

DISCOURSE APPROACHES TO  
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# Representations and Othering in Discourse

*The construction of Turkey in the EU context*

BEYZA Ç. TEKIN



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Beyza Ç. Tekin

Galatasaray University



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*To my daughters, Tenzile Defne and Ada Şirin*

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## List of abbreviations

AKP	Justice and Development Party – <i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i>
DL	Liberal Democracy – <i>Démocratie Libérale</i>
DNA	<i>Les Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace</i>
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EDC	European Defense Community
EEC	European Economic Community
EU	European Union
EURATOM	European Atomic Energy Community
FN	National Front – <i>Front National</i>
LCR	Revolutionary Communist League – <i>Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire</i>
LO	Workers' Struggle – <i>Lutte Ouvrière</i>
MDC	Movement of Citizens – <i>Mouvement des Citoyens</i>
MNR	National Republican Movement – <i>Mouvement National Républicain</i>
MPF	Movement for France – <i>Mouvement pour la France</i>
MRC	Citizen and Republican Movement – <i>Mouvement Républicain et Citoyen</i>
PCF	French Communist Party – <i>Parti Communiste Français</i>
PRG	Left Radical Party – <i>Parti Radical de Gauche</i>
PS	Socialist Party – <i>Parti Socialiste</i>
RPF	Rally for France – <i>Rassemblement pour la France</i>
RPR	Rally for the Republic – <i>Rassemblement pour la République</i>
UDF	Union for French Democracy – <i>Union pour la Démocratie Française</i>
UMP	Union for a Popular Movement – <i>Union pour un Mouvement Populaire</i>

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## Introduction

And I beheld Tantalus suffering severe griefs, standing in a lake; and it approached his chin. But he stood thirsting, and he could not get any thing to drink; for as often as the old man stooped, desiring to drink, so often the water being sucked up was lost to him [...]. And lofty trees shed down fruit from the top, pear trees, and apples, and pomegranates producing glorious fruit, and sweet figs, and flourishing olives: of which, when the old man raised himself up to pluck some with his hands, the wind kept casting them away to the dark clouds.

(Homer's *Odyssey* XI. 585–624)

The fate of Tantalus, now proverbial for insatiable temptation, is markedly reminiscent of Turkey's strenuous efforts to join the European Union. In its long odyssey towards Europe, the EU has been an object of both temptation and frustration for Turkey. Just like Tantalus, the king of Sipylus, Turkey, who has long been trying to become a member of the EU, is suffering continuous frustration; her desire to be accepted as 'European' never being fully satisfied. This study is on the French perceptions of this Turkish desire to join the EU.

Turkey maintains a long history of relations with Europe, but this relation and its status as a European country have always been a source of debate and controversy. Despite its geographical proximity to the core of Europe, and its deep-rooted presence in the European interstate system since the admission of the Ottoman Empire to the Concert of Europe, Turkey's belonging to Europe has always been seen as dubious. Neither the permanent cultural interactions between Europe and Turkey, nor its self-expressed, proven and enduring enthusiasm to anchor itself to Western European modernization could destroy the clouds looming over its belonging to Europe. The issue of Turkey's belonging to Europe remained highly contentious, regardless of the actual state of Turkey's relations with the European powers. Although Turkey has taken part in the European integration project from the very beginning, and despite its ambition to become part of an integrated Europe, the process has been slow, intermittent and cumbersome. During this more than four decade journey, the EU maintained an arm's-length relationship

with Turkey, continuously questioning its candidacy on essentialist grounds.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the full course of this period, the question of whether Turkey is European has continued to lie at the heart of debates surrounding Turkey's possible EU membership. Although the visible content of the debate changed continuously following the actualities or agenda of international politics, the issue of Turkey's eligibility remained complex and enigmatic from the very early days of the European unification process.

The Helsinki European Council of December 1999, during which Turkey's status as a candidate country was finally officially recognized, marked a turning point in Turkey-EU relations. It was during the Helsinki Summit that the contours of the debate regarding the legitimacy of Turkey's EU candidacy were finally established. For the first time, more than four decades after its application for an association with the European Economic Community (EEC) in July 1959, Turkey's vocation to becoming a full member of the European Union was recognized and Turkey was offered the concrete prospect of full EU membership (Ahtisaari et al. 2004: 7). Consequently, discussions about Turkey's adhesion to the Union shifted from an essentialist ground, based on inherent differences between Turkey and European countries, to the more functionalist ground of acquired characteristics (see Nicolaidis 2003).<sup>2</sup> Recognition of Turkey's eligibility for EU membership and its candidacy status, similar to that of other EU candidates, was perceived as an end to centuries-old discussions about the country's Europeanness. It was a widely shared feeling among many pro-EU advocates in Turkey, and their European supporters, that the only issue that remained was to fulfill the so-called Copenhagen political criteria on democracy, human rights and the rule of law (Nicolaidis 2003: 60). The essentialist considerations of Turkey's Europeanness were no longer the question. This generated a sense of relief amongst both the political elites and the general public in Turkey.

The long-expected relief, however, has proven to be short-lived. The EU Copenhagen Summit of December 2002, in which Turkey was given a date with the prospect of opening accession negotiations, marked another breakthrough in Turkey-EU relations. Following the Copenhagen Summit, the debate has changed and become even more controversial by setting a new agenda. Since the Copenhagen Summit the question of Turkey's Europeanness, and its belonging to European civilization has re-entered with full force into the European public spheres. The Turkish candidacy was discussed amongst the political elites and

1. For a critical perspective on the economic and political logic of Turkey's EU membership application, see Öniş (1999, 2000 and 2001).

2. See Rumelili (2004) for how Europe differentiates Turkey on the basis of both inherent differences and acquired characteristics (p. 44).

the general public with an unprecedented fervor; and these discussions served as a catalyst to bring into public debate a need to redefine European identity (Göle 2005a). Questions of the geographic frontiers of Europe, past memories, civilizational belonging, and cultural and religious differences emerged as new themes in an old debate and “set a new agenda” for the redefinition of European identity (Göle 2005a).

This new debate started in France first following a declaration by Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, former French president and president of the European Convention on the Future of Europe. In November 2002, one month before the meeting of the European Council in Copenhagen, Giscard d’Estaing declared that Turkey was not “a European country” and that admitting Turkey to the EU would be the “end of Europe” because Turkey has “a different culture, a different approach, and a different way of life” (Giscard d’Estaing, *Le Monde*, 9 November 2002). Giscard d’Estaing’s declaration was made in the particular international atmosphere in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA, and just a few days after the electoral success of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which was perceived by many French observers as the coming to power of Islamists in Turkey. The declaration of Giscard d’Estaing broke down the long-standing consensus in France, of not fervently confronting Turkey’s EU membership; an old tradition of French rulers and foreign policy which could be labeled as the French “*vision d’Etat*” (see Chenal 2004: 9). Following this consensus breaking discourse by the former French President, the concerns over the fate of an integrated Europe as well as of European identity were quick to become a question of great interest in the French public sphere. Quickly, however, the debate on Turkey’s future EU membership has become part of other EU-member states’ political agenda as well.

The possibility of Turkish membership has triggered an intense and unprecedented debate regarding the (re)definition of European identity. Europe began discussing its own identity and the future of the European project through Turkey’s EU membership. Consequently, as discussions were anchored in the compatibility of Turkey with the EU, the question became even more controversial. Perceived as a threat, Turkey’s possible EU membership provoked a fear of identity loss which in turn reinforced the search for identity preservation in Europe (Göle 2005a). However, the possible presence of Turkey within the EU, which is equated with Europe, seemed to hit something much more hidden, deep-rooted, and emotional in the definition of French identity in particular (Göle 2005b: 132). It seemed to threaten the French republican identity more than the European identity, still a contested and ambiguous notion. This centrality and particularity of the very debates prevalent today in France call for a reflection on, and investigation into, the discursive nature of the debate and its consequences for the future of the EU.

The core questions of this study can now be formulated as follows: How is the possible EU accession of Turkey constructed in French political discourse? How do the French debate participants evaluate Turkey's Europeaness? Assuming that the identities are constructed discursively, how does the French discourse about Turkey's EU accession construct European identity? Identity necessarily concerns a relation of Self and Other; 'othering' is an important activity in the construction of collective identities. Given this assumption, this study also explores whether 'othering' Turkey is an observable strategy in the discursive construction of a collective European identity in the debates. If 'othering' is a significant discourse strategy, then what are the characteristics and the nature of this 'Otherness' attributed to Turkey?

In an attempt to provide answers to the above set of questions, this work analyzes the representations, images, understandings and meanings of Turkey in French political discourse, following the 1999 Helsinki Summit, especially at the level of political elites, intellectuals, scholars and the media. More specifically, by making use of Critical Discourse Analysis, this study investigates which topics, discursive strategies, and linguistic devices are used to construct Turkey in French political discourse within the context of its possible accession to the EU.

Following Cornelius Castoriadis (1987), I argue that all societies have a central imaginary in order to consider basic questions about their identity; 'who we are', 'how we fit together', 'how we got where we are', and 'what are we for one another' (p. 147). Imaginary significations provide an answer to these questions; assemble, adjust, fabricate, and construct a society, and define its orientation to the world (Castoriadis 1987:260). In all these, language plays a crucial role (see Delanty & Rumford 2005:16–18). In Castoriadis' view, it is through language, "the medium par excellence, in which these social imaginary significations become manifest and do their constitutive work" (Gaonkar 2002:7). Based on these assumptions, I argue that French political discourse on Turkey's EU accession is reflective of the place Turkey occupies in the French social imaginary. As the social imaginary is fed by history, this work provides an excursion into the ways in which the past shapes today's constructions of Turkey in the EU context. A major curiosity of this work is therefore to identify the processes through which past memories, representations, images, and fantasies regarding Turkey are inserted into the French social imaginary.

This study aims to contribute to the growing literature on identity studies in International Relations (IR), with a special focus on the Self/Other nexus in IR. The discipline has recently witnessed a surge of interest in the identity related dimension (Neumann 1996:140); the mass of literature, however, remains predominantly theoretical with very little empirical work on the role identity plays in international relations. Although constructivist studies in IR theoretically

recognize the importance of the Self/Other dichotomy in identity construction, little effort has been given to demonstrate empirically how exactly people construct identities by means of Othering (Hülse 1999:2). Given the amount of relevant empirical material, this study contributes to the literature by providing an empirical analysis of the Self/Other nexus in international relations within the context of Turkey's adhesion to the European Union.

Rather than merely conducting a linguistic analysis, this study tries to investigate the socio-historical basis of the construction of Turkey's alterity in the French imaginary. Standing on its historically grounded approach, this research tries to contribute to our understanding of Self/Other relations in IR by providing new empirical information on how exactly the Turkish Other has been portrayed in France within the context of Turkey's adhesion to the EU. Previous studies have repeatedly confirmed that Turkey is playing the role of a 'constitutive Other' of Europe, as it was in history during the era of the Ottoman Empire or the Saracens.<sup>3</sup> Rather than simply repeating that Turkey is still partly continuing its role as a constitutive Other for Europe, this work specifies the characteristics of the Otherness attributed to Turkey in a more elaborate way.

### The motivation of the study

The reasons behind the exclusive focus on the case of France and French political discourse in this study are many. One immediate reason is the particular place France occupies in the Turkish collective imaginary, as the representative of Europe and European civilization. Historically, France has always had a special importance for Turkey and Turkish people, both amongst the intellectuals and at a popular level. During the Ottoman era, Europeans were exclusively referred to as 'Franc', regardless of their national or ethnic belongings. Any novelty imported from the Occident was named similarly as being '*alafranga*' (alla Franca), with explicit reference to France (see Göle 1996). As Mardin (1971) asserts, "a fluent knowledge of French and *alla Franca* (Western) social graces was the foremost requisite of advancement" (p. 201). An ally to Turkey during the reign of Soliman the Magnificent in an attempt to protect itself against the Habsburgs, France occupied a particular role in Ottoman relations with the Occident. Paris was not only one of the first capitals where the Ottomans established a permanent diplomatic representation but also home to the 'Young Ottomans' and '*Jeunes Turcs*', two opposition movements of the nineteenth century created with influence

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3. See Neumann (1999) for an excellent genealogical study on Turkey's constitutive and dominant Otherness for Europe.

from French positivist thought.<sup>4</sup> The French ideals worked to shape not only the thoughts of Ottoman reformist intellectuals, but also the Jacobin tradition of politics, as a most convenient and realistic means in modernizing Turkey, during the foundation of its nation-state (see Ahmad 1993). It is quite easy to find signs of France's specific importance in the founding principles of the modern Turkish Republic. Turkish modernization was built upon two main pillars: secularism and republicanism, and it was the French '*laïcité*', rather than the Anglo-Saxon experience of secularism, that had inspired this modernization (Göle 2005c: 73). Therefore, it is argued that the French discourse on Turkey's accession to the EU is important in itself, given the particular importance attached to France in the Turkish collective imaginary.

Another major reason for my exclusive focus on France is that it is one of the EU member countries in which public opinion is constantly hostile toward Turkey's EU membership.<sup>5</sup> Successive opinion polls conducted since 2002 show an average 55–60% rejection rate.<sup>6</sup> Although the question of Turkey's potential EU membership has generated a debate in many member states, there is not a single other nation in which the topic entered the domestic political agenda as profoundly as in France; nowhere has the issue been politically instrumentalised to the same extent and become such an agenda-setting issue for internal politics (see Akagül & Vaner 2005). France is the first European nation that considered changing its constitution in order to facilitate legislative arrangements that would allow a last minute national referendum on the issue of Turkey's EU accession.

Debate over Turkey's accession to the EU in France has recently been an integral part of the domestic politics of the country, infused into the everyday life and discussions of French households through the front pages of newspapers, and magazines and through bookstore shelves. Discussions took place over the Internet, in newspapers and magazines as well as on national television and radio. All parties involved in French politics, covering the lower and highest ranks of intra-party hierarchy, and including local and regional elected officials, as well as the Members of Parliament and European MPs, took part in these discussions.

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4. See Georgeon (1995) and Mardin (2000) for the French influence on the late Ottoman opposition movements.

5. According to the Ifop-*Le Figaro* poll published on December 13, 2004, 67% of the French held a negative stance on Turkey's EU membership, while the same rate was 55% in Germany, 30% in the UK, 24% in Italy and 18% in Spain.

6. Since the 2002 TNS Sofres poll conducted for *Le Pèlerine Magazine* found a 58% of opposition to Turkey's EU adhesion, countless opinion polls have been conducted and published. In these opinion polls, the rate of opposition to Turkey's EU membership has never fallen below 50%.

While the discussions about Turkey's entry to the EU are quite old in France, the identity dimension has recently been initiated by prominent politicians, especially by those who belong to the strong Christian democrat tradition in French politics. Morin (2004) argues that it is this Christian democrat ambition to defend the myth of Europe identified with Christianity that caused such a fierce and passionate debate and opposition in France (p. 18). This is why Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's call to defend Europe against what he considers to be the "end of Europe" has found such a strong echo in France, first amongst his Christian democrat allies and followers, such as François Bayrou, the leader of the Christian democrat inspired, centre right, Union for French Democracy (UDF), and Philippe de Villiers, the head of the Catholic, eurosceptic, Movement for France (MPF).

The possible EU membership of Turkey and the question of its Europeanness became a hot-button issue in the French referendum on May 29, 2005 on the European Constitutional Treaty. Turkey was in the headlines in the campaigns of both the opponents and advocates of the Constitutional Treaty. Many commentators argue that a major reason behind the French 'Non' to the EU constitution was the perception of Turkey as a threat to the EU project and its non-Europeanness. The question of Turkey's European identity has increasingly aroused more and more interest in these discussions.

The significance of the EU accession of Turkey as an agenda-setting issue continued with full force during the last presidential elections in France in 2007. The question of Turkey's EU adhesion was highly instrumentalised in the campaigns, starkly dividing the candidates. In the election campaigns, two presidential candidates, Nicolas Sarkozy, the head of the governing right-wing Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) and François Bayrou (UDF), were opposed to Turkey's adhesion mainly on culturalist-essentialist grounds, while the Socialist Party (PS) candidate, Ségolène Royal, declared that France has to be responsible, and respect the promise made to Turkey forty years ago.

The election of Nicolas Sarkozy as the new French President surely represents another break in the consensus, this time in the official presidential discourse of France, which has never been particularly hostile to Turkey's EU candidacy. The succession of Jacques Chirac, who once declared "We are all children of Byzantium"<sup>7</sup> by Nicolas Sarkozy, who simply contradicted him by stating that "If Turkey

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7. "Nous sommes tous des enfants de Byzance." (Jacques Chirac, November 14, 2004)



were European, we would know it!”<sup>8</sup> reflects how structural the rupture in the French presidential discourse is.

### Theoretical relevance of the study

Turkey’s adhesion to the European Union is a political decision which will involve all of the member states, and in some cases, through referendums, this decision will directly involve the nations as well. It is therefore more than evident that this study lies, first and foremost, in the realm of European Integration and International Relations (IR) studies. Turkey’s belonging to the European Union, furthermore, necessarily entails considerations about identity – her European or non-European identity, as well as the European identity itself. We therefore have an international relations issue with a significant identity dimension, which requires a theoretical framework that surpasses predominantly essentialist approaches of neo-realist and neo-liberal perspectives. The constructivist approach to international relations provides such an alternative.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, as far as theory is concerned, this study connects with the constructivist approach in international relations theory. I make use of a constructivist approach not only due to this approach’s interest in identity, but also because of its strong emphasis on the role of language and discourse in constructing reality.

The basic methodological difference between constructivism and other approaches in international relations concerns the nature of the social reality (ontology) and the relation of our knowledge to that reality (epistemology) (Jackson & Sørensen 2007: 299). “The social and political world, [...], is not a physical entity or material object that is outside human consciousness”, but instead, it is constructed by human intervention; “it is a set of ideas, a body of thought, a system of norms” (Jackson & Sørensen 2007: 162). In Emanuel Adler’s (1997) widely quoted words: “Constructivism is the view that the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world” (p. 322).

8. “*Si la Turquie était Européenne, ça se saurait!*” (Nicolas Sarkozy, *France 2*, December 18, 2004)

9. This point was raised in a series of works by Rainer Hülse (1999, 2000). Hülse did not only make clear that a constructivist approach needs to be adopted, but also pioneered the use of Critical Discourse Analysis “with a certain leaning towards the ‘discourse-historical’ approach” (1999: 9) in studying European discourses on Turkey’s possible EU accession.