

Review Article

The transcript of a long story: A critical analysis of Eurocentric prejudices in Turkey's European union membership process

Onur Birkan^{a,*}^a*Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Mardin Artuklu University, Mardin, Turkey*

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

EUization
Europeanization
Europeanness
Identity
Orientalism
Turkey-EU relations

ABSTRACT

Turkey's European Union (EU) membership process has long been knotted in identity-based discussions that frame Turkey as an outsider, reinforcing the perception that it poses a cultural and political challenge to European unity. This study critically examines the role of Orientalist narratives in shaping the EU's approach to Turkey's membership, arguing that Turkey's exclusion is not merely a result of political or economic misalignment but is deeply rooted in Eurocentric prejudices. Drawing on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), this paper explores how the concept of "Europeanization" extends beyond institutional alignment ("EUization") to include implicit cultural and civilizational boundaries. The study employed a qualitative, interpretative methodology to analyze the EU's lengthy strategies and policy frameworks that construct Turkey as the "Other." It further investigates how Orientalist tropes manifest in debates surrounding Turkey's geopolitical position, religious identity, and democratic credentials, affecting the EU's inconsistent application of membership criteria. The findings reveal that the EU's reluctance to integrate Turkey stems from an exclusionary European identity that prioritizes ethno-religious homogeneity over pluralism. Furthermore, mechanisms such as the "privileged partnership" model and discourse on the EU's "absorption capacity" reflect an Orientalist mindset that seeks to control rather than integrate Turkey. By uncovering these underlying biases, this study contributes to broader discussions on European identity, integration policies, and the persistence of Orientalist thought in contemporary political discourse.

1. Introduction

Turkey formally applied for membership in the European Economic Community (EEC) on July 31, 1959, to uphold a Western-oriented foreign policy, foster economic growth, and enhance its competitiveness with Greece (Bourguignon, 1990). The Ankara Agreement, signed in 1963, created a legal framework for the bilateral relations between Turkey and the EEC (Aybey, 2004). However, due to the predominant influence of Turkey's foreign policy ties with the United States, Turkey's approach to the EEC was primarily driven by economic rather than political factors during this period. Turkey's interest in Europe began to intensify only in the latter half of the 1960s, largely because of growing tensions with the United States (Brown and Kramer, 2000). During this period, the EEC gradually evolved into a more significant political force. The 1974 Cyprus Intervention, which took place one year after the approval of the additional protocol in 1973, strained relations between Turkey and the EEC. As a result, Turkey unilaterally suspended these relations in 1978. Subsequently, following the military coup on September 12, 1980, Turkey's ties with the EEC further worsened, due to violations of democratic principles and human rights (Taskinsoy, 2021). However, after the 1983 elections, Özal applied for full membership in 1987, believing that both the economic integration with the European market and the political liberalization associated with membership in the European Communities (EC), would help counterbalance the effects of bureaucratic tutelage (Balci, 2013).

Although Turkey's application for full membership in the EC was rejected in 1989, the 'Turkey package' was subsequently introduced in 1990, with the aim of strengthening relations through the formation of the Customs Union. The organisation was renamed the European Union (EU) in 1992 and began undergoing a political restructuring process. The EU declared that its relations with Turkey would focus on achieving economic integration under the Ankara Agreement. The Maastricht Treaty, which came into effect in 1993 (Aka and Gürsoy, 2014) established a comprehensive framework for the community's economic and political integration. Consequently, three long-term objectives, i.e., creation of an economic and monetary union with a single currency, the development of EU identity founded on a common foreign and security policy, and the establishment of an area of freedom, security, and justice that facilitates the free movement of people (Canbolat, 2014) were set. However, while the EU began evolving toward a political union, it has been more inclined to engage with Turkey through an economic union rather than a political one. As a result, Turkey and the EU achieved a significant economic milestone with the establishment of the Customs Union, which came into effect in January 1996 (Özgöker and Alperen, 2016; Voigt, 2008).

Turkey believed that political unification would be accelerated by the Customs Union and thus suspended relations (Aydin, 2015). This decision was made because the EU had tied the development of relations with Turkey to the conditions set forth at the 1997 Luxembourg Summit, which included human rights, democracy, minority rights,

*Corresponding author

E-mail address: onurbirkan@artuklu.edu.tr (O. Birkan)

Received: 5 December, 2024 Accepted: 20 April, 2025 Epub Ahead of Print: 20 May, 2025 Published: ***

DOI: 10.25259/JKSUS_451_2024

improved political relations with Greece, and a resolution of the Cyprus problem (Hugg, 1999). However, the 1998 Progress Report stated that Turkey was one of the 12 candidate countries for the Union, providing the groundwork for the relationship to regain pace. This was so significant that at the Helsinki Summit in 1999, the decisions made at the Luxembourg Summit were reversed, and Turkey was named a candidate country for the Union (Geray, 2005). Consequently, several constitutional reforms were made in 2002 and 2004 and the EU decided to begin negotiations with Turkey on October 3, 2005 (Aydın-Düzgüt and Keyman, 2013). Nevertheless, the predicted progress remained inadequate due to a cyclical pattern of structural crises in relations with the EU, stemming from political discourse and financial instability within the EU; the strong critique of the EU towards the policies implemented by the AK Party governments in response to Turkey's domestic political landscape; and the conflicting objectives and priorities between the two parties concerning developments in the regional and international circles (Alessi et al., 2020).

The existing literature on Turkey-EU relations primarily focuses on bilateral relations in terms of democracy, economy, and foreign policy, and analyzes the membership process in terms of the opportunities and barriers generated by these elements (Saatçioğlu et al., 2019). Some Turkish studies use identity lenses and emphasis to understand Turkey's EU membership process (Müftüler-Baç, 2025; NAS, 2015; Onis, 1999). Nevertheless, these studies are insignificant compared to those that investigate bilateral relations in economic, political, and technical domains (Alessi et al., 2020; Saatçioğlu et al., 2019). These studies examined whether orientalist codes were used in Turkey's membership process, referencing the claim that the foundations of the 'European Union,' built around the identity of 'Europeanness,' are rooted in orientalist codes. Consequently, Turkey's membership was assessed considering the question, 'Does Europe aim to forge a new, post-nationalist, post-Christian identity, or to preserve its traditional sovereign and dominant identity?'

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks to which Turkey has been subjected throughout its EU membership process, distinct from other candidate countries, together with the models specifically offered by the EU for Turkey, will be used to ascertain the presence of an orientalist mentality (Gulmez et al., 2023; Yilmaz, 2011). This analysis examined terminology and paradigms pertinent to Turkey's membership process, including Europeanism (Ostrowski, 2023), EUization (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2023), in-group and out-group identity (Arts and Halman, 2006), absorption capacity (Börzel et al., 2017), privileged partnership (Gstöhl and Phinnemore, 2019), principled pragmatism (Fredriksen and Franklin, 2015), and value-distribution system (Nurmi and Meskanen, 1999). Consequently, conceptual and interpretive assessments, namely qualitative/hermeneutic methodologies, were used to determine the presence of orientalist codes within the varied aspects of the EU's position on Turkey. Hence, Orientalism (Macfie, 2014; Said, 1978), which serves as the article's philosophical basis, was addressed first. The subsequent analysis examined whether the ideas, discussions, processes, and practices encountered by Turkey throughout the EU accession process align with the framework of Orientalism as defined. The potential accession of Turkey to the EU was analyzed.

2. Orientalism

Orientalism is an academic discipline that examines Islamic cultures and their political, social, cultural, and economic frameworks. It started in the 17th and 18th centuries (Macfie, 2014; Said, 1978). While its intellectual roots extend further back, Orientalism developed as a discipline throughout the specified periods. Orientalism originated from intellectual interest and had a favorable connotation (Bevilacqua, 2013; Davidson, 2014). In the 19th century, Europe sought to fulfill its colonial ambitions via political and economic strategies, while advancing the 'universal reason and modernity project' (Bryant, 2006; Dube, 2000). This necessitated expanding knowledge-based power tools to Eastern societies. Grounded on the principle that knowledge is power, Europe began to gain understanding and knowledge of the Islamic world's social, political, economic, and cultural rules and laws, aiming to Christianize these societies (Thomas, 2003). The objective of Orientalism is to alter and reconstruct the legal frameworks, civilizations, and belief

systems of these cultures (Gane and Turner, 1996). In contrast to efforts conducted from intellectual curiosity, orientalist efforts executed in this way possess a 'negative' implication about consequences.

Islamic societies, seen by Europe as essential for its colonial objectives, provide challenges or evident concerns across political, geographical, military, religious, intellectual, and cultural aspects (Roy, 2017). The West constructs a negative and impoverished image of the East and Islamic countries while categorizing them. In this sense, while the West describes and classifies itself as modern, developed, democratic, individual-centered, libertarian, rational, progressive, conciliatory, and advanced, the East is met with a despotic, conflicting, authoritarian, backward, traditional, emotional, and reactionary world, which is the exact opposite of all of the West's good qualities (Keyman, 2002). In this context, Orientalism constitutes a mechanism for acknowledging a 'denial of civilization' and constructing the 'other' dependent on the argument that it is impossible to hold the Islamic world/East in high regard due to its distinct worldview, cosmology, philosophical perspective, scientific tradition, or understanding of art and aesthetics.

The last quarter of the 18th century is accepted as the beginning of Orientalism, which the West has used as a means of strengthening its power and legitimizing its imperialist ambitions. Through Orientalism, the West has claimed that Islamic civilization lacks an 'original' quality and, instead, has been inspired by Judaism and Christianity in terms of religious foundations, as well as by Ancient Greek, pre-Islamic Iranian, and Indian civilizations. In accordance with this assumption, it initiated the 'civilizing mission' aimed at effecting a civilizational transformation in Islamic countries. This assumed that Islamic civilization is stagnant and homogeneous, implying it cannot generate knowledge, culture, or philosophy. In this regard, Eastern/Islamic societies are formed and understood as 'the other' who must be civilized. In the scope of orientalist studies, the West has positioned itself as the focal point of history, time, and space, establishing a 'self-identity' that perceives itself as the origin of various domains, including morality, science, education, culture, art, and religion. Conversely, the Eastern/Islamic societies are relegated to the status of 'the other,' situated outside and distanced from this 'self-identity' (Said, 1978). Islamic cultures, whose whole civilizational heritage has been dismissed, ignored, and seen as primitive, are being elevated to the status of civilization due to the efforts of the 'white man,' who has assumed the burden of history with remarkable commitment. Consequently, Orientalism enables Western/European civilization to dominate and reshape Eastern/Islamic civilizations across social, political, cultural, economic, military, scientific, ideological, and sociological dimensions. Said asserts that the West employs 'cultural leadership' to assert its hegemony (Said, 1978).

Orientalism is based on a connection of power, authority, and sovereignty between the East and the West (Said, 2014, 2013). Orientalism is too diverse and multifaceted to fit into a single term. In fact, it is "many things that are all interconnected/intertwined". Another definition of Orientalism is "a way of thinking based on the ontological and epistemological distinction between the East and the West" (Bulut, 2012; Clifford, 2019; Macfie, 2014). Consequently, the West has developed a group in Islamic and Eastern nations that aligns with its views on perception, cognition, and assessment. The view that social and political advancements at different levels need to be evaluated via a Western/Eurocentric lens, rather than the ideals and standards of Eastern/Islamic culture, has become widespread.

It must be noted that Orientalism's strength and influence arise from its dominant position in the global system and the political, economic, military, and intellectual institutions that support it, rather than the objectivity of the knowledge it generates about the Orient. As a result, the information presented about the East is not universally factual or objective; rather, it represents the West's strategic, one-dimensional, interest-driven appraisal of its aims using its resources.

The influence of Orientalist narratives on EU-Turkey relations has been emphasized by recent studies. These studies indicated that Europe's approach on Turkey's membership is influenced by persisting cultural concoctions rather than being impartial. European elites and media often describe Turkey as the 'Other' in terms of civilization, implying that it is retrograde, dictatorial, or essentially apart from Europe (Arcan, 2012; Aydın-Düzgüt, 2015). The representations

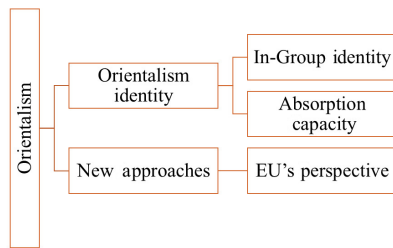


Fig. 1. Orientalism approach used in the study.

raise the distinctions identified by Edward Said, whereby Islam and 'Oriental' traits are shown as antagonistic to Western modernity. Moreover, critical thinkers have expanded upon Said's understanding by examining the Ottoman legacy in Turkey and the colonial memory in Europe (Bryce, 2013). The results of these recent research suggest that the current discussion around Turkey's candidacy for European Union membership is less focused on Turkey's capabilities and more on Europe's attempts to redefine its identity and boundaries (Fig. 1). European Union's expansion process centers on issues of identity, belonging, and historical narrative; additionally, it illustrates how modern discussion and policy regarding Turkey's possible European future are influenced by Orientalist assumptions (Sen, 2020).

3. Evaluation of Turkey's European Union Membership Process from an Orientalist Perspective

Orientalism will serve as the foundation for examining the European Union's policies and perspectives on Turkey. The main claim is that the fundamental reason for Turkey's failure to achieve the desired results in Turkey-EU relations is the orientalist attitude toward Turkey developed within the EU political structure, rather than the economic, political, and social weaknesses that emerged during the implementation of the membership criteria (Gulmez et al., 2023). The concept of European identity has gained prominence in EU integration literature, particularly in relation to enlargement (Aydin-Duzgit, 2012; Stavarakakis, 2004). The significance of this ideology results in EU membership procedures and processes being influenced by Orientalism. Nonetheless, a fundamental distinction may be made between Europe and the EU. The first characterizes Europeanness as a static, retrospective, comprehensive, essentialist, and cultural construct (Wevelsiep, 2020). The second describes 'Europe' as a fluid, continuing, dynamic, future-oriented, non-essentialist formation process (Kaya and Marchetti, 2014).

The second term focuses on a political strategy that prioritizes religious and cultural diversity, especially Islam, whereas the first term emphasizes cultural objectives. The foundation of a conservative civilization in Europe consists of Christian mythology, shared historical memory and values, heritage from ancient Greece and Rome, and cultural, ethnic, and religious homogeneity (Shepard, 2004). The fundamental aspect of European identity is the prevalent acknowledgement of Christian ancestry as its foundation (Lehning, 2001). Christianity shapes European culture and identity while promoting unity (Yeğenoğlu, 2014). The foundation of a conservative civilization in Europe consists of Christian mythology, shared historical memory and values, heritage from ancient Greece and Rome, and cultural, ethnic, and religious homogeneity (Yeğenoğlu, 2014).

Turkey's 1959 membership application was denied, despite its alignment with the EU's liberal economic and democratic political values, like other Eastern Bloc nations. The Eastern Bloc nations emerged from the Cold War with a unique economic production system and political framework. Europe's cultural identity is the fundamental reason for its inconsistent relationship with Turkey (Sjursen, 2005). The former Soviet states that exited the Eastern Bloc represent in-group identity, or the "self," whereas Turkey signifies out-group identification, or the "other," owing to its distinct history, religion, geography, and populace. Turkey's refusal to join the EU, citing cultural disparities, exemplifies the efficacy of Europe's orientalist policy centered on essentialist and ethno-religious homogeneity (Aydin-Duzgit, 2012).

Turkey is recognized for its desire to maintain its identity as a Muslim and Turkish member of the European Union for economic and geopolitical purposes. Germany and France, leading the EU effort, oppose Turkey's membership due to historical, ethnic, religious, cultural, and identity concerns, whilst proponents of Turkey's membership advocate for it based on political, economic, and technological factors (Kalin, 2023). According to EU Commission official Günther Verheugen, Christian Democrats in Europe would complicate Turkey's accession to full European Union membership, as conveyed to then-Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem on September 21, 2000 (Canbolat, 2014). This statement demonstrates how EU culture and identity will serve as constraints to Turkey's EU membership. Canbolat (2014) argued that the EU's identity "reflects its mutable nature, which has not yet become established in common perception". Turkey's full membership seemed impossible after remarks by Wilfried Martens, head of the Christian Democrat Group in the European Parliament, who said, "We have a European civilization project before us" (Yavuz, 2002).

The 'other' opposes integration by prioritizing the cultural foundations of the EU above its political, economic, or security aspects. The philosophy of Orientalist thinking posits that "a culture requiring civilization cannot maintain an equal relationship with European culture" (Kalin, 2023). Orientalists believe that rather than interacting with 'the other,' they should be excluded, transformed, or maintained at a distance. The exclusion and othering inherent in Orientalism have been intensified in Turkey's relations with the EU.

France has initiated negotiations over the European Union's "absorption capacity," which presents an additional barrier to Turkey's membership in the EU (Gidişoğlu, 2007). Although Turkey has potential for European Union membership, its size renders it unmanageable for the EU politically, economically, and culturally (Dahlman, 2004). Turkey's full membership would adversely affect the political, institutional, economic, resource, and cultural characteristics of the EU (Aydin-Duzgit and Keyman, 2013; Keyman and Aydin-Duzgit, 2013). Certain individuals believe that Turkey's cultural and social standards are incompatible with and harmful to the identity of the Union. These disputes seem to be political strategies by orientalists aimed at delaying Turkey's membership to the EU. The argument of Keyman and Aydin-Duzgit (2013) on the difficult obstacles to Union membership, including a country's size, population, and culture, is described as orientalist.

The word 'power' carries no essential value judgment or absolute accuracy. Structures interacting with entities from other civilizational circles must possess the "durability of the qualities that determine the resistance elements". Ultimately, on issues of cultural identity, the EU exhibits inflexibility. This renders it inflexible, exclusive, fundamentalist, and conservative. Turkey's pursuit of complete EU membership included more than mere procedures, unlike the Eastern expansion. The EU perceives Turkey as "the other" because of its orientalist perspectives. İpek and Oyman (2014) emphasized that Turkey's entry to the EU is impeded by its cultural practices and its identity perceptions in relation to EU culture. The EU's concerns over "absorption/digestion capacity" were ultimately addressed in Turkey's 'Negotiation Framework' on October 12, 2005. Europe is pursuing 'oneness' instead of 'unity' in relation to the EU Project. European pluralism ended with the Reconquista in 1492. During the Reconquista, Muslims and Jews were expelled from Andalusia, ending a five-century tradition of Convivencia, or 'coexistence,' despite theological and cultural disparities. Consequently, Convivencia allowed for the coexistence and evolution of many cultures, languages, religions, and identities without necessitating their abandonment.

Another orientalist obstacle to Turkey's EU membership is the EU's 'privileged partnership' framework with France and Germany. Consequently, Turkey will be able to collaborate closely with the EU on security issues without formally entering. Keyman and Aydin-Duzgit (2013) stated that Turkey will be unable to join EU institutions and would encounter visa restrictions. Turkey is required to achieve 'absolute' compliance with EU laws. Several proposals for "second-class membership" have been presented to preserve Turkey's position as an observer. The EU is endeavoring to use several types of membership to render Turkey a compliant and dependent member state. Turkey's imperial orientalist perspective isolates it from other civilizations; it resists equitable contact, perceives other cultures as distinct and

inferior, constantly reinforces its own superiority, and prescribes actions for others.

The EU's mindset parallels Hegel's "Master-Slave Dialectic" (Bertholf, 2020). Consequently, the presence, self-awareness, or consciousness of one individual requires the existence of another. Both individuals possess self-confidence, although they lack mutual recognition of this quality. Self-mastery is significant by itself when recognized by a mindful other. Therefore, an enslaved individual must acknowledge a Master's authority to render it important (Fitzhugh, 1960). The notion of a 'privileged partnership' seeks to transform Turkey, a cultural and civilizational entity managed from the periphery, into a submissive and passive component tied to its dominator. This is accomplished via Hegel's dialectic. In this Slave-Master paradigm, the EU recognizes Turkey's political existence while denying its *de facto* sovereignty. Exerting control over peripheral actors from the center is straightforward. Turkey may attain equality and emerge as a more powerful core member in the EU.

Orientalism believes that the West and the East have an unbreakable connection regarding sovereignty and power. The Western EU aims to establish control over Turkey (the Eastern counterpart) along its borders via a privileged partnership model and create dominance over this country. The EU, opposing Turkey's membership, seeks to promote an integration that is fundamentalist, conservative, and isolated.

Cultural, social, and political values are integral components of security, extending beyond military security often stressed by realists (Canbolat, 2014). As globalization grows stronger, relationships become more complex, and governments become more interdependent. The EU interprets its principles and rules to maintain consensus amid changing circumstances and contextual realities. In the face of significant security risks, the EU employs the rationale of 'principled pragmatism' to dilute its values, norms, and aims. In 2013, the EU and Turkey formalized a Readmission Agreement to maintain border controls after the Syrian civil war and the anticipated influx of migrants to Europe.

Negotiations began in November 2015, concluding in an official agreement by June 2016 (Yaralı Akkaya, 2019). The EU aimed to mitigate perceived risks to Turkey's social and cultural security by eliminating visa restrictions for its citizens. Consequently, the EU aimed to concentrate and advocate its cultural norms by categorizing Easterners as 'problematic,' 'ignorant,' and 'dangerous.' With the provision of financial assistance and visa liberalization, the EU was hoping to discourage Easterners from entering Turkey. Given Turkey's failed attempts to achieve full EU membership via bilateral relations, the inquiry of the extent to which its negotiations with Syrians reflect a "moral and conscientious foreign policy" remains significant. The EU is using Turkey's concerns over its EU membership, employing 'principled pragmatism' to rationalize its actions, even as its security instincts intensify. The EU enacts new strategic steps to address the increasing danger of conflict with the 'other,' aiming to isolate Turkey and align it with its military and security objectives.

The EU's approach emphasizes the differentiation of 'the others.' Turkey seems to be the most advantageous and appealing choice due to its significant connections with the EU. The most sensible and beneficial option would be Turkey, which has not yet joined the EU but may use EU rights to ensure EU security during a crisis. When security difficulties arise, the EU takes an orientalist perspective and implements pragmatic, case-specific remedies; it does not completely accept Turkey, which it perceives as the Eurocentric other. Given that the concepts of identity and security are interdependent, Turkey is a vital component of the EU's security framework (Canbolat, 2014). Turkey is seen as a pivotal player with a self-serving orientalist perspective, rendering its involvement in the EU difficult.

The EU's 'value-distribution system' (the Copenhagen Criteria) regarding Turkey's involvement contributes to the country's susceptibility to Orientalism (Canbolat, 2014). The requirements for full membership were established in the 1993 Copenhagen Summit, which Turkey subsequently accepted at the 1997 Luxembourg Summit. Consequently, the requirements regarding political criteria were the necessity for stable institutions that adhere to democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and the protection of minorities. Similarly,

requirements concerning economic criteria were the existence of a viable market economy capable of withstanding competitive pressures and market dynamics within the EU. In the same way, requirements pertaining to legislative compliance/harmonization criteria were the capacity to fulfill membership obligations, including adherence to the goals of the political, economic, and monetary union. Turkey is experiencing its first substantial examination of Western principles such as democracy, human rights, and legal equality. The EU claims it can define the political, cultural, legal, and social dimensions of Turkish society using these characteristics. The factors of Turkey's Westernness or Europeanness include human rights, democratic management, and a legal system that adheres to Western humanism. Nonetheless, it appears that the monopolistic Western culture seeks to completely alter another cultural entity when evaluating a society from a different civilization, disregarding its internal dynamics and employing specific concepts that have evolved throughout its historical journey. Notwithstanding Turkey's favorable economic indicators and closer alignment with the EU in political governance, factors rooted in cultural differences indicate that the EU is socially engineering the nation.

Through its involvement in the EU, Turkey will have its social, political, economic, and legal boundaries and goals determined by the EU, in accordance with orientalist paradigm. Orientalism allows Western/European culture to redefine and dominate Eastern/Islamic authorities from social, political, cultural, economic, military, scientific, intellectual, and sociological perspectives. Consequently, the self (the West), which positions itself as the arbiter and source of all progress, defines and characterizes the other, along with the appropriate methodology. Political leaders and governments see the EU's discussions with Turkey over membership as a unilateral 'value-distribution system' rather than as 'negotiations' (Kaya and Marchetti, 2014). The EU seems to be using the accession negotiations and the Copenhagen Criteria as a pretext for exerting control, dominance, and coercion over Turkey to compel the adoption of certain political, legal, foreign policy, and institutional frameworks.

4. Public Opinion and EU Decisions on Turkey's EU Membership

Opposition to Turkey's membership to the EU has grown stronger among EU nationals. According to a 2006 Eurobarometer study, 28% of EU citizens supported Turkey's entry, while 59% opposed it (Knoben, 1994). Support for the public was greater among the newer EU-15 members (44% in favor) compared to the more established members (38% at the time). In 2006, 81% of Austrians opposed Turkey's membership, while 66% of Romanians supported it. European support has been decreasing since the early 2000s due to political and human rights issues in Turkey. In 2013, under 20% of Europeans saw Turkey's entry as beneficial for the EU. Widespread reservations exist across political factions, shown by a 2017 survey indicating that 86% of Germans opposed Turkey's membership, while 77% of respondents throughout the EU shared this opposition. Over the last two decades, public attitudes in Europe have transitioned from moderate hesitancy to overt rejection of Turkey's accession to the EU.

Nevertheless, there exists a variety of opinions among Turks about EU membership. In 2004, over 73% of Turks indicated their support for EU membership (Şenyuva, 2018). Optimism was linked to democratic and economic advancement. Concern in Turkey decreased as negotiations prolonged, and European support was weak. In 2007, 41.9% of the public supported EU membership (Anastasopoulos, 2023; Kaeding and Schenuit, 2021); in 2009, the figure increased to 48%; and in 2013, it declined to 33%; nevertheless, by the early 2010s, opposition increased to two-thirds of the population. Two contributing issues were the perception of double standards and frustration stemming from delayed communication. In 2013, one-third of Turks supported EU membership (Şenyuva, 2018); but, due to political differences and crises like the Gezi Park rallies, double that amount opposed it. After 2016, both government statements and public opinion in Turkey started to improve, and by 2018, a slight majority of Turks supported EU membership. A 2018 poll by Kadir Has University revealed that 51% of Turks supported Turkey's accession to the European Union. The proportion of Turks supporting EU membership increased to 66%

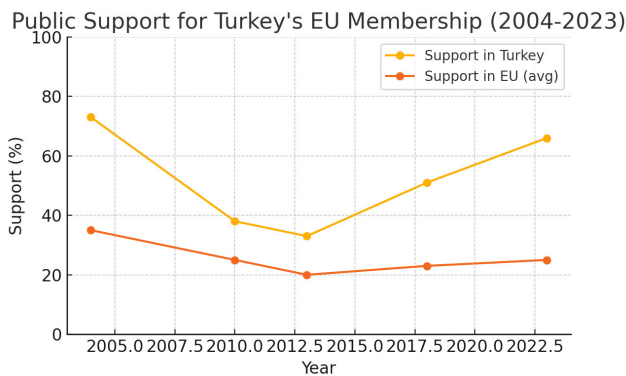


Fig. 2. Public opinion trends on Turkey's EU membership in Turkey vs. EU.

from 61% at the end of 2023. Officially, there have been no changes; yet popular sentiment in Turkey is progressively leaning towards EU membership. The public opinion changes over time in the EU and Turkey are given in Fig. 2.

5. Conclusion

The European Union (EU) supports Turkey's intentions to join the union via the Copenhagen Criteria and accession negotiations by establishing diverse legal, political, and institutional frameworks. This transition signifies Europe's attempts at demonstrating influence over Turkey by imposing its political, social, and cultural standards on the nation. The EU adopts a monopolistic and homogenizing position, emphasizing the geographical, cultural, and historical differences between Europe and Turkey. This signifies a complete European identity. This indicates that, unlike other candidate states, Turkey has undertaken distinct evaluations and procedures.

Europe observed Turkey as a possible threat to its civilization due to its distinct cultural and religious identity, particularly its Muslim majority population. Europe's integration efforts position Turkey as the perpetual "other," incapable of completely embracing the core qualities of being "European." Superficial aspects of EU membership ("EUization") may facilitate Turkey's membership. However, deeper concepts related to culture and identity ("Europeanness") impede its complete integration. The historical foundations of Christianity and the Enlightenment extend Europe's exclusion of non-European cultures by establishing criteria for the marginalization and critique of non-European civilizations.

European identity politics, rather than technical compliance, present significant barriers to Turkey's membership. Membership prospects for other culturally varied states, such as Egypt, may arise if Europe gives up its civilizational identity in favor of universal values, like human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, potentially provoking strong opposition from essentialist-oriented Europeans against Turkey's membership. Full EU membership for Turkey is very unlikely, owing to Europe's reluctance to adopt a post-nationalist and post-Christian framework, hence placing Turkey in a more unsafe position within Europe's orientalist paradigm.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Onur Birkan: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing—original draft preparation, Writing—review and editing, Visualization. The author has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

The author confirms that there was no use of artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted technology for assisting in the writing or editing of the manuscript and no images were manipulated using AI.

References

- Aka, H., Gürsoy, B., 2014. Turkey's Objective of Full Membership in the EU with reference to Maastricht Criteria. *Atatürk Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi* 28, 271–294.
- Alessi, L., Benczur, P., Campolongo, F., Cariboni, J., Manca, A.R., Menyherth, B., Pagano, A., 2020. The Resilience of EU Member States to the Financial and Economic Crisis. *Soc. Indic. Res.* 148, 569–598. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-019-02200-1>
- Anastasopoulos, G., 2023. Legal analysis of the EU-Turkey statement of 18 March 2016: past and future. *Int. Eur. Union Leg. Matters* 2, 148–205. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10458424>
- Bevilacqua, A. 2013. The birth of orientalism. *Intellectual History Review*, 23, 270–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496977.2013.773625>
- Arcan, H.E., 2012. Reflections of the Turkey in the mirror of orientalism: Orientalist discourse in the British press regarding Turkey's EU membership. *Sosyoloji Dergisi* 3, 119–153. Available from: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/4301>
- Arts, W., Halman, L., 2006. Identity: The case of the European union. *J. Civil Soc.* 2, 179–198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448680601104105>
- Aybey, A., 2004. Turkey and the European Union Relations: A Historical Assessment. *Ankara Avrupa Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 4, 19–038. <https://doi.org/10.1501/avraras.0000000080>
- Aydın-Düzgüt, S., 2012. Constructions of European identity: Debates and discourses on Turkey and the EU. Palgrave Macmillan London.
- Aydın, M., 2015. The positive and negative effects of customs union on Turkey. İstanbul Bilgi University.
- Aydın-Düzgüt, S., 2015. European parliament 'doing' Europe. *J. Lang. Politics* 14, 154–174. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.14.1.08ayd>
- Aydın-Düzgüt, S., Keyman, E.F., 2013. EU-Turkey Relations and the Stagnation of Turkish Democracy. *Global Turkey in Europe*. Available from: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/156275/GTE_WP.02.pdf
- Balci, A., 2013. Türkiye dış politikası: ilkel, aktörler, uygulamalar. *Etkileşim Yayınları*, İstanbul 258–259.
- Bertholf, G., 2020. Hegel and Empire: From Postcolonialism to Globalism. *Philos Q* 70, 424–426. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqz034>
- Börzel, T.A., Dimitrova, A., Schimmelfennig, F., 2017. European Union enlargement and integration capacity: Concepts, findings, and policy implications. *J Eur Public Policy*, 24, 1–20.
- Bourguignon, R. 1990. The History of the association agreement between Turkey and the European community. In: *Turkey and the European Community Turkey and the European Community* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften), pp. 51–63. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-663-01422-5_4
- Brown, L.C., Kramer, H., 2000. A changing Turkey: Challenges to Europe and the United States. *Foreign Affairs* 79, 147. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20049939>
- Bryant, J.M., 2006. The west and the rest revisited: Debating capitalist origins, European colonialism, and the advent of modernity. *Can. J. Sociol.* 31, 403–444. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cjs.2006.0066>
- Bryce, D., 2013. The Absence of Ottoman, Islamic Europe in Edward W Said's *Orientalism*. *Theory Cult. Soc.* 30, 99–121. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276412456562>
- Bulut, Y., 2012. Oryantalizm'in Ardından. *Sosyoloji Dergisi* 3.
- Canbolat, İ.S., 2014. Avrupa Birliği ve Türkiye. In: Ari, T., editor. *Postmodern Uluslararası İlişkiler Teorileri* 2.
- Clifford, J. 2019. On orientalism. In: *The Predicament of Culture The Predicament of Culture* (Harvard University Press), pp. 255–276. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvj9x0h.14>
- Dahlman, C., 2004. Turkey's accession to the European Union: The geopolitics of enlargement. *Eurasian Geogr. Econ.* 45, 553–574. <https://doi.org/10.2747/1538-7216.45.8.553>
- Davidson, N., 2014. Mohammad R Salama Islam, orientalism and intellectual history: Modernity and the politics of exclusion since Ibn Khaldūn. *Am. Hist. Rev.* 119, 1817–1818. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/119.5.1817>
- Dube, S., 2000. Colonialism, modernity, colonial modernities. *Nepantla: Views from the South* 3.
- Fitzhugh, G. 1960. Cannibals All! Or, Slaves without Masters. In: C. V. Woodward (Ed.), *Cannibals All! Or, Slaves without Masters*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674036925>
- Franklin, C.N.K., Fredriksen, H.H., 2015. Of pragmatism and principles: The EEA agreement 20 years on. *Common Market Law Rev.* 52, 629–684. <https://doi.org/10.54648/cola2015049>
- Gane, N., Turner, B.S., 1996. Orientalism, postmodernism and globalism. *Br. J. Sociol.* 47, 374. <https://doi.org/10.2307/591740>
- Geray, İ.U., 2005. Turkey-european union relations: Helsinki European council (December 1999)-Brussels European council (December 2004) with a special emphasis on the fulfillment of the political criteria (MS thesis). Marmara University, İstanbul.
- Gidişoğlu, S., 2007. Understanding the Absorption Capacity of the European Union. *Insight Turkey*, 9, 124–141.
- Gstöhl, S., Phinnemore, D., 2019. Introduction: Privileged partnerships between the European union and third states. In: *The Proliferation of Privileged Partnerships*

- between the European Union and its Neighbours, 1st edition. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429435744-1>
- Gulmez, S.B., Topal, A.E., Rumelili, B., 2023. Europe and Turkey: Identities in evolution an analytical literature review. *Open Res. Eur.* 3, 120. <https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.16176.1>
- Hugg, P.R., 1999. The Republic of Turkey in Europe: Reconsidering the Luxembourg Exclusion. *Fordham Int'l LJ* 23, 606.
- İpek, V., Oyman, Ç., 2014. Postkolonyal Teori ve Uluslararası İlişkiler. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Teorileri içinde*, İstanbul: İletişim, pp. 405-442.
- Kaeding, M., Schenuit, F.2021. The European parliament's perspective on EU-Turkey relations. In: *EU-Turkey Relations: Theories, Institutions, and Policies*. Springer International Publishing Cham, pp. 241-264.
- Kaya, A., Marchetti, R., 2014. Europeanization, framing competition and civil society in the EU and Turkey. In: Aydın-Düzgit, S., Huber, D., Müftüler-Baç, M., Keyman, E.F., Tasci, J., Tocci, N., editors, *Global Turkey in Europe II: Energy, Migration, Civil Society and Citizenship Issues in Turkey-EU Relations*. Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI). pp. pp. 145-196. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09868.15>
- Keyman, E.F., 2002. Globalleşme, oryantalizm ve öteki sorunu: 11 Eylül sonrası dünya ve adalet. *Doğu Batı* 20, 11-32.
- Keyman, E.F., Aydın-Düzgit, S., Duncker, A., Huber, D., Tocci, N., editor, 2013. Transforming Turkey-EU relations: Ground for hope. In: *Global Turkey in Europe: Political, Economic, and Foreign Policy Dimensions of Turkey's Evolving Relationship with the EU*. Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI). pp. 275-282. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09869.25>.
- Kalın, İ., 2023. Ben, öteki ve ötesi: İslâm-batı ilişkilerine giriş. İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları.
- Lehning, P.B., 2001. European citizenship: Towards a European identity? *Law Philos.* 20, 239-282. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1010681009751>
- Kaya, A., Marchetti, R., 2014. Europeanization, framing competition and civil society in the EU and Turkey. In: Aydın-Düzgit, S., Huber, D., Müftüler-Baç, M., Keyman, E.F., Tasci, J., Tocci, N., editors, *Global Turkey in Europe II: Energy, Migration, Civil Society and Citizenship Issues in Turkey-EU Relations* (pp. 145-196). Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09868.15>
- Knoben, R., 1994. Public Opinion in the European Union: Selection of Graphs. In: *The Ratification of the Maastricht Treaty* (pp. 319-348). Brill Nijhoff.
- Müftüler-Baç, M., 2025. A fragile relationship: Turkey and the European Union moving beyond membership with external differentiated integration. *West European Politics* 48, 1186-1215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2024.2442870>
- Macfie AL. *Orientalism*. Routledge; 2014.
- NAS, Ç., 2015. Turkish identity and the perception of Europe. *Marmara Journal of European Studies* 9, 177-189. <https://doi.org/10.29228/mjes.272>
- Nurmi, H.A.N.N.U., Meskanen, T.O.M.M.I., 1999. A priori power measures and the institutions of the European union. *European J. Political Res.* 35, 161-179. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.00445>
- Onis, Z., 1999. Turkey, Europe, and paradoxes of identity: Perspectives on the international context of democratization. *Mediterranean Q.*, 10, 1-10.
- Ostrowski, M.S., 2023. Europeanism: A historical view. *Contemp. Eur. Hist.* 32, 287-304. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0960777321000485>
- Özgöker, U., Alperen, Z.B., 2016. The modernisation of the EU-Turkey customs union. *İstanbul Arel Üniversitesi İletişim Çalışmaları Dergisi* 5, 37-53.
- Papathanassopoulos, S., Miconi, A., Cannizzaro, S., 2023. From Europeanisation to EU-ization: The media case. *Stud. Media Commun.* 11, 394. <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v11i7.6362>
- Roy, O., 2017. Islam in the West or Western Islam? The disconnect of religion and culture. *State Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide* 35, 77-84. <https://doi.org/10.22394/2073-7203-2017-35-3-77-84>
- Saatçioğlu, B., Tekin, F., Ekim, S., Tocci, N., 2019. FEUTURE synthesis paper: The future of EU-Turkey relations: a dynamic association framework amidst conflictual cooperation. *Istituto Affari Internazionali*. Cologne, University of Cologne, Ukraine. pp. 1-37.
- Said, E.. Orientalism. In: [ERROR [booktitle]][ERROR [booktitle]], 75-79.
- Said, E.W., 2014. Orientalism Reconsidered, in: *Postcolonial Criticism*. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350237124.0007>
- Said, E.W., 2013. Orientalism reconsidered, in: *Literature, Politics and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference 1976-1984*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315015927-18>
- Sen, S., 2020. On Colonial Self-Perceptions: The European Union, Turkey and the "bad" leader. *Interventions* 22, 763-782. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801x.2020.1749706>
- Şenyuva, Ö., 2018. Turkish Public Opinion and the Eu Membership: between Support and Mistrust. *Feuture Online Paper* No. 26 5.
- Shepard, J., 2004. Review: The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity. *The English Historical Review* 119, 1324-1326. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/119.484.1324>
- Sjursen, H., 2005. Enlargement and the Common Foreign and Security Policy: transforming the EU's external identity? In: *Back to Europe*. Routledge, pp. 51-65.
- Stavrakakis, Y., 2005. Passions of Identification: Discourse, Enjoyment, and European Identity. In: *Discourse Theory in European Politics Discourse Theory in European Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK), pp. 68-92. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230523364_3
- Taskinsoy, J., 2021. Turkey's Hidden Economic Disaster Fostered by Unorthodox Policies in Isolation. *SSRN Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3781491>
- Thomas, N.M., 2003. Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam: Politics, Culture, and Citizenship in the Age of Globalization. *J Anthropology Europe* 3, 37-38. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jsae.2003.3.1.37>
- Voigt, S., 2008. The Customs Union Between Turkey and the EU: How Did it Affect Turkey? *Diplomica Verlag*.
- Wevelsiep, C., 2020. Europe in the face of the other. *EN* 20, 91-105. <https://doi.org/10.37449/enenjanant.88660>
- Yaralı Akkaya, A., 2019. Avrupa'nın mülteci Politikalarına Oryantalist Yaklaşımı: Suriye Krizi Sonrası Avrupa ve türkiye ilişkileri. *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi*, 74, 357-380.
- Yavuz, H., 2002. " Oryantalizm" Üzerine Bir'giriş'denemesi. *Marife Dini Araştırmalar Dergisi* 2, 53-63.
- Yeğenoğlu, M., 2014. Avrupa Kimliğinin İdeolojik Arkapları. *Farklılıkların Birlikteliği*, Der. Ayhan Kaya, İstanbul: Hiperlink Yayınları 57-71.
- Yılmaz, H., 2011. Euroscepticism in Turkey: Parties, Elites, and Public Opinion. *South European Society and Politics* 16, 185-208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608741003594353>