

Representations and Othering in Discourse: The Construction of Turkey in the EU Context

By Beyza C. Tekin

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Notwithstanding its somewhat misleading title, this book focuses exclusively on the representations of Turkey in the French debate about Turkey's EU accession bid. Part I of the book focuses on the historical dimension and context of the French debate. Part II goes on to apply Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to this debate. CDA is concerned with "the relationship of language to other elements of social processes and power" (p.15), and draws on the contents of speeches, debates, media reports, and the like. The book adds to the growing literature on the role of identity in politics, and on how these are constructed. In particular, it explores the relationship between Self and Other in the French political discourse on Turkey.

As Tekin argues, the French debate matters, both because of the centrality of France to the EU but also because France is strongly associated with opposition to Turkey's EU accession. Tekin's discussion of the background and context to French attitudes is especially pertinent, and rather impressive. She notes how a French inclination to conflate the idea of "France" with that of "Europe" has been undermined both by changes in Europe and in France itself – notably through mass immigration, especially of Muslims, and challenges to the "one and indivisible" republican values, such as secularism and fraternity. Furthermore, the French imagination of Europe has been prone to equate it to "Christendom" and to cultural

and philosophical values especially associated with France, such as the Enlightenment.

France could cope with the idea of Turkey's inclusion in a *Europe des Patries*. However, as the EU began toying with federalism and with a more civilizational idea of what is Europe, the French have begun to doubt the desirability of Turkey's EU accession. As the prospect of Turkish accession neared, the French debate about Turkey intensified. This debate has a rich, complex and hopelessly contradictory vein of historical and contemporary imagery from which to call upon. It incorporates the Crusades, the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, the powerful Muslim Ottoman enemy at the gates, France's sixteenth century diplomatic ally, the welcoming refuge for Jews expelled from Iberia, Ottoman tolerance for the empire's religious and ethnic diversity, the declining sick man of Europe, a republic drawing inspiration from French secularism, the Armenian atrocities, the repression of the Kurds, the Cold War partner, and the Muslim world's most democratic and progressive polity. Turks can be represented as exotic, oriental, cruel, martial, tolerant, backward, stoic, youthful and enterprising. For French (and other European) Christian Democrats in particular, committed as they are to an essentially Christian idea of what is Europe and feeling beleaguered by Muslim immigration and the social and racial tensions with which it is associated, Turkey can also be seen

as the battering ram for Europe's creeping Islamification.

Tekin's wonderfully researched book serves as an invaluable repository for this panoply of French images of Turkey and Turks and of the manner in which they are employed, and it is this that makes it such a rewarding read. It superbly illustrates how the selective use of history and the manner of its articulation can support essentialist opposition to Turkey's EU accession as well as its integration. Images of Turkey exist on a continuum, from the negative Other to the positive Self, from the very definition of non-Europe at one end to the positioning of Turkey as integral to the very idea of Europe at the other. However, it is also at this juncture that one can part company from Tekin's approach. Even in France, opposition to Turkey's EU accession is far from universal. Furthermore, images of Turkey have changed over time, and will continue to change. As Tekin notes, "the fervent opposition to Turkey's EU membership, and the recognition of the Turkish Other as a threatening, dangerous entity can undergo change" (p.215-6).

Furthermore, the discourse about Turkey varies from EU country to EU country. In the UK - for example - itself an Other for that strand of French opinion that sees it as a Trojan Horse for the US, as maritime and global rather than continental and European, as more inclined towards multiculturalism and less to assimilation, as preferring inter-governmentalism to federalism - Turkey is presented rather differently. It is not that the negative discourse does not exist - it does. However, the tone is altogether more positive, and the support for Turkish accession more enduring. This leads to two

critical questions about this book. The first question, what exactly does CDA bring to the table? Doesn't it go without saying that the historical record offers a rich mix of overlapping, competing, reinforcing, and contradictory narratives and images? Doesn't it also go without saying that we "construct" our "truths" and discourses by the way in which we interpret and select from that record?

Secondly, if, as Tekin asserts, "there is always the possibility of change" (p.215) in the way in which Turkey is represented, what might induce such a change? Turks also possess a discourse, which sometimes constructs a European Other, a "Christian Club," which refuses their country's EU accession for the essentialist reason that Turkey is Muslim. Indeed, this book could reinforce that discourse, inadvertently or otherwise. However, what if Turkish democracy consolidated and its judiciary became independent and impartial? What if Turkey did not throw journalists in jail or ban political parties? What if its political and social atmosphere became more tolerant and less polarised, and the rights of its minorities better protected? What if Turkey were to be a bit more like France or the UK - if, in other words, if it seemed rather more like Europe's Self and rather less like its Other? Then, and notwithstanding Turkey's headscarves and mosques, wouldn't Europe's discourses, including that of France, be more encouraged to utilise those images and representations that construct a more positive assessments of Turkey's EU accession credentials? There are truths as well as representations, and this book overlooks them.

Bill Park, *Kings College, London*