ONE CIVILISATION OR MANY? THE CONCEPT OF CIVILISATION IN DISCOURSE FOR AND AGAINST TURKISH EU ACCESSION

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Abstract:
The paper argues that the concept of civilisation has been frequently used as a metaphor in arguments both in favour of and against Turkey’s eventual EU membership. However, an examination of the discourse suggests that civilisation, which is a polyvalent concept, has been understood and used differently by each side. While the concept of civilisation used by supporters of Turkish accession is an inclusive one, according to which civilisation is one and (potentially) available to all, it is used in a very different way by opponents of Turkey’s full membership. In this case, the conception of civilisation is similar to that of Huntington, as multiple, culturally based and relatively inflexible. Hence, on this basis, it is argued that Turkey is not a suitable candidate for full EU membership as it does not share the civilisational background of European countries, and thus cannot easily adapt to ‘European’ values such as democracy or human rights. Finally, a minority of arguments imply a culturally based, yet more flexible view of European civilisation as being historically influenced by Islam, and by Turkey in particular. Such a view, similar to Delanty’s ‘civilisational constellations’ implies support of Turkish accession on a cultural basis.

Key words: civilisation, European Union, Turkey, enlightenment, Huntington.

Introduction
Each round of European Union (EU) enlargement provokes considerable soul-searching as to the nature of European identity and the EU’s eventual borders. This has especially been true in the case of Turkey’s accession bid. However, according to social constructivism, identity is not something inherent and fixed; thus an identity cannot simply be ‘found’; instead it must be constructed and reconstructed. It is argued here that the division of EU opinion regarding the issue of Turkish accession represents two alternative attempts at constructing an identity for the EU.

It has frequently been noted that there is a deep division among EU political elites about whether Turkey should eventually become part of the EU or not. Many, most notably in the Commission and in a group of Member States including Spain, the UK and most of the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs), argue that Turkey should be allowed the same chances as any other candidate country to accede to the EU. Others, however, led by the Franco-German right, argue that by virtue of its cultural and religious heritage Turkey is simply not a European country at all and, thus, should not be considered for full membership in the EU; instead it should be offered a more limited ‘privileged partnership’.

This paper argues that these competing arguments are based on fundamentally differing concepts of civilisation. Civilisation is a polyvalent term; it thus has several possible meanings. It is put forward here that, while those who support Turkey’s eventual accession to the EU see civilisation as fundamentally ‘universal’ in character, opponents of Turkey’s full membership argue that, rather than ‘one’ civilisation, there are several distinct civilisations which are culturally based and relatively fixed in nature. In this view, Turkey, which belongs by history to ‘Islamic civilisation’ cannot easily adopt the EU’s values, which are founded on ‘European civilisation’.

A Social Constructivist Approach to Identity Construction
According to the social constructivist approach, identity is continuously constructed, negotiated and contested between political actors (Rumelili,
99). It is, then, not rooted in objective characteristics. However, in the constructivist view identity cannot be created overnight and cannot be completely divorced from objective traits such as ethnicity, religion history or culture (Rumelili 2008: 99). Although constructivism allows for a relation between cultural variables and collective identity this connection is much less fixed than in the primordialist or essentialist version1 and is subject to construction and reconstruction (Risse 2004: 167).

In the social constructivist view discourse, particularly that of elites and epistemic communities, is an important factor in social learning and, ultimately, identity construction. As Fearon and Laitin argue, for instance, “discourses define identities and shape or determine actions”(2000: 853). While epistemic communities tend to have an impact on policy learning, the discourse of political elites tends to have more of an impact in framing particular issues (Milliken 1999: 233). Active efforts to construct a territorial identity, then, tend to be an elite driven, top-down process.

In addition, according to constructivists, elite attempts to construct identity are more likely to result in social learning on the part of the general population during a time of perceived crisis or at critical junctures. As Checkel argues, when “the target of the socialization attempt is in a novel and uncertain environment … [it is] cognitively motivated to analyze new information” (2005: 3). Secondly, the public is more open to elite attempts at identity construction when the elite in question is viewed as legitimate and credible; in other words it must be part of the audience’s ‘in-group’ (Checkel 2001: 59). Moreover, from a constructivist view, this tends to be more successful when the ideas promoted by the elites in question do not significantly clash with those held by the public; the audience should have “few prior, ingrained beliefs inconsistent with the socializing agency’s message” (Checkel 2001: 59).

However, identities also imply limits; if some people are included in a particular identity group there must be others who are not. Social identity theory argues that identities necessitate ‘Others’; in other words, in order to define who we are we must also define who we are not. The ‘imagined community’, then, is further defined by a sense of difference in relation to other communities: thus an imagined community needs an ‘Other’. Moreover, individuals tend to perceive their group identity as more positive than that of their ‘Others’, therefore increasing their self-esteem. Thus, an examination of Othering can help to shed light on the various ways in which identities are constructed:

Unstated in these narratives representing the Other are counternarratives of the self. Thus, if the Other is an ‘infidel’, then ‘we’ are ‘the faithful’. If the Other is a ‘barbarian’ then we must be ‘civilized’. If the Other is a ‘sick man’, then we have ‘healthy’ and ‘robust’ regimes and societies. If the Other is ‘backward’, ‘despotic’, or a ‘laggard’, then we are ‘modern’, ‘liberal’ and ‘progressive’. If the Other is ‘Asiatic’ and ‘Eastern’ then we are ‘European’ and ‘Western’ (Hall 2001: 104).

Social identity theory also puts forward that an individual has several social identities which correspond to widening circles of group membership, and the identity that is most salient at any given moment depends on the social context. Thus, just as identities appear to be multiple in nature, it follows that the ‘Others’ which define those identities can also differ (Risse and Engelmann-Martin 2007: 292-293). In Kaelble’s words, these Others may be “close or alien, amicable or menacing, linked to or separate from Europe” (2009: 207). Indeed, a wide variety of candidates for Europe’s ‘Others’ have been put forward, including (but probably not limited to) the East in general, the Islamic East in particular, the USA, and Europe’s own past (Neumann 1999).

EU Identity Construction and Discourse on Turkish Accession: One Civilisation or Many?

Civilisation is a polyvalent concept in that it has many possible meanings. This multiplicity is well illustrated by a quip made by Indian leader Mohandas Gandhi on a trip to England in the 1930s. When asked by a reporter what he thought of Western civilisation, his reply was “I think it would be a very good thing” (Aydon 2009: 45). As Kuzmanovic argues, it is its very polyvalence that has led civilisation to be a metaphorical pivot in framing EU-Turkey relations (2008: 42).

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1 Essentialist concepts of collective identities argue that cultural variables are given which then develop into national identities during the process of nation building. Thus, in this view, identities are fixed and the creation of supranational or postnational identities is impossible.
One issue of debate is whether civilisation is one or many, whether it is culturally bound or transcends cultures. Thus, there has been much discussion over whether the values which constitute civilisation are universal in nature and potentially available to all, or if they vary according to cultural and religious background. Notably, Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis which, according to Adib-Moghaddam is a ‘contagious’ idea in the sense that, whether in agreement with it or mockingly, many tend to contemplate it and engage with its premises (2011: 1), puts forward the latter point of view. According to Huntington, then, there is no single civilisation; instead, the world is divided into different civilisations, each of which has a fundamentally different outlook and different values resulting from the specificities of its religious foundation and historical development. In this way, then, a civilisation is “a culture writ large” (Huntington 1997: 41). Thus, in his view, the belief in the universality of the West’s values and political systems is naïve. Instead, each civilisation has its own, unique values which may not be compatible with those of the West:

The people of different civilizations have different views on the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy. These differences are the products of centuries. They will not soon disappear (Huntington 1993: 3).

Therefore, so-called ‘universal values’ such as representative democracy, the rule of law or secularism are seen as specifically resulting from the European experience, notably the influence of classical culture (particularly Roman law) and ‘Christian values’, as well as the Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment and, importantly, cannot easily be transferred to other ‘civilisations’ which have their own systems of values (Huntington 1997: 69).

A more flexible view is the concept of civilizational constellations. In this view, while civilisations are considered formations of the longue durée, they are open to significant internal change and are more adaptable to new circumstances than Huntington’s civilisations. Each civilisation is a constellation of societies, in that it is a juxtaposed rather than fixed cluster of changing elements; a civilisation in this view thus constitutes a unity in difference. Similarly, civilisations may also cluster together; a civilizational constellation is a configuration of civilisations (Delanty and Rumford 2005: 37).

On this basis, Delanty and Rumford argue that Europe is, in fact, constituted by a tripartite set of civilisational constellations; the Occidental Christian constellation, the Byzantine/Slavic/Eurasian constellation and the Ottoman Islamic constellation (2005: 38-40):

The historical roots of this Western civilisation – Athens, Rome and Jerusalem – were not European in the Western sense of the term European. Classical antiquity and origins of Christianity were Mediterranean … Western civilisation is based on a history that was never entirely European, but became Europe in a process of borrowing, translation and diffusion. The major examples of this are Hellenization, Romanization and the subsequent adoption of the Roman heritage by Christianity, the Renaissance and scientific revolution and age of discovery, and exploration and imperialism which led to the diffusion in Europe of non-Western inventions and marked ‘the rise of the West’ (Delanty and Rumford 2005: 38).

An alternative view, however, is that civilisation is one and transcends culture; in other words that there is a ‘world civilisation’. In this case, the concept of ‘civilisation’, linked with the idea of a settled, urban and literate society, is defined in contrast to the ‘barbarous’, or, in psychological terms, as a taming of ‘the beast within’ (Osborne 2007: 4). While this idea of civilisation as the ‘in-group’ and barbarians as the ‘out-group’ can be traced as far back as ancient Greece, the term ‘civilisation’ itself came into use in the French Enlightenment. According to a view of civilisation inherited from the French Enlightenment, then, while Western Europe is seen as the source of civilisation, the resulting

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2 According to Huntington, the major civilisations are Western, Latin American, Orthodox, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Japanese, and possibly African (Huntington 1997: 26–27). Israel is considered a unique state with its own civilisation, although this is extremely similar to the West (1997: 48). Ethiopia and Haiti are ‘lone’ countries in Huntington’s view (1997: 136–137).
values, such as democracy, human rights or the rule of law, are potentially universal in nature. Here, civilisation is not a given; instead it can only be achieved as the result of progress and development (Kuzmanovic 2008: 57). A different view goes a further step by arguing that these ‘universal values’ did not originate exclusively in Western culture but can be found independently in cultures around the world. As Amatrya Sen, for instance, argues,

The championing of political liberty and of religious tolerance in their full contemporary forms is not an old historical feature of any country or civilisation in the world. Plato and Aquinas were no less authoritarian in their thinking than was Confucius. This is not to deny that there were champions of tolerance in classical European thought, but even if this is taken to give credit to the whole Western world (from the ancient Greeks to the Vikings and the Ostrogoths), there are similar examples in other cultures as well (Sen 2007: 50).

In the context of the EU, then, civilisation has been an important metaphor in the attempt to define a European identity. The question of a European identity to underscore EU integration has become particularly important since the widened impact of the EU following the Maastricht Treaty, as both the salience and the divisiveness of public opinion on European integration have increased (Hooghe and Marks 2005: 251). Other events, including enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) as well as the attempt to develop a ‘Constitution’ for the EU have also prompted considerable soul-searching about the nature and identity of the EU. As Kuzmanovic argues, while the concept of civilisation has played an important part in conceptualising EU integration from the outset, the significance of civilisation has become particularly notable as a trope for imagining what the EU is and should be since the 1990s (Kuzmanovic 2008: 58).

The prospect of Turkey’s accession has intensified this debate. In particular, the idea that the EU should be based on a ‘universal’ civilisation has been challenged, most notably on the Franco-German right, by an alternative view that the EU should be grounded on a more cultural, Huntington-type ‘European’ identity. As Jose Casanova argues,

Europe is actually the torn country, deeply divided over its cultural identity, unable to answer the question whether European identity, and therefore its external and internal boundaries, should be defined by the common heritage of Christianity and Western civilization, or by its modern secular values of liberalism, universal human rights, political democracy and tolerant and inclusive multiculturalism (Casanova 2006: 241).

Thus, the increasing politicization of EU identity issues has revealed two contrasting EU identity projects based on differing conceptions of civilisation. The first of these is the ‘official’ version of EU identity, as expressed in the Treaties; an outward-looking, cosmopolitan civic identity project generally promoted by EU elites and based on ‘universal norms’. The formation of a cosmopolitan European identity has also been supported by philosophers such as Habermas, among others. It is this cosmopolitan, civic identity which is embodied, for instance, in the Lisbon Treaty and other EU legislation. Such an identity rests on shared political and social values rather than on a ‘thicker’ ethnic, linguistic or cultural identity. Therefore, in this view civilisation is one, and the borders of the EU are potentially open to any country considered geographically European regardless of culture or religion as long as they are seen as respecting the ‘universal’ norms cited above.

The second attempt to construct a European identity is more inward-looking, populist and cultural in nature (Checkel and Katzenstein 2009: 9-10). As is discussed below, such populist movements, most notably those of the French and German right, have argued that a strong Europe requires a strong cultural identity. Increasingly, this has taken on a ‘civilisational’ nature; thus, the borders of Europe are considered to be the borders of ‘European civilisation’.

In this view, then, the ‘universal norms’ on which the EU is based are the product of European civilisation (itself, in Huntington’s terms, a ‘sub-branch’ of Western civilisation). They are specifically the result of the European experience, notably the influence of classical culture (particularly Roman law) and ‘Christian values’, as well as the Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment. On this basis, it is argued that a country such as Turkey, perceived as coming from a different civilisation, in this
case ‘Islamic civilisation’, is inherently incapable of properly comprehending and adopting such values.

An EU based on ‘One Civilisation’: Implications for Turkey’s Accession

So far, due to the cultural diversity of Europe, the EU’s drive to construct an EU identity has focused mostly on the creation of a civic rather than a cultural identity. Cerruti, for instance, defines civic identity as “the set of social and political values and principles that we recognise as ours, or in the sharing of which we feel like ‘us’, like a political group or entity” (Cerruti 2003: 27). According to this view, then, the EU is conceived as a “rights-based, post-national Union founded on universal principles such as democracy and governed by the rule of law, rather than on traditional ‘national’ values such as language, ethnic group, religion and culture” (Ruiz-Jimenez and Torreblanca 2007: 5).

Despite some attempts to create European cultural symbols, the concept of a European cultural identity beyond universal norms such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law has not been emphasized in the Treaties, so that any country which is considered both geographically European and able to fulfill these universal values qualifies potentially for EU membership. More than cultural ‘European-ness’, then, EU accession implies the voluntary acceptance of a certain set of rules as binding and legitimate. As can be seen in the Preamble to the 2004 Treaty on European Union (TEU)\(^3\), this is based on a concept of civilisation that is close to the ‘French Enlightenment’ view;

Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. […] Believing that Europe, reunited after bitter experiences, intends to continue along the path of civilisation, progress and prosperity for the good of all its inhabitants […] and that it wishes to deepen the democratic and transparent nature of its public life, and to strive for peace, justice and solidarity throughout the world …

Similarly, further analysis of the TEU\(^4\) indicates that the identity referents are generally of a universal nature rather than based on a common past, and are limited to universal principles. Article 2(1a) of the TEU affirms that “the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities”. In addition, article 3(2) of the TEU stresses ‘unity in diversity’, as it emphasizes the EU’s commitment to respect the “rich cultural and linguistic diversity” of the Member States, and its desire to “ensure that Europe’s cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced.

Moreover, the focus on the preservation of national identities, cultures and traditions means that there is room for a certain degree of divergence of interpretation and implementation of these values between the Member States. This implies appreciation and tolerance of differences between countries, regions, political orientations and individuals; in other words respect for and interest in the internal Other, at least in so far as the ‘universal values’ underpinning the EU are respected. Thus, the appreciation of difference is seen as one of Europe’s greatest achievements, and a stimulant for democratic institutions as well as for cultural and economic innovation (Kaelble 2009: 201).

Importantly, the Preamble to the TEU does not mention ‘a community of Christian values’ although, as discussed below, during the European Convention, some Member States, as well as the Catholic Church and some intellectuals, such as Weiler, wanted Judeo-Christian values to be more openly mentioned in the Constitutional Treaty. Instead, the Preamble makes a more general allusion to European religious values as the foundation of universal values on which the EU is based: “Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.

Thus, while the Treaty mentions ‘European-ness’ and ‘European values’, these values are actually universal and somewhat neutral in nature. More specific references to ‘European-ness’ and ‘European values’ were avoided in order to prevent dissent and to bolster the EU’s legitimacy among European citizens. Moreover, the emphasis is again more on the

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\(^3\) The numbering of the TEU is that used following its amendment to the Lisbon treaty.

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creation of a future common identity through universal values and integration than on a shared past. In addition, the Charter of Fundamental Rights also emphasizes universal values coupled with respect for diversity in areas such as religion, language and custom (Zürcher and Van der Linden 2007: 449).

Similarly, the Copenhagen criteria for accession, set out by the European Council in 1993, demand that the candidate countries meet four conditions as follows:

The stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union ... [and] the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union (European Council, 1993).

As Ruiz-Jimenez and Torreblanca point out, then, “whether the candidate country is Turkey, Norway or Switzerland it should not make much difference” (2007: 6). Thus, from this point of view, there is no cultural criteria for EU accession; instead any country that is accepted as geographically European and which fulfills these criteria should be allowed to join regardless of broader identity questions such as religion or history. Supporters of this vision of EU identity, then, tend to favour Turkish accession in principle on the grounds that it would help to prevent a ‘clash of civilisations’ by proving that values such as democracy are not limited to ‘Western civilisation’ and that the EU is not a ‘Christian club’. Thus, it would show that civilisation in the broader sense is open to all. This kind of discourse has been used by supporters of Turkish accession in the European Commission and Parliament as well as those who support it among national political elites.

As, for instance, former Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn argued in 2004: “A Turkey where the rule of law is firmly rooted in its society and state will prove that, contrary to prejudices, European values can successfully coexist with a predominantly Muslim population. Such a Turkey will be a most valuable crossroads between civilisations” (Rehn 2004). Similarly, former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder argued that, “A democratic Turkey committed to European values would serve as proof that there is no contradiction between commitment to Islam and enlightened modern society” (2004). In this view, then, although a barbarous ‘Other’ clearly exists, it is potentially capable of change; thus, the EU is seen as a global force for ‘good’. As Rehn argues;

In my view, we are not doomed to an eternal conflict between the West and the Muslim world. As we used both containment and co-operation to win the Cold War, we should today show resolve against Islamic fundamentalism and firmly contain all kinds of terrorism, while continuing to build bridges with Islam and repeat universal democratic values. Turkey plays a key role in this (2008).

Similar arguments can also be seen in the political discourse of those Member States whose political elites broadly support Turkish accession, such as Spain or Britain, as well as in the discourse of those politicians who support Turkish accession in countries such as Germany. As Aksoy argues regarding the British Labour government’s attitude to Turkey’s bid for full membership;

The argument that was consistently pointed out by the government was that EU membership would help to consolidate democracy and secularism in Turkey, which was overwhelmingly a Muslim nation, and this would, apart from sending all the right messages to other Muslim nations which were similarly trying to democratize, help repair the relations between the West and the Muslim world that were significantly damaged by the September 11 attacks and the subsequent War on Terror (Aksoy 2009: 476).

Similar arguments have been used by other countries which are in favour of Turkish accession. According to Soler i Lecha and Garcia, for example, pragmatic arguments, including that of Turkey’s geostrategic value, are also frequently used in support of Turkish accession in Spanish political discourse, particularly on the left (2009: 74).

Moreover, in this discourse it is argued that not only would Turkish accession bolster European security by contributing to the prevention of a clash of
civilisations, the failure of Turkey to join the EU would put both Turkey itself and its EU neighbors at the mercy of Islamic fundamentalism. As British Conservative MP Liam Fox, for instance, argued in 2006, EU membership will protect Turkey from those in the “fundamentalist shadows” (Fox 2006).

In addition, bearing in mind that every identity is constructed vis a vis an Other, this construction of EU identity includes an internal ‘out group’: xenophobia and racism (Risse 2010: 53). From this point of view, then, Turkey’s accession would help to combat anti-Islamic and xenophobic tendencies within Europe. As Denis MacShane, British Labour Minister for Europe argued in 2002, EU support for Turkish membership “allows Europe to deal with the Islamophobia that drives the new right-wing politics of rejectionism of all things foreign. It should also encourage the major nations of the EU to bring European Muslims into mainstream politics” (MacShane 2002).

Thus from this point of view Turkey may be considered less civilised if it is not seen as sufficiently internalizing the ‘internal values’ on which the EU is founded. It is not, though, seen as being inherently unable to adopt these values as a result of belonging to ‘Islamic’ rather than ‘Western’ civilisation. As is explored below, however, the latter view has been increasingly openly expressed in recent years as an argument for not offering Turkey full membership of the EU.

A European Cultural (or Civilisational) Identity

A contrasting argument is that an entity such as the EU needs to be constructed on the basis of a solid cultural identity, such as a common religious or historical experience. A shared history in this context has often been understood as Europe’s classical Greek and Roman past, the Renaissance and/or the Enlightenment. As has been pointed out, in Huntington’s view, for instance, ‘European civilisation’ is informed by ‘classical civilisation’, which, for him, includes Greek philosophy and rationalism, Roman law, Latin and Christianity. However, he also adds several features which are expressly linked to democracy and the rule of law (Huntington 1997: 69).

Importantly, in Huntington’s view, Turkey is a ‘torn country’ whose leaders have tried to ‘shift’ its civilisation from Muslim to Western civilisation; given his essentialist concept of civilisational identity, as discussed above, this is a difficult, if not impossible task. Huntington argues that this could only be achieved if the national elite, national public opinion and dominant elements in the host society are staunchly supportive of the change in civilisational identity. However, in his view these conditions are not sufficiently fulfilled in the case of Turkey (Huntington 1997: 144–149).

As has been argued, since the opening of Turkey’s accession process at the Helsinki summit in 1999, and especially since discussions began over the opening of accession negotiations in 2004–2005, opponents to Turkey’s EU membership have often tended to phrase their arguments against Turkey’s accession in terms of cultural identity. This has been the case both in moderate right-wing parties, most notably in France and Germany, and on the far-right. Christianity in particular, for many, appears to still be an important component of ‘European identity’. Thus it follows that Islam, and an ‘Islamic’ country such as Turkey, continue to be seen as an important ‘Other’ at the popular as well as right-wing elite level. In this view, whatever the pragmatic benefits of Turkish accession, these are overshadowed by Turkey’s perceived ‘non-Europeaness’ and non-democratic nature.

Despite the fact that Turkey is actually a secular state, then, the fact that the vast majority of its population are, at least nominally, followers of Islam is often cited as a reason for excluding it from the EU, which is considered by many to be founded on ‘Judeo-Christian values’.

There was much discussion during the European Convention of 2003–2005 over whether the EU constitution should include references to Christianity. The idea that Christianity should explicitly underlie EU values has also, unsurprisingly, been supported by the Catholic Church. Pope Benedict, for instance, argued that “Christians and Muslims could be privileged partners”, indicating that the Catholic Church would find it difficult to accept that Turkey could be a full member of the EU (Rehn 2007: 146). Centre-right political elites, particularly but not exclusively in France and Germany, have also tended to emphasize such cultural elements in addition to geography and universal values when defining European identity (Yılmaz, 2007) (Szymanski, 2007: 34).

Yılmaz describes the role of Christianity in right wing discourse on European identity as an ‘extinguished volcano’; thus, as has been argued above, Christianity is viewed not as a belief system but as a
cultural marker. Thus, in this view Christian heritage is viewed as the basis of some secular European values, including the separation of religion and the state, the idea of the natural rights of man and even the culture of capitalism. Therefore, conversion to Christianity is viewed as insufficient to acquire ‘Judeo-Christian values’, as the convert “does not carry the Christian heritage in his or her ‘cultural genes’” (Yılmaz 2007: 298). Shakman Hurd supports this analysis, particularly regarding secularism;

Secularisation, in this view, is the realisation of a Western religious tradition. Religion is part of the moral basis of Western civilisation. A significant implication of this authoritative discourse is that the secularist separation of religion from politics, and the democratic settlement of which it is a part, is perceived as an unique Western achievement that is superior to its non-Western rivals … The potential for secularisation is tied to a particular cultural identity, civilizational history and geographic location … (2006: 409–410)

As Yılmaz argues, “it is generally believed that Turkish secularism is fake, it is artificial, it has been assimilated by a small Westernised elite, it has not submerged into the ‘cultural genes’ of the larger Turkish society, and it has been protected only by the force of arms” (Yılmaz 2007: 300).

This construction of EU identity, then, also contains an ‘out group from within’; in this case Muslim immigrants from North Africa and Turkey (Risse, 2010: 54). From this point of view, then, the accession to the EU of a country like Turkey with a majority Muslim population is seen as highly problematic. As former Belgian prime minister and current permanent President of the European Council Herman van Rompuy argues, “The universal values which are in force in Europe, and which are also fundamental values of Christianity, will lose vigour with the entry of a large Islamic country such as Turkey” (Cited in Cronin 2010).

Thus, in this view, these norms are specifically the result of Western, or European, civilisation, and cannot easily be adopted by other civilisations, especially ‘Islamic’ civilisation. The concept of the democratic West is thus constructed against that of the ‘barbarous’ East. This is by no means a new idea. The ‘Orient’, particularly the Islamic East, has been a traditional and constitutive ‘Other’ for European or Christian identity. Although the concept of the Orient as an undemocratic and authoritarian ‘Other’ can be traced as far back as ancient Greece, it was the rise of Christianity in Europe and the subsequent threat posed by Islam to ‘Christendom’ due to the expansionist nature of neighbouring Islamic regimes at the time that developed and consolidated the image of the Near and Middle East as Europe’s principal ‘Other’.

Notably, such views also seem to be prevalent among large parts of the European public. Surveys among the European public tend to support a negative view of Islam, and indicate that many Europeans view Islam as being incompatible with ‘universal’ values. According to a German survey carried out in 2006, for instance, 83% of respondents agreed with the view that ‘Islam is driven by fanaticism’, 71% believed Islam to be intolerant, and, significantly, 61% considered Islam to be ‘undemocratic’ (Cited in Bardakoğlu 2008: 113). Europe-wide surveys support this negative view of Islam. In the 2006 Transatlantic Trends survey, for instance, 88% of respondents from the 9 EU countries included believed that the values of Islam are not compatible with democracy, rising to 95% and 98% in France and Germany respectively (Transatlantic Trends 2006). Therefore, as Kaya points out, “Islam is, by and large, considered and represented as a threat to the European way of life” (Kaya 2005).

In contrast to these arguments, research suggests that Turkish people do not significantly differ from those in the EU in their evaluation of democracy. As Dixon points out, “Contrary to Huntington’s clash of civilizations thesis, there are no civilizational divides in analyses of democratic values”. While Turkey does differ from the majority of EU states in its support for more religious and authoritarian values, there are no important differences in this regard with the Orthodox Member States (Greece, Romania and Bulgaria), perhaps as a consequence of Ottoman (or even Byzantine) rule. The only value on which there was a significant difference was in tolerance for minority rights, on which Turkish respondents scored considerably lower than their EU counterparts, perhaps because of the Kurdish issue (Dixon 2008: 694).

In addition, in a ‘cross-civilisational’ study, Norris and Inglehart found that both Western and Islamic countries were similar in their support for democratic ideals, and indeed, were more similar to each other in this respect than to most of the other ‘civilisations’ examined. Where there did appear to be a clear divide between ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’ was on issues relating to gender equality and sexual liberalisation, with Western countries generally more accepting of both (Norris and Inglehart 2002: 14–15).
In this framework Turkey is seen as inherently alien to European civilisation. This is succinctly put forward by former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who argues that the EU is a ‘civilisational project’ in which ‘Turkey has no place’. Turkish accession, then, is seen as a problem, or even a threat from this point of view. Former French President and President of the European Constitutional Convention Valéry Giscard d’Estaing expanded on this idea of how Turkey did not fit into ‘European civilisation’ as the European convention attempted to define it:

The European Convention sought a clearer definition of the foundations of this entity, which include the cultural contributions of ancient Greece and Rome, the religious heritage pervading European life, the creative enthusiasms of the Renaissance, the philosophy of the Age of the Enlightenment and the contributions of rational and scientific thought. Turkey shares none of these (2004; cited in Risse 2010: 218-219).

Such views have been echoed perhaps most notably by French President Nicolas Sarkozy:

I am in favour of signing a contract with Turkey. I am in favour of a joint market with Turkey. But I am against Turkey’s integration into Europe. Turkey is a small Asia. And there is no reason for it to be a part of Europe. In 25 years, Turkey’s population will be 100 million. Turkey is a great civilisation; but not a European one (Sarkozy 2007a).

Thus, supporters of this view have generally been in favour of offering Turkey a ‘privileged partnership’ rather than full EU membership. The Negotiation Framework adopted by the European Council in October 2005 reflects these concerns, emphasizing the ‘open-ended’ nature of the negotiations. The Negotiation Framework states that “while having full regard to all Copenhagen criteria, including the absorption capacity of the Union, if Turkey is not in a position to assume in full all the obligations of membership it must be ensured that Turkey is fully anchored in the European structures through the strongest possible bond” (European Council 2005). Thus, the possibility of alternative outcomes, such as a ‘privileged partnership’, is suggested in the document, and the EU’s absorption capacity is emphasized (Duyulmuş 2008: 28). This differs not only from the Negotiation Frameworks of the countries which acceded to the EU in 2004 and 2007, but also from that of Croatia, which was issued on the same date as Turkey’s (Aydın 2006: 7-8).

Conclusions
The concept of civilisation has played an important role in EU elite discourse concerning Turkey’s EU accession, and can be helpful in understanding the split in opinion between proponents and opponents of Turkish full membership of the EU. While both groups argue that the EU represents civilisation, the view of civilisation differs in each case. In the first view, civilisation is one and is potentially available to all. Thus, there is no obstacle to Turkish accession providing that it proves its ‘civilised’ nature by fulfilling the accession criteria. Indeed, Turkey would then be able to play a role in preventing a ‘clash of civilisations’ by proving that ‘civilised’ values can be adopted by a Muslim majority country.
In the second view, in contrast, civilisations are conceived of as plural, based on a historical and religious background and are mutually exclusive; thus it is difficult if not impossible for a country to switch civilisations. In this view, the EU and its values are perceived as based on 'European civilisation' with its foundations in Christianity, the classical world and later events such as the Renaissance and Enlightenment. In this discourse, then, Turkey is not seen as a suitable EU member as it belongs to a different civilisation – Islamic civilisation – which is based on values which are fundamentally different and incompatible with 'European' civilisation.

Given this opposition, and given that Turkey’s accession must be accepted unanimously, it thus seems logical to be pessimistic about Turkey’s prospects for full membership in the EU. However, a change of discursive strategy on the part of Turkey and its supporters may be helpful here. Instead of focusing on Turkey as a ‘bridge between civilisations’, which essentially emphasizes that it does not belong wholeheartedly to ‘European civilisation’, it may be more useful to argue for Turkey’s Europeanness. A focus on arguments of the civilisational constellations type may be useful in this regard. While this type of argument has been relatively unusual in support of Turkey’s accession, it can be seen in the discourse of some of its supporters. The Independent Commission on Turkey, for instance, has stressed cultural arguments for including Turkey in the EU. Instead of exploring the historical links between Islam and European civilisation, these arguments focus more specifically on Turkey as heir to Byzantium, Christianity and classical civilisation via the Ottoman Empire. According to this argument, then, Turkey is intimately intertwined with European cultural heritage (Independent Commission on Turkey, 2004: 15), in a way that other Muslim countries in North Africa and the Middle East, are not. In this view the Ottoman Turks became heirs not only to Byzantine and the Eastern Roman Empire, but also to a rich Greco-Latin and Judeo-Christian culture in Anatolia. Names such as the ‘father of history’, Herodotus of Halicarnassus; Aesop, who inspired La Fontaine’s fables; Lucullus, the patron of gourmets; Saint Nicholas, bishop of Myra and ancestor of our Father Christmas; and Croesus, who became the richest man of his time, are connected with this region, as are places like Troy, Pergamon, Ephesus, and Mount Ararat where Noah’s Ark came to rest. Saint Peter preached to the first Christian community in Antioch. Tarsus was the birthplace of Saint Paul, who made his first missionary journey to Anatolia, extending Christianity beyond the limits of Judaism and thereby laying the foundations of a worldwide religion. All this reminds us that the region which today is the heart of Turkey was one of the cradles of European civilisation (Independent Commission on Turkey 2004: 15).

References


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