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# The European Union and Turkey

An analysis of identity politics in the European Commission and European Parliament

Bacheloroppgave i Europastudier

Veileder: Jan Henrik Meyer

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Kunnskap for en bedre verden



## **Table of content**

1. Introduction
2. Theoretical framework
3. Method
4. Analysis part 1: Commission's Turkey 2016 Report
5. Analysis part 2: European Parliament plenary debate
6. Conclusion
7. References
8. Appendix: MEPs present during the plenary debate

## Introduction

After nearly 20 years of accession negotiations between the European Union (EU) and Turkey, the EU concluded in 2018 that due to negative developments in the judiciary system in Turkey, the negotiations had come to a standstill (European Commission, 2019). After an attempted – and failed – military coup in 2016, the Turkish government limited fundamental freedoms, human rights, freedom of speech, and the power held by the democratic institutions (European Commission, 2019). Eller: President Erdogan relieved Parliament from its power, and removed the position of Prime minister, transferring several areas of power to himself (European Commission, 2019: 9). By doing so, the president made sure that Turkey was not compatible with the democratic values the EU is built upon.

Being a country in both Europe and Asia, the Turkey-question is complex. The debate of whether Turkey is European or not has been going on since the nation first sought membership in the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1959 (Dinan, 2014:324; MacMillan, 2018). The nation is predominantly Muslim and borders several other Muslim and war-torn nations in the Middle East. They have an ongoing occupation of Cyprus – a member of the EU – linking them directly to the EU, and they share borders with Greece (European Commission, 2019). On the other hand they host 4 million Syrian refugees, linking them to the Middle-East and Asia (European Commission, 2019: 7). The nation's population of around 76 million people would mean that if they were granted membership, they would outnumber all EU countries expect for Germany (and in time even them, due to stronger population growth) and have a lot of power in the shaping of the EU through a high number of seats in the European Parliament (Pahre & Ucaray-Mangitli, 2009, Wimmel, 2006). This is a threat to the established powers of the EU. The religious differences and anti-Muslim prejudices in Europe also contribute in creating fear of Turkey (Dinan, 2014: 324).

Through this essay I shall look into a specific milestone in the latter part of the negotiations: the European Commission's (EC) Turkey report of 2016 and the following plenary debate in the European Parliament (EP). The aftermath of the coup was considered a concerning development by the EU, and for the first time, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) called for suspending or freezing the accession negotiations (European Parliament, 2016a). In her opening speech of the debate, High Representative of Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini said: "I believe [this debate] will be essential to shaping the future of our relations with Turkey" (Mogherini, 2016). A statement that makes the debate a natural place to perform an analysis, alongside the report, to try and find answers to the topic of this essay.

Based on these two EU events, I will analyze the discourses in the European Parliament and the Commission's report to try to find traces of identity politics in the way the EU talks about Turkey. A definition of both identity politics and identity follows in a later section. Is identity politics at play when the EU discuss the coup and the new direction of Erdogan?

The theoretical framework in this essay is constructivism. This theory focus on identity, values and ideas and how this shapes political actors and their decision-making (Sarugger, 2014: 145). Ideologically the EU is based on liberalist traditions, while Turkey – after having tried for years to prove to the EU that they can be democratic - seem to be moving backwards in an autocratic direction.

The analysis is divided in two parts; an analysis of the Turkey report, and a discourse analysis based on statements from MEPs in the EP debate. We can assume that the Commission, as the EU's "face" in accession negotiations will use a diplomatic and somewhat neutral language. I do not necessarily expect to find any radical statements revealing identity politics and fear of otherness, but hope to be able to outline what the EU consider central values – and how Turkey contradicts these. Chances of MEPs speaking in a little less correct manner are higher, as they represent political views and ideas, and they are in a debate to discuss Turkey giving room for more nuanced and personal opinions as they aspire to find a common solution to the problem. The two parts of the analysis thus have a slightly different focus; the Turkey report is mainly used to find the EU's values, while the debate will seek to reveal identity politics in play. Due to these differences, it will be interesting to compare their statements.

There are five main parts in this essay: introduction, method, analysis of Turkey 2016 report, and analysis of EP debate, with a conclusive section at the end. The section of method presents the theoretic framework and some theoretic foundations (brief history of EU-Turkey relations, identity/identity politics, etc.) that will be relevant for the analysis.

The essay is summarized in the end, and the main findings outlined. Then follows a list of references, and at last an Annex to provide the reader with a list of all MEPs present in the plenary debate. The MEPs are listed by party affiliation, country and stand on accession negotiations (keep open/freeze/suspend).

### **Theoretical framework:**

#### *Brief history of EU-Turkey relations*

After signing the Treaty of Rome in 1957, Turkey was among the first countries to show interest in membership of the EEC, sending their application in 1959 (Macmillan, 2018; Dinan, 2014: 324). Membership negotiations opened in 2005, and despite efforts on the Turkish side to align with the EU, no severe progress was actually made. No enlargement has been debated as much, and several leaders of existing member states (MS) have called for other ways of relationship – like a "privileged partnership" – rather than membership (de Vreese, van der Brug and Hobolt, 2012). Turkey has done major efforts to align with the EU *acquis*<sup>1</sup>, but in recent years there has been concerning backsliding in areas of democracy and human rights, causing the relationship to sour (MacMillan, 2018). This despite a cooperation-deal on controlling refugees and immigration between the two parties in 2015, where Turkey agreed to prevent immigrants reaching Europe in exchange for significant economic relief (Icoz, 2016). Although this agreement is in troubled waters as of early 2020 (BBC, 2020), by 2016 it was still standing steadily.

#### *Framework on EU-Turkey relations*

A common fear of Turkish membership is founded in their population size – growing to be the largest population in the EU – and the influence it would hold in voting situations (Pahre and Ucaray-Mangitli, 2009; Erisen and Erisen; 2014). Opposition to Turkish membership was eminent in the French vote against the Constitution treaty in 2005<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> The EU *acquis* are the body of rules and obligations that are binding to all EU member states (Eur-Lex, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> The EU tried to establish a common European constitution through the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe. This was rejected by France and the Netherlands, and thus never entered into force (European Parliament, 2020a)

and has also been electoral issues in both Germany and Austria (Pahre and Ucaray-Mangitli, 2009). It was a central issue for the Leave-side of the Brexit campaign as well (Vote Leave, 2016).

Gerhards and Hans (2011) conducted a study-of EU citizens in all 27 MS and their attitude towards Turkish membership. They found that despite Turkey's rather considerable efforts to align with the Copenhagen-criteria<sup>3</sup> and democratic measures, only one-third of EU citizens actually favored Turkish accession (Gerhard and Hans, 2011). Only four countries had a majority in the population in favor of membership, and the support was lowest in Austria (5.6%) and Germany (17.1%). 68 % of the interviewees agreed that "the cultural differences between Turkey and the EU MS are too significant to allow it to join the EU" (Gerhard and Hans, 2011).

Syed Kamall, MEP for the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), says in the EP debate that "We [the European Union] have dishonestly dangled the prospect of EU membership in front of Turkey. You and I know there are so many reasons why it may never happen in our lifetime [...]" (Kamall; European Parliament, 2016c). With the majority of MS populations not wanting Turkish membership, and prominent MS leaders (Germany, France) opposing it, there might never have been any real prospects of membership for Turkey – despite the EU's good intentions in the early 2000s.

## **Method**

This is a qualitative study of the role of identity politics in EU-Turkey relations. I will base the analysis on two cases from 2016: the Commission's Turkey report (European Commission, 2016), and the plenary session in the European Parliament debating Turkey on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2016 (European Parliament, 2016b).

The nature of this paper sets clear limits to the length of my analysis, and therefore also to the amount of research. The relationship between EU and Turkey lasted as previously mentioned from 1959 up until 2018 (Dinan, 2014: 324-325; European Commission, 2019). Clearly, I am not able to analyze all the information within this time span. Therefore, while there are many important milestones in the relationship between the EU and Turkey, I have chosen to focus my analysis on the two events from 2016. This is the year the military coup in Ankara took place (European Commission, 2016: 8). Turkey's reaction to the coup caused great distress within the EU, leading the MEPs for the first time to call for suspending negotiations (European Parliament, 2016a). The Commission spoke in their report about "backsliding" in several areas, and the fact that the Commission are so concerned about these developments, suggests that they are at clash with what the EU consider to be central values. The debate centers largely on values, making it a natural place to start searching for identity politics at play.

As this essay will focus mainly on identity politics, I will only analyze some of the 2016 report. The report is of considerable length, and not all is relevant. My analysis will focus on the first three major components; introduction, political criteria and enhanced political dialogue, and economic criteria. The chapters are chosen because of their subject, and amounts to approximately half of the report. When discussing the role of identity politics in accession negotiations, subjects like "transport and infrastructure" are not considered

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<sup>3</sup> The Copenhagen Criteria is a list of three main criteria prospering member states must fulfill before they are fully admitted as members. They include the guarantee of a functioning democracy with respect of human rights, a solid free market economy able to keep up with the market forces in the EU, and accept the obligation of EU-membership (Dinan, 2014: 258).



relevant. Identity politics, being focused on politics of social groups, identity etc. are closer related to the subjects chosen for this essay.

The plenary debate in the European Parliament is video recorded and transcribed by the EP (European Parliament, 2016c). It is a correct transcription of what the MEPs said during the debate, but it is not translated. This gives the statements credibility, but also limitations in my understanding of some of the languages, making it necessary to use the Google translate tool for some of the statements. As there may be flaws in these translations, I have made comparisons with the live translation in the video recording of the debate, to ensure a satisfying match.

### *Discourse analysis*

The second part of the analysis will focus on the discourses given by MEPs during the plenary debate. Sometimes the MEPs may utter words that seem diplomatic and neutral, but the way they say it speaks otherwise. A discourse analysis is traditionally concerned with language and utterances in use, and on analyzing the talk and text in context (Howarth, 2000). Michel Foucault, an important discourse scholar, focused in 1987 on how discourses are shaped by social practices, which in turn shape social institutions and relations (Howarth, 2000). When conducting a discourse analysis, I will therefore analyze and discuss what the MEPs say and how their discourses shape the relationship between the EU and Turkey. As the language might not be clear, I will have to read between the lines of what is being said in order to uncover traces of identity politics.

### *Theoretic foundation*

The most relevant theoretic foundation to identity politics is constructivism. Constructivism address the question of how ideas affect and dominate political actors and their decisions (Sarugger, 2014: 145). World-views, background, norms and values, collective understandings and memories of political actors will shape political decisions and outcomes (Sarugger, 2014: 145). Identity consists of several of the factors just mentioned, making it a good platform for my analysis. The core idea of constructivism is that 'social reality is constructed and reproduced through permanent interaction between social agents' (Sarugger, 2014: 146). In other words, the relationship between EU and Turkey are shaped by the actors involved, and the ideas of the actors. Against this backdrop, it is relevant to study how the identity constructions are used as arguments in the political debate.

Several important definitions and distinctions are necessary to do this correctly, among them being identity, ideology and identity politics itself. Ideology and identity are closely linked, the first affecting the latter. The kind of ideology held by the society you live, may affect your impression on whether values should be considered right or wrong, and which form of government is best (Heywood, 2014: 3-5). An ideology claims to have found the truth of how a system can be organized in the best way possible (Heywood, 2014: 5). The EU is founded on liberal ideology, emphasizing freedom of religion and speech, and the fundamental human rights (European Commission, 2016: 5). Having this liberal ideology and finding it to be the truth, allows the EU to push these thoughts onto prospering member states. After all, if they have knowledge of the best way to organize a state, do they not owe to others to share it? The EU nations therefore share a common world-view founded in the liberalist idea and human rights. Turkey, however, is a Muslim country based on Islamic traditions, with very little shared memory with Europe, placed geographically more in Asia than in Europe. While they for years tried to become

democratic in order to qualify for EU membership, Erdogan has shifted the nation's ideological focus towards the autocracy, where power is more centralized in the hands of the one/the few. These opposing views on ideology may help create fear of the other, as the EU now seem to be very concerned by the ideological turn in Turkey.

### *About identity and identity politics*

Identity politics is often defined as political mobilization based on social and cultural groups – like gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. – rather than mobilizing around party affiliation and manifestos (Béland, 2017; Bernstein, 2005). These groups consider themselves minorities and aim to enhance their own standing in society by gaining rights, understanding, social standing, and so on.

During the 2016 US election, Republican candidate Donald Trump had been frequently using the slogan "make America great again". His strategy was based on enhancing the feeling of Americanness within the citizens, so that he could appeal to large groups all over the American population (Abdi, 2018). This proved to be beneficial as he managed to beat his opponent, Hillary Clinton. She focused more on so-called neglected groups (blacks, latino, gays & lesbians, etc.), and may have focused too narrow on these identity-based groups (Abdi, 2018). She did not appeal to the Americanness in the same way as Donald Trump.

Identity politics in the EU is not as easily defined. The EU is not one, but many nations. Where US politicians can simply draw on the Americanness of their citizens and the American identity, the EU first has to establish a European identity *next to* the already existing national identity. A European identity would mean the creation of a collective sense of "us". When the EU member states gain a sense of collectiveness and similarity it will in consequence lead to solidarity for each other (Fliegstein et. Al., 2012). But the EU needs support from the European people to legitimize their work. Creating "one" people is difficult in the EU, as they attempt to merge people from 27 nations with different identities in areas such as culture, traditions, language, social class, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, etc. (Fliegstein et al., 2012; Checkel and Katzenstein, 2009). Becoming "European" could be a threat to the already existing national and cultural identity. The European identity is mostly in terms of rights and privileges, not culture and tradition.

During the Parliamentary debate, MEPs frequently mentions the so-called "European values" without specifying what this term actually means. Because of this confusion I use the Commission's report to gather what I can see to be the main values of the EU. I do this without assuming that all MEPs refer to the same set of values as the Commission, or even as each other, but in order to outline values general to the EU. These can be summarized into two categories:

- Civic: Democracy, freedom of expression, judicial security and independence, anti-corruption
- Normative: Culture, heritage, religion, gender, traditions, language, etc.

The normative identity is close to that of ethnicity, and has a sense of exclusiveness in that you belong to a group based on criteria that cannot be easily gained. Nationality through citizenship can be earned, but being for instance ethnically Norwegian is based on parents, birth-place, heritage, etc. I have chosen to use the term normative identity as it is based on features of ideas and traditions. Civic identity is related to rights and politics (Fliegstein, et. Al, 2012). EU citizens are citizens because of political criteria, not because the nations of Europe suddenly stopped existing and the whole continent

became one nation. The normative identity of a Spanish man differs from that of a Romanian woman in terms of the above-mentioned features, but they share the civic identity of being European citizens. The values central to the EU are largely civic.

EU values are often showed as a contrast to what Turkey does. This is said by both EC report and by MEPs: "This [Turkey's actions] is not in compliance with European values" (Mr. Verhofstadt, section 9). The European values are constructed by the EU in their search for European unity (Kaiser, 2015). These values are supplementary to the national values, and per 2004 only a small percentage of EU citizens actually felt "European" (Fliegstein, Polykova and Sandholtz, 2012). In a social constructivist perspective, it still makes sense to view these values as real, and as arguments to justify – or not justify – specific policies. When the EU try to force democracy onto Turkey, they do this based on what they themselves consider crucial to a functioning state. This is a way of legitimizing what they require.

The civic identity of the EU is rather easy to map out, as the EU openly advocates the importance of these values. The Copenhagen criteria that coming member states have to adapt in their home country, sets a stable democracy to be an ultimate need in order to approve accession (Dinan, 2014: 258). On normative terms however, it is a little more complicated. When it comes down to shared history and common memory, creating a single narrative for Europe as a whole is very difficult. The EU arose after WW2 and Holocaust, and so the "liberation" of Europe can be said to have started after that (Leggewie, 2009). But for Eastern Europe, liberation were not until the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, and therefore even within Europe the collective memory is widely different (Leggewie, 2009). Religion, values, culture and traditions are also part of the normative identity. Europe is historically Christian. The Christian democracy has a strong role, and is still a large part of European political life. Turkey being a Muslim country funded on Muslim values pose a religious threat to the foundation of Europe. Being a Muslim country will also lead to different traditions and a different culture, which seems to clash with the traditions and culture of Europe. I acknowledge that there is not one culture for all of Europe. The differences are vast across the continent. Comparing Sweden, Hungary and Spain it is clearly big differences in both traditions and culture. The essay will still build upon this generalization in order to simplify discussion.

With this theoretic and contextual framework in mind, I will begin my analysis. The first section is regarding the Commission report, where the goal is to outline central values in the EU. Then follows the plenary debate, where I seek to find more clear traces of identity politics.

### **Analysis part 1: European Commission's Turkey 2016 Report**

The European Comission's Turkey report of 2016 is mainly ~~focused~~ focuses on how Turkey is aligning with the *acquis*, but also contain sections with information about the coup and the aftermath of this. I will use the report to outline values important to the EU. Values are central to defining identity (Fliegstein, Polykova and Sandholtz, 2012). Therefore, in finding the EU's values, I also hope to discover features the EC consider to be a European identity.

Commissioner Johannes Hahn says during the parliamentary debate that "our annual report on Turkey has shown the facts objectively". But is there such a thing as objectivity? The EU, from a constructivist point of view, have a set of shared values. The EU politicians also have backgrounds with some similarity, and they are raised to learn and believe the liberal democracy to be the "correct" organization of state. This belief about democracy is presented through both the report and the debate. The facts presented in the report may be objective in that they are truthful to the events that took place, but they are not objective in that they are free from personal opinions of how things "should be". It is very clear, both in the report and the debate, that the EU have certain principles they consider to be true. Erdogan seems to have other principles he believes to be true for Turkey. He might say that the EU is objectively wrong in their assumptions about how Turkey should be governed. He, after all, is a result of a culture that is different from the EU, and is raised in a different context of geopolitics, religion and society. This has ultimately also shaped his view of the world differently.

The following are the main values that I found throughout the report<sup>4</sup>:

- Democracy as the proper way to govern (2016: 5)
- Independence of the judiciary from the state (2016: 5-6)
- Gender equality (2016: 8, 15, 59, 74-75)
- Freedom of speech (2016: 26-27, 71)
- LGBTI-rights (2016: 6, 73-76)
- Freedom of worship (2016: 72-75)
- Transparency and right to access information (2016: 15-16, 27)
- Right to life (causing abolition of death penalty) (2016: 70)
- Respect for human rights (2016: 24-25)
- Education for all (2016: 86)

These values paint a picture of the EU as a tolerant, open, democratic union with deep respect for human rights, freedom to live life as one wants, with a reliable and transparent judiciary system.

What the Commission outlines is mostly elements of *civic* rights. In the section "judiciary and fundamental rights", the Commission mentions several groups they claim would not to be allowed the same fundamental rights in Turkey, as other groups, in particular the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) community (European Commission, 2016: 73-76). There is also discrimination on grounds of religion – directed towards Jews and Christians – and towards women, children, Kurds and the Roma population (European Commission, 2016: 70-77). When the EU speaks up and promotes the social situation of these groups, it bears traces of identity politics. These groups have already been fighting for their position within the EU for a long time, while some – like the Roma – still have not achieved equal social status as other groups. The different groups do not have equal rights and situation all across the EU either; some countries are more conservative than others and therefore groups like the LGBTI-movement still

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<sup>4</sup> There are of course more values in the report than are listed here, but these are the values that are considered relevant to the thesis. Values regarding trade, economy etc. are therefore not listed.

struggle in certain parts of Europe. This, however, shows that the EU does care about identity politics when they make it a supranational priority to lift these groups forward.

Almost all of the values listed above are presented in a negative context, i.e. that these are unfulfilled commitments on Turkey's side. When the EU talks about gender equality, they simultaneously criticize the Turkish approach to achieve this. When speaking about the importance of transparency in government and budgets, they argue that Turkey cannot fulfill the criterium. Turkey is pictured as rather grim in comparison to the EU's openness and tolerance.

The EU has a legitimate right to demand that Turkey ~~to~~ align with their criteria for membership. The Copenhagen criteria states that they must accept all obligations of membership (Dinan, 2014: 258), and in doing so they must respect values such as gender- and LGBTI-rights. However, it does not seem that denying to fulfill this is in itself enough to call off the negotiations. What seems like the turning point – both here and in the plenary debate in the EP – is if Erdogan were to reintroduce the death penalty. The death penalty is a violation of the right to life. The turn towards autocracy also seems crucial, as several MEPs mention this during the debate. The Commission mentions the death penalty briefly as a concern (European Commission, 2016: 70), but provides no plan of action in the case it is in fact reinstated.

While the Commission may be careful to actually call Turkey "them" and make this terminology obvious, there are certainly traces of an "us vs. them-policy" in the report. By listing requirements and claims that the EU demands of a prospering member, they create a difference and a need to change in order to be "like us (the EU)" and thereby one of "us", not one of "them". As we move on to the next section – the plenary debate – we will see that this separation between the EU and Turkey is even clearer in how the MEPs talk about the issue.

## **Analysis part 2: European Parliament plenary debate**

In this section I aim to analyze different discourses – statements – made during the plenary debate in the European Parliament about Turkey on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2016. Represented in the debate are the main political parties of the EP, as well as High Representative of Foreign and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, and Commissioner Johannes Hahn. I will try to uncover "us vs. them"-terminology, and otherwise look for traces of identity politics within the discourses. "Us vs. them" suggests that there are differences, and it is a way for the EU to push Turkey further away by saying that "they do not comply with what we are looking for; they are not like us". It is also important to distinguish *who* the EU talks about when they say "Turkey"; is it Erdogan and his government, the Turkish people, or Turkey as a country?

### *About the groups in the European Parliament*

The European Parliament is organized in transnational groups based on party affiliation: the MS politicians are placed in the group closest to their national political party (European Parliament, 2020b; McElroy and Benoit, 2011). The following list shows the full name of all the groups represented in the 2016 European Parliament:

- EPP: European People's Party
- S&D: United Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
- ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

- GUE-NGL: European United Left – Nordic Green Left
- Greens-EFA: Greens – European Free Alliance
- ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists
- EFDD: Europe for Freedom and Direct Democracy
- ENF: Europe of Nations and Freedom

According to McElroy and Benoit (2011), S&D, ALDE and EPP are center groups, with S&D and EPP being the largest groups. S&D and EPP were the biggest groups in the 2016 EP, while ERC had just outnumbered ALDE by a few MEPs (European Parliament, 2014). Traditionally in favor of European integration, the center groups have a total of 36 statements during the debate (European Parliament, 2016c). The groups ENF, ECR and EFDD are considered right-wing and Eurosceptic (McElroy and Benoit, 2011), with a total of 21 statements. On the far-left, GUE-NGL only had 4 statements. McElroy and Benoit (2011) also placed the Greens in the left wing, and they had 6 statements.

I will try to discover whether the spherical placement match what they say about Turkey. According to my assumptions, EPP, ALDE and S&D should be generally positive to Turkish membership as they are considered pro-European, and the right-wing groups ECR, EFDD and ENF should be sceptic both of membership and the threat of refugees and immigration – as Euroscepticism usually leads to disinterest in further integration, as well as coinciding with negative views on immigration and minority groups (De Vries, 2018: 15). This could be visible through the discourses and rhetoric of the different groups. Left-wing GUE-NGL have been sceptic towards Turkey – typing the keyword “Turkey” on the group website search page led to dozens of negative articles condemning Turkish actions (GUE-NGL, 2020). The Greens have however been generally positive – their discourses bear trace of sadness over the direction in which Turkey is heading – but were also calling for the negotiations to be frozen during the debate (Greens-EFA, 2011; European Parliament, 2016a)

My impression after reading and watching the debate is that the right-wing MEPs use stronger adjectives than the center MEPs. The center parties match the diplomatic line of the Commission when speaking, while politicians from groups that are less enthusiastic about European integration have a harsher tone. Tone matters because it allows the creation of a climate of fear, and shift opinions. Enough people calling Erdogan a dictator, will eventually make it the conceived truth – even if he is not quite a dictator yet. That would push him even further away from the EU “us”, giving the sceptics more reasons to urge the end of negotiations.

*What do they mean when they talk about “Turkey”?*

This is a discussion of how the EU will act in their relationship with Turkey, and so as such the whole debate is loaded with ‘us vs. them’-terminology. That is natural, as the EP is debating a common neighbor, ultimately making Turkey the other. High representative Mogherini spends some time in her opening speech to discuss how ‘we’ (the EU) supported Turkey and stood by the Turkish people. What does become clear, however, is that the Turkish people is included in the ‘we’. Mogherini says “We stood on the side of the Turkish people [...]. We stood on the side of the parliament as it was being bombed down, and on the side of the Turkish parties, all of them, that spoke against the coup and for democracy”. So, the real ‘them’ is in fact not Turkey as a country, but the military and Erdogan’s government. The solidarity for the Turkish people reoccurs in almost all parts of the debate. It is Erdogan and his government that are being punished

by the EU for their actions after the coup, and unfortunately the Turkish people suffer as a consequence.

But Mogherini's mention of Turkey as "the Turkish government" is not how all speakers talk about Turkey. Some MEPs specify that they are rejecting Erdogan, while some reject Turkey all together. Many reject the refugee deal, calling out on EU hypocrisy for remaining under Erdogan's thumb while simultaneously criticizing him. This is indeed rather ironic.

Kofod (S&D) "We have to say that Turkey is bigger than Erdogan. Turkey is not Erdogan".

Graf Lambsdorff (ALDE): "The most important thing about membership in the EU is shared values. Does anyone here in this house believe that our values are currently being lived in Turkey [...]?"

Fleckenstein (S&D) "Our friends in Turkey should know that we still believe in the possibility of a common European future. [...] While the Turkish President wants to develop Turkey away, [...] we are also conducting accession negotiations."

Björk (GUE-NGL): "End the disgraceful agreement with Turkey aimed at stopping refugees. It is hypocrisy to cooperate with Erdogan this way. [...] We should freeze all membership negotiations with Erdogan's regime."

In many cases, Turkey means Erdogan's Turkey. In some cases, it simply means "in the nation of Turkey where events took place", and in some cases Turkey is a referral to "the people of Turkey". Mostly when EU values are mentioned, they speak of Turkey as Erdogan's regime. The people of Turkey are the victims of his policies, and it seems the EU respect them deeply as they try to defend their rights. When I use the term "Turkey" in the following, I mean Erdogan's regime. Any other meaning is specified.

#### *Why do the EU reject Turkey?*

The center parties usually call on the lack of democracy as an argument for freezing negotiations, and generally give speeches with a milder tone. The right-wing parties mention Islam, calls Erdogan a dictator, and talks about EU hypocrisy instead. They rarely put democracy as the main reason for breaking negotiations. Their arguments are more of normative direction than the civic arguments of the center.

#### Right-wing arguments:

- Lebreton (ENF): "Erdogan makes fun of the Union and plunges his country more and more into Islamist obscurantism. [...]."
- Finch (ENF): "This is a regime that persecutes its citizens, [...] covertly support the Islamic state. You spend EUR650 million a year to support this board. Do you think that [...] the 40 000 people who have recently been arrested are grateful for your support of this dictator?"

#### Center arguments:

- Kukan (EPP): "It is clear to us that the restriction of civil liberties and violations of the rule of law and human rights are not consistent with the commitments of a country aspiring to EU membership."
- Schaake (ALDE): "Our vote to freeze the negotiations is intended to emphasize that the democratic principles that the EU cherishes are more than a dead letter."

It is a recurring theme that the center groups (S&D and EPP especially) bring up arguments about backsliding democracy, violation of human rights, lack of judiciary, etc. when they explain why they want negotiations to be frozen. Many of these MEPs does not want to call off negotiations altogether – the Greens does not want this either – but understand that freezing is the right thing to do in order to set an example to Turkey. The groups on the right use arguments based on culture, tradition and religion in a larger extent, and are also the only ones to openly call Erdogan a dictator. Do they bring up issues of religion and culture in order to freeze negotiations, to create a climate of more fear of Turkey? By calling out the differences, claiming they are subjecting to an Islamist dictator, they make the situation sound grimmer and even further from the EU values than it already is. This climate of fear of otherness could perhaps persuade other MEPs to agree with them that the differences are becoming too large. If the Eurosceptic agenda is to make sure there will be no more EU enlargement, it is only to be expected that they use powerful and scarifying arguments to ensure it from happening. The somewhat neutral arguments of the center groups do not bear the same strength and effect when it comes to creating fear. They do, however, contain more power to actually end negotiations. If Turkey cannot adhere to the Copenhagen Criteria in terms of democracy, rule of law, transparency, economy, etc., the EU are obliged to call off the negotiations. They cannot accept a member that will not comply to their standards. But if Turkey as a Muslim country do not share the cultural values of the EU, calling off the negotiations would seem strange and poorly reasoned. After all, the EU is negotiating accession with the Balkans – also mainly Muslim countries (European Commission, 2020). Denying Turkey membership status because of culture and religion would contradict the image EU is trying to create as tolerant and open. However, we cannot prove whether the arguments based on civic criteria are in fact just that, or if the MEPs use these criteria knowing the effect they have, while simultaneously wanting negotiations to end due to fear of otherness.

### *"European values"*

Sometimes it seems that MEPs are just calling on the "European values" in order to make a statement. To push Turkey further away and underline the differences. There is rarely any mention to the specific nature of the values, but I have found some quotes showing what the MEPs of the EU consider to be central values of the EU:

- Lebreton (ENF) "She [Turkey] has denied European values so much that she is no longer able to defend women and children [because of the proposed laws on rape and marriage (European Commission, 2016: 75)]. She submits to radical Islam."
- Trebesius (ECR): "Europe itself is in a serious crisis. Europe is old, inflexible and descending. [...] This descent of our country means that we are no longer taken seriously. Turkey is currently breaking all democratic values and is becoming an Islamic dictatorship."

Democracy is specifically mentioned as an important value. This is reflected in the Commission's report, and mentioned frequently by MEPs as a reason to freeze negotiations.

- Danti (S&D): "In a country that has long been a candidate for membership, we cannot accept repeated violations of the rule of law, mass arrests, and failure to protect human rights [...]. Europe is not only an economic Union; it is a community of values."



- Ward (S&D): "Turkey is fast slipping into a fascist state, and we must rethink our relationship with our European neighbor, because European values of democracy and human rights are being sorely tested."
- Valero (Greens): "if the proposal to impose the death penalty was to pass through, that's what Ms. Mogherini said "the nail in the coffin" for the membership."

As noticed in the Commission's report, democracy is considered a core value. This is clearly in line with the constructivist point of view and how the European politicians are raised to believe democracy to be the best form of government. There is broad agreement on this within the EP. During the debate, both Ms. Mogherini (the Commission) and several MEPs mention that the Turkish plan to reintroduce the death penalty would mean the end of the relationship. That makes it a severe violation of European values.

There are several interesting points about the statement made by Ms. Trebesius; her mention of Europe as "our country", and that Turkey is becoming an "Islamist dictatorship". Introducing Europe as one country could serve to push Turkey even further away. The uniting of Europe becomes stronger, serving to build Europeanness within the peoples. However, the mentioning of Islamist dictatorship is what you expect to see in the rhetoric of identity politics. As mentioned in the analysis of the Commission's report, freedom of worship can be considered a central value in the EU. It should therefore be completely irrelevant whether Turkey is an Islamist, Christian, Jewish or Hindu dictatorship. The affiliation of religion is not something the EU cares about per se. What they *do* care about is the fact that Turkey is turning into a dictatorship. Lebreton (ENF) also call out Turkey for being Muslim, as if that is a problem. It does not adhere to the EU standard to make a point out of this. Mr. Verhofstadt, leader of the ALDE group, opposes her when saying:

Verhofstadt (ALDE): Well, I was always defending the entry of Turkey in to EU because I always felt that it's not on religious basis that we should define European civilization, but it's on the basis of our values.

While Trebesius seem to be rejecting Turkey on religious grounds, there is no way to say for certain that this is what she meant. Her statement does, however, contribute to prejudice and fear of otherness. Perhaps its also a result of just that.

The usual conclusion after calling out on Turkey for lacking European values is that the negotiations must end. The values thus become a tool that the MEPs use to achieve a goal. The common European identity is being drawn upon through the majority of statements, but can this qualify as identity politics?

Insofar as the definition given above (where identity politics is political mobilization of social groups rather than political/ideological affiliation), this is not really what happens when the MEPs talk about Turkey. They are mobilizing each other to reach a common agreement about the way forward, but when the European Parliament mobilize for a cause within itself, are they not mobilizing based on political affiliation? We usually link identity politics to policies of minority groups – as Mr. Lebreton does when mentioning how women suffer in Turkey, or the Commission talking about LGBTI-safety – but also politics directed at the majority would be identity politics. The European majority population, even though they can be considered the standard in the population, are also a social group. Turkey appears to be a threat to this established majority; the

Christian/secular, European citizen. The European people have been saying this for a long time (Gerhard and Hans, 2011), now the European Parliament has followed. In order to preserve the culture, tradition and values of the EU as we know it, Turkey must be left out. This is also a strong hint to fear of otherness.

There are however many instances of the MEPs distancing the EU from Turkey through "us vs. them"-terminology, and especially from the parties on the right side of the spectrum we find rhetoric aimed at emphasizing this. Whether this is intentional or just symptoms of the MEPs own fear of otherness is not for me to say, but judging by the stance of their groups it ~~could~~ would seem like they are doing this in order to make the EP join them in ending enlargement negotiations.

It is very clear, though, that the European Commission and the MEPs agree that some kind of common European identity exists. "Europe is a community of values", Nicola Danti of the S&D said. It is also clear that Turkey does not share this identity. Or at least not anymore.

### **Comparing EC report and EP debate:**

While the Commission does not call as directly on European values as the MEPs do, they present a wider scope of the same European values. During the debate, it is pointed at e.g. democracy, freedom of speech, the death penalty, but little mention is given to education, transparency and LGBTI-rights. There are some mentions of women's rights when MEPs talk about how Turkey might legalize child rape by making the rapist marry the victim, and some mentions on the Kurdish issue. When it comes to the occupation of Cyprus, it is almost exclusively the Greek and Cypriot MEPs that brings the issue up. The Commission treats Cyprus as a conflict with huge importance to the entire Union, but this is not reflected by the MEPs.

As expected, the language in the Commission's report is more diplomatic than that of the MEPs. The MEPs yell at each other, calling out other politicians as well as the Commission on hypocrisy and faulty decisions made in the handling of the Turkey-issue.

### **Conclusion**

This essay has investigated the relationship between the EU and Turkey after the military coup in Turkey in 2016. The aim was to discover traces of identity politics in the way the EU was talking about Turkey. In order to do this, I read and analyzed parts of the European Commission's 2016 Turkey report, and I watched, read and analyzed a plenary debate in the European Parliament about the way forward in accession negotiations with Turkey. The theoretic foundation was constructivism; a theory that takes into account the background and identity of a political decision-maker. This theory can help understand why the EU and its politicians have a fear of otherness towards Turkey, as Turkey represents a different culture, tradition, religion and governing style than the rest of Europe. When analyzing the Commission's report, I outlined what the EU consider to be central values, and how Turkey contradicts the same values. The report lay the foundation for the EP plenary debate, where I drew on statements made by MEPs in order to discover how they talk about Turkey, what they conceive to be European values, and the consequences of this understanding. I aimed to find identity politics in their discourses. The section concludes that the debate shows no direct use of identity politics as the MEPs aim to find political grounds to banish the negotiations with Turkey. If

anyone can be said to use identity politics in their arguments, it would be the right-wing political groups, as they give harder rhetoric and to a larger extent presents what I have defined as "normative" values.

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## Annex 1

### List of MEPs

Name	Political group	Stand on negotiations
Federica Mogherini	High representative FSDP	Keep open/unclear
Mannfred Weber	EPP, leader	Freeze
Gianni Pitella	S&D, leader	Freeze
Syed Kamall	ECR, leader	Redefine relationship
Guy Verhofstadt	LibDem, leader	Freeze
Takis Hadjigeriou	GUE-ENL	Unclear
Rebecca Harms	Greens, leader	Freeze
Laura Ferrara	Independent	Suspend
Mario Borghezio	ENF	Suspend
Georgios Epitideios	Independent	Suspend
Angel Dzhambazki	ECR	Suspend
Elmar Brok	EPP	Suspend
Kati Piri	S&D	Freeze
Mark Desemaeker	ECR	Suspend
Lisa Jaakonsaari	S&D	Unclear
Alexander Graf Lambsdorff	ALDE	Suspend
Lambrous Foundoulis		Unclear
Martina Michels	GUE-ENL	Freeze
Kazimierz Ujazdowski	ECR	Unclear
Bodil Valero	Greens-EFA	Freeze
Tomás Zdechovský	EPP	Unclear
Fabio Massimo Castaldo	EFDD	Suspend
Doru-Claudian Frunzulica	S&D	Unclear
Marcel de Graaff	ENF	Unclear
Christina Dan Preda	EPP	Freeze
Knut Fleckenstein	S&D	Freeze
Charles Tannock	ECR	Suspend
Marietje Schaake	ALDE	Freeze
Malin Björk	GUE/NGL	Freeze
Ska Keller	Greens-EFA	Unclear
Kristina Winberg	EFDD	Suspend
Gilles Lebreton	ENF	Suspend
Renate Sommer	EPP	Freeze
Tanja Fajon	S&D	Suspend
Eleni Theocharous	ECR	Suspend

Nedzhmi Ali	ALDE	Keep open
Ernest Maragall	Greens-EFA	Freeze
Raymond Finch	EFDD	Suspend
Georg Mayer	ENF	Suspend
Esther de Lange	EPP	Unclear
Marju Lauristin	S&D	Freeze
Geoffrey Van Orden	ECR	Unclear
Eduard Kukan	EPP	Unclear
Miltiadis Kyrkos	S&D	Keep open
Ulrike Trebesius	ECR	Suspend
Michaela Sojdrová	EPP	Unclear
Elena Valenciano	S&D	Freeze
Lefteris Christoforou	EPP	Unclear
Nicola Danti	S&D	Freeze
Nikos Androulakis	S&D	Freeze
Dimitris Papadakis	S&D	Unclear
Julie Ward	S&D	Unclear
Franc Bogovic	EPP	Freeze
Ana Gomes	S&D	Suspend
Notis Marias	ECR	Suspend
Pavel Telicka	ALDE	Suspend
Sofia Sakorafa	GUE-NGL	Suspend
Ulrike Lunacek	Greens-EFA	Unclear
Maria Spyraiki	EPP	Unclear
Jeppe Kofod	S&D	Freeze
Johannes Hahn	Member of Commission	Unclear

