

Turkey and Europe have been in an interaction process and have mutually affected construction process of each other’s identity for a very long time. The construction of modern

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43 Bretherton, Vogler, The EU as a Global Actor, pp.236-238.
Turkish identity has been affected by Europe especially till the Reformation period in the 19th century. So in the last two hundred years Turkey has tried to construct its identity in an interaction with Europe. Turkish and European identities are mutually “constructive others” of each other. In the late Ottoman era, Westernization was used in order to cope with the decline of the state. Europe was seen as a threat but in order to cope with this threat, Ottoman state preferred to adopt the technology and values of Europe. Especially after the establishment of Turkish Republic in 1923, European values were try to be adopted by Turkish political and legal systems; even they were tried to be adopted to daily lives of Turkish society, but some of them could not be internalized.

After each enlargement, the EU has to accommodate itself. The most challenging one till now was the last enlargement in May 2004 with the accession of ten CEE countries, Cyprus and Malta. But Turkey’s membership will be the much more challenging one. Turkey has been discriminated from the CEE countries, Cyprus and Malta in terms of its culture and identity, which can be observed especially at the Luxembourg Summit in 1997. The membership of Turkey to the EU and her Europeannes have been sometimes questioned in terms of her geographical location and culture. But nobody questioned the “Europeanness” of the last ten new member states from the CEE, which were seen as part of the “other” of Europe during the Cold War.

In the case of Turkey’s membership, identity politics can be observed especially since the official candidate status was given to Turkey at the Helsinki Summit in 1999. In recent years, after Turkey has mostly fulfilled the Copenhagen economic and political criteria, opponents to Turkey’s membership have started to base their arguments on cultural identity with regard to Turkey. According to former French President Valery Giscard d’Estaing, “the capital of Turkey is not in Europe, 95% of its population lives outside Europe, it is not a European country so Turkish accession to the EU would be the end of Europe.” But it has to be emphasized that, Turkish application to the EU has never been rejected since the end of 1950’s in terms of not being a European state. Former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl

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46 Le Monde, 8 November 2002.
stated that, the EU is a “civilisational project” in which “Turkey has no place”.\textsuperscript{47} Angela Merkel suggested that, Turkey should be offered a “privileged partnership” instead of full membership. In October 2004, President Chirac suggested that French voters should be able to vote on whether France will approve Turkish membership.\textsuperscript{48} On the other hand, according to EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn, “…Certainly, geographical borders set out the framework, but values define the borders.” He also stated that:

> “Any European country that respects values like democracy, human rights and rule of law can apply to be a member of the EU. That does not mean that we have to accept every country. But it would also be wrong to close the door forever by drawing a line in a map that forever sets the borders of Europe.”

As a counter argument to the idea that, the EU will become simply an economic area without the political integration if it takes on too many member states, he stated that “the history of the EU shows that, enlargement and political deepening are not opposites”.\textsuperscript{49} We can see this reality in the historical background of the EU, because widening and deepening have gone hand by hand since the first enlargement process in the 1970’s. Regional policy was introduced during the first enlargement, which includes accession of the UK, Ireland and Denmark. The accession of Spain and Portugal was accompanied by the signing of the Single European Act(SEA), which introduced new policy fields to the EU, increased the powers of the EU, increased the use of qualified majority voting (QMV) in the decision making process. Before the last most challenging enlargement in May 2004, deepening was achieved by Amsterdam and Nice Treaties.

Construction process of European identity within the EU is closely related with Turkey’s membership to the EU. It will show whether European identity will be based on cultural variables or civic values such as the rule of law and respect for human rights. It will show that, European identity will be defined mainly on the basis of exclusivity or on the basis of a real multicultural society. The narrower definition of European identity, as a cultural-based identity will negatively affect the construction of a dynamic and multicultural EU. Because some of the groups in the society may feel that, they are excluded and discriminated and this may lead to some negative responses.

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{The Guardian}, 7 March 1997.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Turkish Daily News}, 1 October 2004.
\textsuperscript{49} “Rehn Says EU Borders are not Fixed”, \textit{ABHaber.Com}, 12 April 2006
Although negotiation process and possible membership of Turkey to the EU is one of the most challenging events in the history of the EU, Turkey can make important contributions to construction process of European identity within the EU. Turkish membership will have a much more transformative impact than the eastern enlargement in 2004 did on the EU, which may transform the EU to a real multicultural community. Because Turkish membership would demonstrate that, the EU has overcome narrower self-identity in favor of a broader political identity, which is based on common civic values. In addition to these, it may give some clues about which countries may be included or excluded from the European integration process in the near future.

During the negotiation process between Turkey and the EU since October 3rd 2005, they have been in a closest interaction process. These two parties will know and understand each other much more during the ongoing negotiation process. This process will affect both construction process of European identity within the EU, simultaneously it will affect identity of Turkey in the world. So they will go on mutually reconstructing their identities in this process.

So Turkey and the EU need time and more interaction at different levels not only at governmental and elite levels, also among the NGO’s and even at individual levels, face to face communications especially among young generations to overcome stereotypes about each other and to have a much better relationship, which will contribute to peace and stability in the world.

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