European Media Coverage of Turkey’s Accession to the EU
A Literature Review

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1. Introduction:

Since its official application for full membership in 1987, Turkey's EU accession story has been a hot subject of debate in Europe. Research has been done around the media, public and politicians triangle in order to analyze how they see and voice their opinions about this process. There is evidence to prove that media have a significant role in shaping public opinion. As Luhmann puts it: ‘What we know about our society or even from the world in which we live in, we know it from the mass media.’ (in Walter&Albert 2006, p.9) Carey&Burton explain the link between the media, public and political parties in a European context by arguing that media messages may influence public opinion towards Europe when those messages are in line with the political parties (in Inthorn 2006, p.72).

It is also agreed that news media are one of the most important powers that define concepts of collectivity, in our case, the definition of 'being European' (Inthorn 2006). Moving on from this point, we see that Turkey's Europeanness is widely discussed among European public spheres (Tekin 2008). The Turkish candidacy brought forward a fruitful debate related to the definition of a European identity—its borders, memories related to it and the civilization on which it was built—. However, to be able to create a definition of the ‘Self’, there was the need to define 'the other'. (Tekin 2008)

Based on this discussion, this literature review aims at finding the commonalities and differences between the research done on the media coverage about Turkey's accession to the EU, which leads to a deliberation about the presence of a European public sphere and identity. The findings will be helpful to see not only how Turkey is perceived in different parts of Europe but also what it means to be European and the powers that define it in relation to Turkey.

In the first part of my literature review, I will examine the findings related to the coverage of Turkey’s accession, based on a civil and cultural discourse, which involves the historical and the religious debates. Then, I will evaluate scholars’ approach to the presence, definition and the nature of the European public sphere and identity. Finally, I will explain the shortcomings related to the research conducted, and this will lead to a conclusion with suggestions for further research.
2. Methodology:

To find suitable articles, google scholar and the digital library of the University of Amsterdam are used. Combined keywords such as ‘Turkey’s accession’ and ‘media’, ‘Turkey’ and ‘EU’ and ‘media’ are used in order to eliminate a large amount of articles only related to politics and history. The limited number of media related articles enables me to comment about the scarcity of research conducted in English language on this issue. Research conducted with different methodologies, ranging from frame analysis to critical discourse analysis are selected in order to have a broader perspective on the issue. Finally, a German article is added to the list as it brings a novel dimension to the discussion by introducing the term ‘transnational discourse’, which was found to be missing in other studies.

3. Common patterns related to the discourse about Turkey’s accession to the EU

When we look at the research conducted so far, we see that different methods complement each other in a sense that quantitative findings show the amount of the positive and negative coverage related to Turkey, frame analysis helps us to see the nature of the dominant frames and discourse analysis places the issue in a historical, cultural, political, sociological, psychological and temporal context (Tekin 2008). Most of the research covers the key moments in Turkey’s accession story like the Copenhagen Summit of 2002, or December 2004, when the start date of Turkey’s accession was being debated. (Negrine 2008; Wimmel 2005; Koenig et. al 2006) There are also broader time scopes -for instance- selected to analyze the discourse after the Helsinki Summit of 1999 until 2008 (Tekin 2008). Walter&Albert (2006) examining the change in discourse on a temporal level choose significant years (1962, 1987, 2000-2002) in European history. Research is mostly based on the press coverage and newspapers representing different ideologies are selected, however the evaluations are made based on the combinations of these results, representing nations.

When we look for the common thematic patterns, we see two types of interlinked discourses that dominate the coverage of Turkey’s accession. Next two sections are dedicated to the findings on these discourses namely, the civil and the cultural discourse.

3.1. The Civil Discourse:

Civil discourse is a political institutional discourse that defines the goals, which have to be fulfilled by a country to be eligible for EU accession. When the Copenhagen Criteria is concerned, the most prominent problems in Turkey’s case are related to democracy, minority rights, the violation of human rights, economy, the lack of pluralism, freedom of speech, and the discrimination of women (Inthorn 2006; Walter&Albert 2006).
Research shows that these deficiencies receive different coverage and the same structure of meaning is not found in all countries. Thus, researchers focus on the way different nations cover the bid related to the civil discourse in order to search for similarities and differences. All national coverages under analysis portray these as barriers in front of Turkey’s accession, however their interpretations differ according to the national, historical and cultural relations of these nations with the EU and Turkey respectively.

One of the first findings is the interlink between the civil and the cultural discourses. The civil discourse is rarely found to be devoid of any cultural implications. The framing analysis of the quality newspapers in Britain shows that only 37% of total reasons coded are related to the adverse economic impact of Turkey’s possible membership, whereas the emphasis on cultural, religious or human rights issues -which will be discussed in the following section- was higher (48%) (Negrine 2008, p.638). Another study about the British and German press coverage from 2001 to 2006 also shows that although the accession debate related to the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) is dealt with in a more inclusive and civil level, when it comes to Turkey, the civil discourse is linked to cultural components, which involves high levels of differentiation (Inthorn 2006). Keeping in mind the fact that many of the CEECs, with poorer economies were accepted in the EU without meeting all the necessary civil requirements, the power of the implicit cultural criteria used for Turkey can be observed (Inthorn 2006).

Various national interests of different countries are reflected on their changing approaches to the civil discourse about Turkey’s accession. The British press, together with the American and Turkish press treat Turkey’s civil deficiencies as problems that can be tolerated and treat the accession in a more inclusive and multicultural manner. Britain, teaming up with the United States, supports Turkey’s accession ‘in order to ease NATO and EU negotiations over Europe’s Common Security and Defence Policy and EU access to NATO assets’ (Inthorn 2006, p.77). Thus, the British press is more focused on the geopolitical and strategic advantages (26.8% of the coverage compared to 15.3% in Germany) when the civil discourse is concerned (Inthorn 2006, p.82). The fact that Turkey met the conditions for accession and waited for a long time are also used as supporting reasons (Negrine, et al. 2008). Negrine et al. (2008) comments about the nature and the limited amount of coverage in the British press, which is mostly based on reports from other European countries like France, Germany and Austria, saying that this is a sign of Britain’s political and cultural detachment from the collective idea of Europe and its willingness to situate itself away from continental Europe and a European Identity. However, this detachment does not stop the press from framing the issues related to culture negatively by quoting the European press, which neutralizes their supportive coverage of civil issues.
French press also reflects national interests and defines Turkey’s possible accession as an economic threat as it has cheaper products, labor and attractive locations for production (Koenig et al. 2006). There is limited coverage about the positive change that EU can bring to Turkey on an economic level (Negrine et al. 2008). Another research shows that Germany is also concerned with the European integration on a national level as it has an aim to protect its labor markets. However, there is support for Turkey’s accession as there is hope for solving social and political problems at home, especially the ones related to the Turkish immigrants (Inthorn 2006, p.76).

In the Greek press, we see the dominance of the Cyprus issue and the Turkish-Greek relations in the debate about Turkey’s accession, which is a sign of their domestication of European issues. The negative coverage in the civil debate outnumbers the positive (Negrine et al. 2008). Spanish press prefers to relate the civil discourse to history and shows its concern about the Armenian Genocide, the Kurdish demonstrations in Luxembourg against Turkey’s accession to the EU and the minority rights issues. They draw the image of Turks as sanguinary and question their suitability for the EU, commenting that the EU is rushing for a decision in a narcotized manner (Loukas 2006). The criticism is found to be harsher in the right-wing newspaper LaRazon, in which Turkey is openly shown as a threat to the EU with its past and present and a possible accession decision is defined as a ‘suicide’ for the EU (Loukas 2006).

Walter & Albert (2006) criticize the contemporary studies about Turkey’s accession, arguing that these interconnected, simultaneous and changing discourses have to be analyzed on a temporal level rather than treating them as historically stable and clear discourses. Looking at the coverage of three German newspapers, they show that an inclusive geostrategic discourse dominates the 60s. The deficits in democracy are tolerated and Turkey’s place in Europe is not questioned. In the 80s, Turkey is seen as an economic bridge between the West and the Islamic world. However, the bridge metaphor changes its nature after Turkey’s application for accession in 1987. Turkey starts to be associated with Islam, turban, foreign workers emigrating to Europe and conflict. After 2000, the debate about Turkish Europeanness is introduced and the accession is seen as a challenge. After 9/11, we see two camps, one supporting the accession because of Turkey’s geostrategic importance and the other finding this geostrategic position as a threat for Europe. With these examples, the influence of historical events and the changing nature of coverage in time and even within nations are made clear.

Shortly, when we look at the overall findings, researchers underline the importance of looking at the national discourse in various EU countries, which is usually linked to the historical, political and cultural relationship of these countries with the EU and Turkey. The countries under analysis differ from each other in terms of their national interests and this is
reflected on the civil discourse. The British and the German press seem to have a more positive attitude, whereas the French, the Greek and the Spanish press stand in opposition. Although there seems to be support for Turkey at a civil level, there is an embedded cultural ‘othering’, which changes the tone of coverage negatively.

3.2. The Cultural Discourse:

In contrast to civil identity, cultural identity is described by scholars as a concept that ‘represents a citizen’s sense of belonging to a particular group of shared cultural and social practices, ethics or even ethnicity’ (Inthorn 2006, p.82). Research shows that ‘cultural identity becomes an unofficial accession criterion’ (Inthorn 2006). Scholars argue that sharing cultural proximity with ‘old’ EU members is considered to be vital for a smoother acceptance of the applicant (Inthorn 2006). The media discourse related to the cultural differences shows the development of a cultural stock, based on which the ‘others’-in this case, Turkey- are evaluated in an exclusive manner (Madeker 2006, p.11). Cultural discourse is found to be more negative compared to the civil discourse.

For example, when we examine the British and German coverage of CEECs’ accession to the EU with Turkey’s, Turkey is rather represented as a cultural challenge for the EU, whereas CEECs are regarded as a natural part of Europe. In the French press, the electoral success of the Front National party in the 2002 presidential elections, together with problems related to illegal immigration, make the tone of coverage about Turkey more negative (Inthorn 2006). This leads to an in and out group formation. Thus, media coverage in France is found to be mostly based on culture and identity. With this cultural essentialist understanding of the ‘Self’, the emphasis on national values shows an increase (Inthorn 2006).

Therefore, the coverage of quality newspapers in Britain, France, Germany and Austria conveys that the civil enlargement debate comes secondary to the cultural debate (Walter&Albert 2006). When the findings are studied in more detail, we notice that the cultural discourse related to Turkey’s accession to the EU revolves around major concepts like history and religion. By scrutinizing the findings on each concept, a more accurate and lucid understanding of how the cultural process of ‘othering’ works can be reached.

3.2.1. The Historical Debate:

This debate is about ‘the references to a common past and (...) future destiny’ (Inthorn 2006, p. 75). The major frame of the historical debate is the ‘clash of civilizations’. Koenig et al. (2006) define the idea behind this frame as ‘different cultures and/or civilizations do not share any common values and cannot share a common political roof’ (p.155). Research, covering the
quality newspapers in Germany, France, Slovenia, Britain and the United States shows that ‘the clash of civilizations’ frame is found in all countries, the highest results being found in Germany, France and Slovenia. Considering the political decision made during the summit in December 2004 about Turkey’s accession, media seem not to be fully in support of British and German politicians, who state that it is vital to accept ‘a country of 70 million Muslims to ward off the so called ‘clash of civilizations’ (The Times in Inthorn 2006, p.83).

Judging from the dominant coverage, the modernization movement in Turkey seems to have done little to change the earlier historical memory, especially the one related to the Ottoman Empire (Negrine 2008). Neither the devotion to secularism nor the democracy in Turkey are seen as valid characteristics to be accepted by the selected national media as the implementation of these and the change they brought to Turkish people’s minds are questioned (Madeker 2006).

In the British press, there are references to the continental European history associated with the Ottomans like the Siege of Vienna in 1683. However, British press portrays it as the history of continental Europe, which is not shared by Britain. By choosing the negative coverage from other European countries, it is ‘othering’ both Turkey and continental Europe by not domesticating the issue and preferring to use exclusive foreign public opinion rather than giving space for domestic voices (Negrine 2008). Consequently, British press is criticized by researchers for being ‘a press that follows and does not lead’ (Negrine 2008, p.643) and the supportive civil discourse is outnumbered by this negative cultural discourse.

The historical links to the Ottomans are also visible in the French quality press. Turkish officials are portrayed as ‘Califes’ who lack the ‘fez’ or ‘turban’ (Tekin 2008, p.738) . We see comments like ‘Turks are once more at the gates of Vienna’, which resembles the media coverage in other EU countries discussed above (Tekin 2008, p.738). In the French press, a rhetorical discourse is observed, with metaphors of aggression and war related to history like the ‘Trojan Horse, ‘Janissaries’, or the ‘Sublime Porte’ (Tekin 2008, p.750). The Ottoman ‘other’, which is a historical construction is strengthened by attributing the same characteristics to Turkey. French press is constantly calling Turkey for repentance of the unpleasant moments in its history, however scholars argue that the same repentance is not expected from others like Latvia, which provided police officers to support the protective squadrons in the concentration camps (Tekin 2008).

The German press, by defining ‘being European’ based on a historical heritage, which dates back to Christian roots, Greek philosophy, the Age of Enlightenment, the Renaissance, the Roman Law and the Industrial Revolution, excludes Turkey (Madeker 2006, p. 9) .
When we look at the limited positive coverage related to history, we see the British press coverage underlining the shifting nature of identities and the possibility of transcending history by bringing cultural, political and social change (Negrine et al. 2008).

Thus, the historical debate contains parallelisms drawn between the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic and these two entities are used interchangeably. There is a dominant, exclusive debate, which underlines the presence of a common European historical heritage, which is not shared by the Turks as seen within the ‘clash of civilizations’ frame and the inclusive debate is limited.

3.2.2. The Religious Debate:

Looking at the emphasis on religion in the cultural discourse, a significant increase is observed after the 9/11 attacks, as a result of which Islam began to be seen as the ultimate other for the West (Walter & Albert 2006). British and German media coverage of Turkey’s accession bid shows that 30.2% of the articles related to the civil discourse included the terms ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’ (Inthorn 2006, p.84). Additionally, Christensen (2006) criticizes the unnecessary amount of religious symbols used as imagery for political news pieces. For example, in one headline from *The Guardian*, the visit of the Prime Minister Erdogan is reported by saying: ‘Turkey’s Islamic leader moves to reassure the West’, a headline which sounds more about the visit of a priest or another religious leader rather than a PM (p.65). This shows us the interconnectedness of the civil and cultural discourse related to Turkey’s accession to the EU.

Exclusive religious discourse mostly includes the comparison of the Christian Europe with Islamic Turkey in order to underline the differences, on the other hand there is a limited inclusive discourse which supports the unification of different civilizations under one political roof and sees EU as a more multicultural project (Koenig et al. 2006). Koenig et al. (2006) criticizes the exclusive coverage arguing that Islam is seen as a homogenous entity which is in opposition to concepts such as liberty, equality and secularism. Although Turkey shows suitability to the EU with its secular character, Turkey’s civil compatibility is rather debated on religious grounds by referring to secularism as a concept that cannot go together with Islam (Negrine 2008). However the links between the church and state in current EU countries is neglected and Turkey, with its secular nature is still portrayed as ‘inferior’, ‘different’, ‘threatening’ and ‘disturbing’ compared to the ‘Self’ (Tekin 2008, p.757). Islam is used as a threat to the Christian EU in the exclusive discourse. For instance, *Daily Telegraph* quotes a European commissioner, who says: ‘Turkey’s Muslim millions threaten EU values’ (Negrine 2008, p.638).
Stereotyping the Muslim world is another problem. For example, the Spanish newspaper *El ABC* uses headlines like ‘dying under the headscarf, rock, rope and sword’, filled with Orientalist symbols (Loukas 2006, p.4). Women are portrayed as passive and obedient, whereas men are sanguine and aggressive (Loukas 2006). Attributing terms such as aggressive, religiously stubborn and arrogant demonizes the ‘other’, whereas the ‘self’ is presented in a positive way. An example is found in the French press, which chooses adjectives for Europe such as ‘democratic, respectful, liberal, peaceful, and tolerant’ (Tekin 2008, p.739). In the British press as well, there is a default coverage on all Muslim countries as anti-Western, and anti-modern, with emphasis on religious piety (Negrine 2008).

Another popular trend is to portray Turkey as a country between ‘modernity’ and ‘backwardness’. We see examples in Spanish newspapers like El Pais, which contain pictures of a modern looking girl and another one with a headscarf posing for the camera together (Loukas 2006). Christensen (2006) touches the same issue and he criticizes the lack of context in political reporting related to Turkey in the British and the American press, stating that newspapers usually depend on cliches and create polarization -like ‘East-West, modern-traditional, European-Asian’- when reporting about Turkey (p.67). Christensen points this kind of ‘black and white’ reporting as the reason for the Western misunderstanding about the Muslim countries. He summarizes the depiction of Turkey in the British press as ‘super-rich Euro-trash driving SUVs, or pathetic fundamentalists living in rat-invested hovels.’, which does not obviously contribute to the positive image of the country. The area between these extremes are defined to be the ‘mental empty spaces’ for the Westerners, who solely follow the media to be informed about these places (p.69). Despite these criticisms about the British press, the exclusive religious discourse is found to be the highest in Germany, France and Slovenia and less so in the British and American press, which again reminds us of Britain’s detachment from the EU on a cultural level. Although the amount of positive coverage is not high enough, voices of support are still heard from the German press (Koenig et al. 2006).

Shortly, an exclusive approach dominates the religious discourse. There is a tendency to generalize the Muslim world and depict it as inferior and in constant conflict with the Western values. Turkey’s compatibility with the EU is questioned based on these religious values and Turkey is usually portrayed as a country, where backwardness meets modernity. There is also a biased inclination in the media under focus to rely on religious Oriental symbols while reporting about Turkey’s accession. Hence, the embedded cultural discourse in the civil discourse is made clear.
4. European Identity:

The discussions related to the civil and cultural discourse, which have a major role on Turkey’s accession process to the EU, bring us to the questions regarding the definition and the role of a European identity. Media’s powerful role in the creation of an ‘imagined community’ is a widely acknowledged idea (Koenig et al. 2006, p.150). Scholars highlight media’s role in the reinforcement of a European identity, if one, accepted by all exists at all.

4.1. Does a European Identity Exist?

When we look at the statistics related to the citizens’ level of attachment to the EU, we see that people in the UK, Greece and the Netherlands are the least attached. The level of detachment is found to be in positive correlation with the strength of national identity (Negrine 2008). News coverage is also known to have an effect on the level of attachment to the idea of a common European identity, changing across nations and in time. As Schlesinger argues, in order for a common European identity and a European public sphere to evolve, first, we need the dissemination of the European news agenda in different nations. Secondly, news have to be domesticated for them to be a part of everyday life. Thirdly, citizens should develop transcending identities, not only linked to their nations but also to the over-arching idea of Europe (in Negrine 2008).

Judging from the findings, the dissemination of the European issues across nations is visible, at least in the case of Turkey’s accession process. However, the domestication issue is not equally observable in all countries. For example, in the British press, there is a strong detachment from the European continent and any domestic involvement with the formation of a European identity is just missing (Negrine 2008; Wimmel 2005). British press, rather treats it as a foreign issue as opposed to the German, French and Greek press, in which domestication occurs at a higher level and transnationalization of news is generated by making cross-references to the coverage in other countries and combining them with the national views (Wimmel 2005). Additionally, considering the findings of the European Commission, it can be argued that Schlesinger’s third point, which requires citizens’ attachment to the idea of Europeanness, seems to be problematic as a large number of European citizens still prefer to define themselves in relation to their national identities (in Negrine 2008). This shows that it is not possible to talk about a collective European identity yet, as there is not a unified picture in all countries.

4.2. The Definition and the Nature of the European Identity:

When asked about what Europe means to them, citizens answer saying it is about ‘peace, harmony, the fading historical divisions and cooperation between similar peoples and cultures,
borderlessness, circulation of citizens, a common civic area, new policy making and prosperity’. It is also about being a member of a common European civilization, ancestry, history, destiny and a society with many languages and cultures (Inthorn 2006, p.71). Researchers agree that with Turkey’s accession process, a new debate emerged not only about the borders of Europe but also about the commonalities and differences Europeans share (Tekin 2008). However, in order to define the ‘Self’, to know the ‘other’ was necessary. At this point, it is important to keep in mind the temporal, and shifting nature of identities. Starting its peaceful process of evolving by taking its own past as the first ‘other’, Europe develops in time with its changing ‘others’ like Russia, the Ottoman Empire and now Turkey, which brings us to a time, when Europe begins to question its limits of inclusiveness (Walter&Albert 2006).

In order to assess Turkey’s eligibility, all the elements in the definition of being a European has been placed under scrutiny. Findings do not suggest the complete non-existence of a European identity and a European public sphere, although the coverage in different nations differ according to their national considerations (Negrine 2008), the pressure brought to the EU with the idea of every new member in the family, creates a strong necessity to redefine and reinvent itself constantly. However, the accession process of the new candidate, Turkey, creates a greater tension as it requires a higher level of reinvention and change (Negrine et al. 2008). Although differences exist, the debate within the triangle of media, politics and the public, seems to contribute to the creation of a common European identity and a European public sphere. Scholars argue that the process of a European identity building is a discourse and language based process and underline the sometimes conflicting, sometimes parallel discourses aimed against the ‘other’. As it is a highly media dominated discourse, what media chooses to portray gains vital significance. In Turkey’s case, when the overall results are analyzed, an exclusive European identity building dominates the national media under focus (Walter&Albert 2006). However, the ‘we’ feeling embedded in the media discourse, still contradicts the detachment observed among the citizens, which so far lacks empirical evidence.

5. Shortcomings of the Research Conducted About Turkey’s Accession Process:

One of the most important problems related to the research conducted so far is the limited number of countries under analysis. Research generally revolves around German, France and Britain, and the findings are generalized to all EU countries. It is not feeble to make generalizations as there is even room for differences within nations.

Another problem is the limited type of medium under focus. By primarily relying on the press coverage, researchers refrain from focusing on other significant media such as TV and internet. However, habits related to media use in different countries should be kept in mind for
selecting the most influential and widely used medium from each country to reach the most viable results.

Among scholars, politicians and journalists, there is also a tendency to use Europe and the EU interchangeably, which may lead to the blurring of definitions and concepts, which are already found to be vague.

One other problem is the lack of empirical research conducted in English related to such a hot topic. Audience research is also highly necessary in order to evaluate media effects on this topic, as the audience will be given a direct voice during the final voting for Turkey’s accession via the referendums as decided by some countries like Austria.

6. Conclusion:

Reviewing the research on Turkey’s accession process to the EU, we see how the European media comes to terms with the issue. Although it will not be right to generalize the findings from a couple of countries to the whole of Europe, we can still discuss their commonalities and differences. The different approaches to the civil discourse -some inclusive, some exclusive- based on national interests and the level of domestication of European news give us a clue about the evolving nature of a collective European identity and a European public sphere. More commonalities are observed in the cultural debate, where different countries show a similar coverage by relying on common frames such as the clash of civilizations and referring to the Ottoman Empire, disregarding the current modernization movements while reporting about Turkish politics. A common European historical heritage is situated against Turkey, seen as the continuation of the Ottoman Empire and an exclusive discourse is created based on the differences. The religious debate consists of an Orientalist discourse, with generalizations of the Muslim world and depictions of it as inferior and threatening. It is observed that the mostly-exclusive cultural discourse is embedded in the civil discourse, which places Turkey in the place of a permanent ‘other’, against which Europe debates about its own ‘Self’.

The dissemination of the European news agenda in these countries under focus and the domestication of news in some countries are signs of a European identity and European public sphere in the making. Thus, Turkey’s accession to the EU is significant to analyze, as it leads to fruitful debates not only about Turkey’s eligibility but also about how Europe defines itself currently in relation to the ‘other’. However the effect of this ‘we’ versus ‘them’ distinction on the European audience is dubious as most of them still hang on to their national identities and refrain from talking about a common European identity. Yet, there is evidence for a strong lack of support from the public for Turkey’s accession.
To be able to see the larger picture, further research needs to be done, including other European countries. It should be supported with audience research to analyze the effects of the coverage on the audience as well as the power relationships between the media, politics and public triangle on a European level, rather than making generalizations based on a couple of countries.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


