

CONCEPTIONS OF THE EU AND ATTITUDES TO TURKEY'S ACCESSION IN FRENCH AND BRITISH DISCOURSE

Catherine MACMILLAN

Yeditepe University
Istanbul/Turkey

Abstract

In recent years, France has opposed full EU membership for Turkey while Britain has been one of the staunchest supporters of Turkey's EU accession bid. This paper argues that this can be explained by fundamentally different conceptions of the EU in the two countries, based in turn on differences in national conceptions of state and nation.

The paper thus analyses recent French and British discourse on the EU and, particularly, on Turkey's accession bid, according to Sjursen's (2007) framework of three idealised visions of the EU. These are firstly, the EU as a problem-solving entity, secondly as a values-based community based on a common cultural identity and finally as a post-national union underscored by 'universal' rights such as democracy and human rights

Key Words: *European Union, membership, cultural identity, Turkey*

JEL Classification: Z1

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to use Foreign Policy Discourse Analysis in order to shed new light on the attitudes of Britain's main political parties towards the EU, and to help explain their support for Turkey's EU accession. As Wæver points out, discourse analysis can 'help to make the debates and actions of a country more intelligible to foreign observers' and can explain and elucidate foreign policy (2002: 261).

According to foreign policy discourse analysis, the concepts of nation and state, themselves constructed discursively, have an important effect on a country's foreign policy as they define national identity and have a constraining effect on which discourses are possible at the level of foreign policy (Larsen, 1999: 454). Regarding European integration, the discourse analysis takes place at three levels. Firstly, the dominant discourse regarding state and nation is examined, including the internal and external dimensions. Here, questions such as the basic conceptual constellation of state and nation, the perceived connection between the two and the attachment to state and nation, as well as the state's projection of itself on the world (Wæver, 2002: 33-36).

Secondly, the relational position of the state/nation *vis-a-vis* Europe is examined. Political discourse should, in its narrative, present a logic of Europe which is compatible with the state/nation construction (Wæver, 1997: 37-41). Here, Sjursen's three 'ideal' constructs of the EU (2006) (2008), which are explained in more detail in the next section, are used as a framework of analysis. Here, the EU may be seen primarily as a simple problem solving entity, as a 'values-based community' underscored by a European 'we-feeling' or identity or, finally, as a 'rights-based post-national union', based on broader, 'universal' rights such as democracy and human-rights.

Finally, the third level of analysis focuses on concrete policies pursued by specific groups of actors, particularly political parties, who argue their positions with reference to levels 1 and 2 (Wæver, 1997: 37-41).

2. THREE 'IDEAL' VISIONS OF THE EU

a. Pragmatic Arguments: The EU as a Problem Solving Community

Pragmatic arguments support or oppose policies according to a means-end calculation. Thus, in the case of EU enlargement, pragmatists tend to support enlargement if it is considered to maintain or enhance the economic prosperity and physical security of national and EU citizens. This viewpoint, often associated with the UK, as well as many of the CEECs and the Scandinavian countries, tends to envisage the EU as a problem solving entity based on the free market and ensuring regional security (Schmidt, 2009: 3). In this view, the EU is simply an international norganisation, and the Member States' right to veto further integration is taken for granted (Sjursen, 2008: 3).

In this vision the EU is optimally without borders. Enlargement is seen as a question of efficiency and utility, and often linked to arguments about extending the free market or reinforcing security (Schmidt, 2008: 3). Similarly, in this view if an enlargement is considered to endanger prosperity or security it is likely to be opposed. Thus, it follows that a candidate country is not merely accepted on cultural terms, and may be rejected for full membership even if it fulfills the formal membership criteria if this is seen as going against the interests of the EU or some of the Member States in question. Regarding enlargement to the CEECs in the 1990s, pragmatic arguments centred on improving stability and avoiding the descent into authoritarianism after communism, as well as on extending the single market (Sjursen, 2008: 3).

b. Moral Arguments: The EU as a Post-National, Rights Based Community

Moral arguments, like ethical-political ones, are normative, in that they are based on norms and values rather than pragmatic or utility based arguments. In this case, however, the norms in question are not cultural but 'universal'; the legitimacy of a community is based not on common cultural values and traditions but on a set of legally entrenched fundamental rights and democratic procedures. In this view, the EU is conceived as a post-national, rights-based community, and particular solutions or policies are preferred if they are considered to fulfill universal criteria of being just or right. In the context of enlargement, the argument is that a candidate country should be allowed to accede to the EU if it is considered to fulfill conditions based on 'universal' liberal democratic norms such as respect for human and minority rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Indeed, the conception of the EU put forward in the Treaties is close to a rights based post national union. Article 2(1a) of the TEU affirms that 'the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities'. In addition, article 3(2) of the TEU stresses 'unity in diversity', as it emphasises the EU's commitment to respect the 'rich cultural and linguistic diversity' of the Member States, and 'shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced' Similarly, the Copenhagen criteria, set out by the European Council in 1993 demand that the candidate countries meet four conditions as follows:

The stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to

cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union ...[and] the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union (European Council, 1993).

As Ruiz-Jimenez and Torreblanca point out, then, 'whether the candidate country is Turkey, Norway or Switzerland it should not make much difference' (2007: 6). Thus, from this point of view, there is no cultural criteria for EU accession; instead any country that is accepted as geographically European and fulfills these criteria should be allowed to join regardless of broader identity questions such as religion or history.

c. Ethical-Political Arguments: The EU as a 'Value-Based Community'

Ethical-political arguments, on the other hand, refer to the borders or cultural values of a community. These arguments imply that a political community should be based on a sense of common identity, or 'we-feeling', rather than simply on common benefits. This 'we-feeling' may be based on a common history or religious tradition (Schmidt, 2009: 3). However, the construction of an identity also involves the construction of its 'Other' (or 'Others'). Ethical-political arguments, then, are focused on differences rather than similarities between inside and outside. Thus, people can be regarded as genuine members of a community only if they are born or assimilated into it culturally. If not, they are doomed to remain outsiders. Those who hold an ethical-political view of the EU, then, view it as a 'value-based community' underscored by cultural and historical characteristics which serve to draw its geographical boundaries. From this perspective, enlargement is encouraged only into spaces which are considered to have a similar cultural heritage: its aim is to bring together the 'European family'.

Such a view has been upheld by conservative politicians in France and Germany in particular. Centre-right political elites from the Union for a Popular Movement (UPM) in France and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU) in Germany have tended to emphasise cultural elements in addition to geography and universal values when defining European identity (Yilmaz, 2007) (Szymanski, 2007: 34). Moreover, particularly for Christian Democrats, Christianity is thought to be an important element of European identity, a notion which, as pointed out in the following section, appears to share considerable public support in spite of the decrease in the numbers of practicing Christians in Europe. This can be explained by the importance granted to Christianity in this discourse as a civilisational marker rather than for purely religious reasons.

Thus, in this view Christian heritage is viewed as the basis for some secular European values, including the separation of religion and the state, the idea of the natural rights of man and even the culture of capitalism. Therefore, conversion to Christianity is viewed as insufficient to acquire 'Judeo-Christian values', as the convert 'does not carry the Christian heritage in his or her 'cultural genes' (Yilmaz, 2007: 298).

3. BRITISH AND FRENCH DISCOURSE ON STATE AND NATION AND EUROPE: A COMPARISON

The dominant discourse on Europe in Britain has tended to be primarily pragmatic in nature; it presents Europe in terms of the concrete interests it can fulfill. Thus, Europe is presented in 'non-mythical' terms, with little emotional pull, rather than a natural, organic community (Larsen, 1999: 456). Moreover, due to the importance granted to the sovereignty of Parliament and its indivisibility in British discourse, Britain has tended to see sovereignty in zero-sum terms. It is

thus often considered as being threatened by the EU, particularly in Conservative discourse (Larsen, 1999: 456).

Despite differences between the dominant Labour and Conservative views of Europe, they still have much in common (Bale, 2006: 9). With the modernising of the Labour party under Tony Blair, the Labour party (or New Labour as it was now known) became overwhelmingly pro-European. The newly elected Labour government argued that, although it would continue to defend vital British interests, it would adopt a much more positive attitude to the EU than its predecessors, and indeed proved itself to be a far less 'awkward partner' in the EU than the preceding Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major. Blair's Labour government joined the Social Chapter, which Britain had opted out of under the Conservatives, and showed a more conciliatory attitude to the negotiations for the Amsterdam and Nice Treaties, in which he was willing to incorporate extensions to supranational decision making (Leonard, 1998: 260).

However, Labour still had a largely pragmatic attitude to the EU, viewing it largely as a problem-solving entity. It continued to prefer an intergovernmental rather than a federal EU, and to promote flexible and dynamic labour markets rather than the social welfare model supported by some continental socialists (Watts and Pilkington, 2005: 232-233). Despite this, however, Blair saw active involvement in the EU as vital for Britain's interests: 'If we want to stand up for Britain then we have to be in Europe, active, constructive, involved all the time. We have to negotiate tough and get our way, not stand aside and let other European countries make the decisions that matter to us' (Blair, 2000).

In addition to this, 'despite the fact that British leaders have in mind primarily a borderless problem-solving free market when they speak of Europe, they have increasingly referred to the EU's common values, its importance of human rights, and its role as a global actor' (Schmidt, 2009: 5). Blair, for instance, in a speech following the French and Dutch rejection of the Constitutional Treaty stated that the EU was a union of values, of solidarity between nations and people, of not just a common market in which we trade but a common political space in which we live as citizens ... I believe in Europe as a political project. I believe in Europe with a strong and caring social dimension. I would never accept a Europe that was simply a economic market (Blair, 2005)

In contrast to the British case, Europe has played a prominent role in French foreign policy since the Enlightenment; France has tended to view itself as Europe's natural leader. Moreover, in contrast to the dominant British view, sovereignty is not seen as a 'zero-sum game' in French discourse; sovereignty that accrues to the EU is not seen as leaving France. In fact, in Larsen's view, in 1983/4 the dominant discourse on the EU in France changed significantly. has been that of a 'symbiosis' between France and Europe. Thus, in this discourse, Europe has been seen as a political actor in French terms. In this view, the qualities of a political actor should include:

- The possession of a political will; technical arrangements alone are insufficient for political action
- A political actor has a strong internal and external identity
- A political actor must have clearly defined boundaries (Larsen, 1999: 103-104).

Here, then, there are indications of a 'values-based' approach to European integration. This view of the EU, then, differs from the dominant British discourse in important ways. In British discourse there is little emphasis on the need for the EU to possess a common identity beyond 'universal values', perhaps understandably when it is considered that the UK itself is a multinational state with no common ethnic identity, and which has, in contrast to France, made relatively little attempt to create a common culture across the UK (Larsen, 1997: 36-37). Similarly, in the British view, there is less need to define the EU's boundaries. Margaret Thatcher, for instance, who envisaged a European community that stretched from 'the Atlantic to the Urals' saw enlargement as a weapon to combat a 'federal Europe' as early as 1988 (Thatcher, 1993: 744). Such views have been much-echoed since, particularly in the Conservative party.

In contrast, the French reaction to the CEE enlargement, although it did not oppose it *a priori*, was much more cautious. Prominent French politicians in the early 1990s, including President Mitterand, referred to the CEECs right to become members of the EC/EU on condition that they fulfilled the political criteria set out in the Treaties for doing so. However, France insisted that enlargement to the CEECs could not be carried out until the EU had undergone significant institutional reform, with Mitterand in 1991 stating that enlargement would not take place for 'tens and tens of years'. As Mitterand later argued:

My worry is that there is too little preoccupation with the institutions. There is nothing solid without institutions. The enlargement of the European Union is necessary; it should not happen to the detriment of its deepening. The Union should have solid, effective institutions that can guarantee further developments with scrupulous respect to democracy. This will be the aim of the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference (2004)

As Sjørnsen and Romsloe point out, the importance granted to institutional reform can be best explained by France's self perception as a protector of EU political integration. In this view, then, although France's acceptance of the CEECs as potential candidates providing the relevant political criteria were fulfilled suggests a rights-based view of the EU, its insistence that enlargement be accompanied by institutional reform suggests a values-based approach (Sjørnsen and Romsloe, 2006: 155-162)

However, it is on the French (and German) right that the specifics of what, in their view, a European identity beyond 'universal values' should consist of have been discussed. In short, while the linguistic and cultural diversity of the EU tends to rule out the development of a 'thick', national-type cultural identity for the EU, the Franco-German right has tended to promote a 'civilisational' type of European identity based on a perceived common religious and historical experience. In such discourse, Yılmaz describes the role of Christianity as an 'extinguished volcano'; thus Christianity is viewed not as a belief system but as a cultural marker. Thus, in this view Christian heritage is viewed as the basis for some secular European values, including the separation of religion and the state, the idea of the natural rights of man and even the culture of capitalism (Yılmaz, 2007: 298).

4. A COMPARATIVE VIEW OF BRITISH AND FRENCH ATTITUDES TO TURKEY'S EU ACCESSION

As has been noted in the previous section, enlargement has been more easily accepted in British political discourse than in the major French discourse. This, in turn, can be explained by the

dominant discourses on state/nation and Europe. In the French discourse, a strong political actor is seen as needing a strong identity or 'we-feeling', which, in turn, must be delimited by clear boundaries. As has been argued above, at least for the French right, such boundaries appear to be those of 'European civilisation', particularly 'Christian' civilisation. Thus, Turkey is perceived as not belonging. As President Sarkozy argues:

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

In this way, then, Turkey's EU accession aim is posed as a threat to the EU integration project as it would dilute the 'European identity' perceived as necessary for a strong EU:

Turkey's entry would kill the very idea of European integration. Turkey's entry would turn Europe into a free trade zone with a competition policy. It would permanently bury the goal of the EU as a global power, of common policies, and of European democracy. It would be a fatal blow to the very notion of European identity (Sarkozy, 2007b: 189).

The British position towards Turkey's EU accession is quite different, which can be explained by its different constructions of state and nation and, in turn, its different perceptions of an 'ideal' EU. As has been argued above, the EU in British discourse is primarily constructed as a problem-solving entity, and also a rights-based union. The values-based community approach is so rare in mainstream British discourse as to be almost absent. Thus, the perceived need for a common cultural identity and frontiers to underscore the EU is far less evident in British discourse than in that of France. Instead, the EU is there for the common benefit of the Member States, and is based on universal rather than cultural values. This being the case, this construct of the EU tends to be accepting, even actively supportive, of enlargement providing the applicant countries' accession is seen as benefiting the EU and its Member States, particularly in economic and security terms, and as long as the candidates are perceived as fulfilling the political criteria, based as they are on 'universal values'.

Thus, Britain has been one of Turkey's staunchest advocates within the EU. Both dominant political parties have phrased their support for Turkey's accession in pragmatic terms based on the country's fast-growing economy and key geostrategic position. Conservative MP Liam Fox, for instance, argues that Turkey is 'a valued NATO partner, a secular state bridging Europe and the Islamic world, a developing economy and a major player in the energy market' and adds the question 'Who wouldn't want Turkey in their club?' (Fox, 2009). This view is also shared by many prominent Labour MPs (Aksoy, 2009).

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, foreign policy discourse analysis can help to shed light on the differences in attitudes between French and British attitudes towards Turkish EU accession. These are determined by different ideal visions of Europe, which in turn result from different dominant discourses of state and nation. In the French dominant discourse, a successful political actor requires a strong identity and definite borders. Thus, the dominant view of the EU is as a values-based community. For this reason, enlargement tends to be viewed as a potential threat to EU integration, particularly that to a country with different religious/cultural roots such as Turkey.

This is, however, different in British discourse, where the need for a common European identity beyond universal values is not emphasised. This can perhaps be explained by the multinational nature of the British state itself, and the fact that, in contrast to the situation in France, the link between state and culture has traditionally been rather weak. Instead, parliamentary sovereignty, as well as the monarchy, has had an important role in defining the British state. Thus, Britain tends to be sceptical of further European integration as it is often viewed as 'robbing' the British Parliament of sovereignty. On the other hand, it is more accepting of enlargement, even if it means a significant increase in the EU's cultural diversity, as long as the candidate country is seen as fulfilling the political criteria for membership and its membership is seen as being of practical benefit to Britain and the EU as a whole.

Thus, from this point of view, it is too simplistic to claim that Britain supports Turkey's accession merely because it will hinder deeper EU integration. Similarly, it is too facile to claim that France opposes full membership for Turkey only because it is xenophobic. While both of these claims may contain a grain of truth, foreign policy discourse analysis reveals that the difference in French and British attitudes to the EU, and to Turkish accession, can be explained by differences in the national political cultures, specifically in the discourse on state and nation.

REFERENCES

- Aksoy, Sevilay (2009), 'The Prospect of Turkey's EU Membership as Represented in the British Newspapers *The Times* and *The Guardian* 2002-2005', *Journal of European Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 4, pp. 469-506
- Bale, Timothy (2006), 'Between a Soft and a Hard Place? The Conservative Party, Valence Politics and the Need for a New Eurorealism', *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol 59, no. 3, pp. 385-400
- Blair, Tony (2000), Annual Speech to City Audience at Mansion House, 31 November 2000
- Blair, Tony (2005), *Speech to the European Parliament*, 23 June 2005 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/4122288.stm [Accessed 3.2.2010]
- Blair, Tony, (2006), *Our Nation's Future: Multiculturalism and Integratio*, Speech delivered to the Runnymede Trust, Downing Street, December 8 2006. <http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/Page10563.asp> [Accessed 9.10.2009]
- Cameron, David (2009), *A Europe Policy that People can Believe In*, http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2009/11/David_Cameron_A_Europe [Accessed 22.1.2010]
- European Council (1993), *Presidency Conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council of 21-22 June*, SN180/1/193, REV
- Fox, Liam (2006) *Turkey Could be a Beacon to the Islamic World*, <http://www.conservatives.com> [Accessed 17.12.2009]
- Fox, Liam (2009), *Turkey and the EU*, <http://conservativehome.blogs.com/centreright/2008/02/turkey-and-the.html> [Accessed 5.2.2009]
- Hague, William (2010), *The Biggest Risk for Britain is Five More Years of Brown*. <http://www.conservatives.com> [Accessed 11.3.2010]
- Larsen, Henrik (1997), *Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis: France, Britain and Europe*. London: Routledge

- Larsen, Henrik (1999), 'British and Danish European Policies in the 1990s: A Discourse Analysis Approach' in *European Journal of International Relations*, 1999: 5, pp.451-483
- MacShane, Dennis (2002), 'Europe Must Embrace Islam Too', *The Guardian*, 24 November 2002
- Millibrand, David (2006), Speech to Turkish government, Cited in BBC, *UK Vows to Back Turkey's EU Bid.*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6980019.stm> [Accessed 5.2.2010]
- Mitterand, Francois (1991), Interview with *Radio France Internationale (RFI)*, 12 June 1991, cited in Sjursen, Helene and Borge Romsloe (2006), 'Protecting the Idea of Europe: France and Enlargement', p.145
- Mitterand, Francois (1994), Interview in *La Depeche du Midi* 20 October 1994, cited in Sjursen, Helene and Borge Romsloe (2006), 'Protecting the Idea of Europe: France and Enlargement', p.156
- Ruiz-Jimenez, Antonia. and Jose Torreblanca (2007), 'European Public Opinion and Turkey's Accession: Making Sense of Arguments For and Against', *European Policy Institutes Network Working Papers* (16), <http://www.epin.org> [Accessed 9.10.2009]
- Sarkozy, Nicolas (2007a) Turkey is not European. *Sabah*, May 23 2007, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2007/05/29haber,E4674A2DDA584E099E7D41326CB52B9C8.html> [Accessed 9.10.2009]
- Sarkozy, Nicolas (2007b) *Testimony*. New York: Harper
- Schmidt, Vivien (2009), 'Envisioning a Less Fragile, More Liberal Europe', *European Political Science* vol. 8 no.2, 212-224
- Sjursen, Helene (2006), 'The European Union between Values and Rights', (in Helene Sjursen (ed.), *Questioning EU Enlargement: Europe in Search of Identity*) London: Routledge, pp. 203-215
- Sjursen, Helene (2008), 'Enlargement in Perspective: The EU's Quest for Identity', *Arena Working Papers no.5*.
- Sjursen, Helene and Borge Romsloe (2006), 'Protecting the Idea of Europe: France and Enlargement', (in Helene Sjursen (ed.), *Questioning EU Enlargement: Europe in Search of Identity*) London: Routledge, pp. 142-164
- Szymanski , Adam (2007), 'Germany and the Question of Turkey's Membership in the European Union', *PISM Research Papers* no. 4, 2007, p. 23-40
- Thatcher, Margaret (1993), *The Downing Street Years*, New York: Harper and Collins
- Watts, Duncan and Colin Pilkington (2005), *Britain in the European Union Today*, Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Wæver, Ole (2002), 'Identity, Communities and Foreign Policy: Discourse Analysis as Foreign Policy Theory', (in: Lene. Hansen and Ole Wæver (eds.), *European Integration and National Identity*), London: Routledge, pp. 20-49
- Yilmaz, Hakan (2007), 'Turkish Identity on the Road to the EU: Basic Elements of French and German Oppositional Discourses', *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*. 9 (3) pp. 293-305.