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# Turkey in European Identity Politics: Key Drivers and Future Scenarios

*Jakob Lindgaard*

*Ayça Uyğur Wessel*

*Cecilie Felicia Stokholm Banke*



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## Abstract

This paper presents a trends survey of identity-related primarily European representations of Turkey (but also vice versa) in the 1999-2017 timeframe with a view to identifying the most salient, pertinent, and durable drivers likely to obtain and drive the relations between Turkey and the EU into 2023. It identifies four key drivers underpinning European representations of Turkey, three drivers underpinning Turkish representations of Europe and one shared driver that collectively reveal the underlying dynamics of identity-related representations of each other, a both pivotal and often controversial aspect of EU-Turkey relations. In conclusion, the paper unfolds the nature of the likely scenario of a ‘conflictual orientation’ in 2023, and adds some initial recommendations for decision makers and stakeholders to address this often both sensitive and elusive aspect of EU-Turkey relations.

## Özet

*Bu makale, Türkiye ile Avrupa arasındaki ilişkilerin Türkiye ile olan ilişkilerini (aynı zamanda tersi) 1999-2017 döneminde, Türkiye arasındaki ilişkileri elde etmek ve yönlendirmek için en göze çarpan, uygun ve dayanıklı sürücülerini tespit etmek amacıyla bir eğilimi incelemektedir. Türkiye'nin Avrupa temsilciliğini destekleyen dört önemli sürücüyü, Avrupa'nın Türk temsilciliklerini destekleyen üç şoför ve birbiriyle özdeş ve sıklıkla tartışmalı bir konu olan birbirleriyle özdeşlikle ilgili temsillerinin altta yatan dinamiklerini kolektif olarak ortaya koyan bir ortak şoförü tanımladı. -Türkiye ilişkilerinin Sonuç olarak, bu makale, 2023'te olası bir “çatışmacı yönelimin” senaryosunun doğasını ortaya koyuyor ve karar vericiler ve paydaşlar için bu sıklıkla AB-Türkiye ilişkilerinin hem hassas hem de zorlayıcı yönlerini ele almak için bazı başlangıç önerileri ekliyor.*



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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

However elusive, sensitive, and controversial, identity has played a key role in the development of EU-Turkey relations, and will do so in the future. Who we are or who we take ourselves to be—rightly or wrongly—often involves a compare and contrast with what we take others to be. Even more so, such self-other dynamics are part and parcel of fears about who we could become or dreams about who we would like to be. This is also very much the case on a political and transnational level. And at this level, the EU and Turkey have been each other’s primary other for many years and in many respects<sup>2</sup>, and will continue to be so in the future. For this reason, it is worth trying to gauge into the underlying drivers of these self-other dynamics. This paper will do that.

Already subjected to a thorough treatment in the literature<sup>3</sup>, this paper will do four things. First, it will present a trends survey of mainly European representations of Turkey—but also vice-versa—invoking a few key illustrative examples in the post-1999 timeframe of the FEUTURE project. Secondly, it will pay some more detailed attention to a few key latter day post-2013 developments, likely to have an impact in the near future as well. Thirdly, it will present an analysis of the drivers that underpin these developments, including a ranking of these drivers according to their salience, pertinence, and durability. Finally, comparing these drivers to the drivers judged to be the most salient and pertinent at the present, and those assessed to obtain in the near future, the paper presents an assessment of the most likely identity-related scenario of EU-Turkey relations in the 2023 timeframe. In conclusion, the paper will make a few interim recommendations on how to address the challenges and make the most of the opportunities that the assessed 2023 scenario will leave for decision makers.

The paper will identify four drivers of identity-related European representations of Turkey. First, a key factor underpinning Turkey’s role in European identity politics are the domestic debates on integration, security, religion, and identity especially in the post-9/11 2001 era of ‘clash of civilizations’ and experienced flip-sides to globalization. Representations of Turkey often reflect stances that stem from such debates. Judging from the already vast literature on representations of Turkey in this context, it can seem surprising that there was ever any support for Turkish accession in Europe<sup>4</sup>. But in the early years following the 1999 European Council Summit in Helsinki that recognized Turkey’s EU-candidacy status, liberal—especially social democrat—voices in Germany, the UK, the EU institutions and even in France took up what is arguably an inclusionary

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<sup>2</sup> Morozov and Rumelili (2012) even argue that Turkey along with Russia have played constitutive roles as external markers of European identity.

<sup>3</sup> Central monographs dedicated to identity-related European representations of Turkey count Kuran Burçoğlu (2000), Rumelili (2004), Bogdani (2010), Tekin (2010), Levin (2011), Öner (2011), Aydın-Düzgüt (2012), and MacMillan (2013). Collections include Yılmaz (ed.) (2005), Jung & Raudvere (eds.) (2008), Rumelili (2011), and Rumelili & Çakmaklı (2011). More detailed treatments will be invoked where relevant below.

<sup>4</sup> The paper will return to this point in more detail below.



stance. Secondly, representations in European foreign policy discourse of Turkey as a “model” country—to the Caucasus in the 1990’s, as a non-violent Muslim majority country following 9/11, as a well-functioning market economy following the 2008 Euro crisis, and as a model secular democracy to the Arab Spring countries in 2011—has bestowed Turkey with a liminal identity as a ‘bridge’, ‘gate’ or ‘alliance’ between civilizations. Thirdly, identity-related European representations of Turkey have also been deeply ingrained in the Pan-European deepening-widening debate on the future of the EU. In this context, those countries in continental Europe in favour of a deeper integration have been more prone to scepticism about Turkish identity and its possible place within the Union than were e.g. the UK, which has always been in favour of a wider and more porous cooperation. The fourth element to be identified as a driver of European identity-related representations of Turkey is the steep incline in perceptions of different political cultures especially following the highly publicized Gezi demonstrations of 2013. In this context, tendencies towards majoritarianism and outright authoritarianism have been seen as incompatible with European political culture. Also, this has been a position espoused especially by the European liberal left, who were originally supportive of Turkey’s EU accession, if mainly because of its opposition to the rising nationalist stance on integration within Europe.

To provide some material for an instructive comparison, the paper also makes a few brief notes of identity-related Turkish representations of Europe. Here, it identifies three drivers. First, religion is a key driver underpinning the EU’s role in Turkish identity politics. At first, the conservative backers of the AKP government saw the EU as a source of freedom of religion—especially for women to wear the headscarf (the *türban*) at the university and in public jobs—whilst the old Kemalist elite saw the EU as catalyst of rising Islamism in Turkey. This later changed—especially following the 2005 ECtHR decision in the Leyla Şahin case and scathing EU criticism of a 2007 attempt to criminalize adultery—with a growing sentiment in the new AKP elite that Europe was an exclusivist ‘Christian club’. Secondly, secular nationalists—the so-called ‘Ulusalçılık’—have seen in the conditionality of the EU accession process a re-enactment of the so-called ‘Sèvres Syndrome’, viz the fear that Western countries are plotting against Turkey’s national integrity through the support of internal collaborators such as the Kurds and non-Muslim minorities—like they allegedly did with the Sèvres Treaty of 1920. At first aloof from this fear, the AKP has arguably adopted (and adapted) this position as well of late, including the Gülenist so-called FETÖ organization on the list of internal collaborators of the West. Thirdly, Turkey’s turns on foreign policy—both after the advent of the AKP government in 2002 and as a result of key turnabouts in the foreign policy outlook during the reign of the AKP—has been a key driver of identity-based representations of the EU.

Europe and Turkey share one very important driver as well. This driver is present as an added level to more of the already mentioned drivers. It is the fact that the various tropes of identity—the



various narratives—that underlie representations of other often have been exploited by the political leadership (and opposition) on both sides for domestic political gains. It is important to keep this added level in view, also looking forward as this paper does.

On the grounds laid by the identification of these drivers, the paper makes the conjecture that identity-based representations of other are likely to push EU-Turkey relations in a more conflictual orientation within the 2023 timeframe. This will hardly surprise anyone privy to the often-heated identity related debates that have taken place since 1999. What is less obvious, perhaps, are points to the effect that (i) the European liberal left, as already indicated, has made a major turn on its identity-based representations of Turkey since 1999 and that this plays a highly salient role today, (ii) that religion as an identity marker today is less salient compared to other identity markers, (iii) that identity based narratives often tend to reflect particular positions on intra-European and domestic debates and manoeuvring on highly needed roles for the other to play in international relations, rather than a knowledge-based assessment of the identity of the other, and (iv) that identity-based representations of other not only have changed in nature, but also are more prominent and salient only relative to the perceived likelihood of membership.

Thus, what the paper will unfold is not so much that relations between Turkey and the EU within this identity-based field are likely to follow a more conflictual path, but some of the specifics of the likely nature and implications of this path, and how it is likely to shape relations into 2023.

Aside from building on some aspects of the expansive literature in this field, the empirical data for the paper is gleaned from public debates and official statements at both national and EU-wide levels, and both EU-institution, national government, and opposition representatives where pertinent. This is meant to be a representative sample of mainstream voices rather than fringe comments that often find notable publicity in the often highly sensitive and contentious identity-related debates. Besides a simple periodization of before and after 2013, the paper deploys only one analytical matrix, the distinction between civic and cultural components of identity (Bruter, 2003, Bruter, 2004, Risse & Grabowski, 2008). A civic reference to European identity envisions a European community bound together by rules and institutions such as outlined in the Copenhagen Criteria. A cultural conception of Europe, on the other hand, sees Europe as primarily bound by history, values, tradition, religion, ethnicity or the like.<sup>5</sup>

Before proceeding with the four steps outlined, a few caveats and disclaimers are in place. Since the main objective of this paper is to unfold the nature and implications of EU-Turkey relations within the area of identity-politics in 2023 based on developments since 1999, it covers an expansive timeframe and wide scope. Thus, it is not a detailed in-depth empirical study of any

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<sup>5</sup> Müftüler-Baç (2008) makes a similar distinction, unfolding how the debate of Turkish accession to the EU around 2005 reflects an intra-European debate on the depth of European integration, a debate that—in the terms deployed in the present paper—sets up culturalist standards for Turkey's accession over and above the civic criteria outlined in the Acquis Communautaire and Copenhagen Criteria. This distinction is also reminiscent of the distinction often invoked between 'thick' culturalist and 'thin' civic conceptions of European identity (see e.g. Dostál, Akçali, and Antonsich (2011), according to whom thick conceptions correlate with identity-based skepticism and thin conceptions with optimism about Turkish EU-membership.)



particular aspect of this highly complex debate already addressed extensively in the literature<sup>6</sup>. Nor does it pretend to make any original contributions on a theoretical or explanatory level. What it does propose to do is to bring out in its analysis both the obvious and less obvious drivers of the identity-based relation, but only insofar they are deemed salient, pertinent and durable in relation to unfolding the most likely identity-based scenario in a 2023 timeframe.

The paper is structured according to the four things already stated it will do, first on Turkey in European identity politics (and vice-versa) in the 1999-2013 period (chapter 1), secondly on new trends (until December 2017) in European representations of Turkey (and vice-versa) (Chapter 2), thirdly unfolding the identification of drivers just outlined (Chapter 3), and fourthly spelling out the nature and implications of the assessed conflictual scenario for 2023. In conclusion, the paper will make some initial recommendations based on the findings.

## 2. Turkey in European identity politics 1999-2013

It is only natural that the EU's recognition of Turkey as a candidate country in 1999 would see a steep increase in Europe of debates on Turkey's compatibility with a European identity.<sup>7</sup> Since this was coeval with the mindboggling upheavals that combined the end of Cold War EU enlargement optimism, the debacles in the Balkans, and a Huntingtonian sense that new global identity-based fault-lines were gaining salience (Huntington, 1996), the question of Turkey's 'Europeanness' to a large extent was integral to Europe's internal grapples with finding its own feet identity-wise (see e.g. Sjursen (ed.), 2006, Sjursen, 2008, Müftüler-Baç & Taşkın 2007, and Schimmelfennig, 2009). As Kastoryano (2006: 275) makes vivid, Turkey's EU candidacy came to serve as a 'mirror' for Europe's grapples with its own identity, in its simplest sense on how far Europe's borders can extend.

Also, the now somewhat tired Huntingtonian idea of a "clash of civilizations" gained salience especially in the wake of the 9/11 2001 terror attacks in the US to provide a simple narrative support for security- and identity-related anxieties about Islam and—by superficial association—Turkey in Europe (Öner, 2009). As Öner also unfolds, liberals invoked this trope to exhibit EU-Turkey relations as a counterexample to the idea of an inevitable civilizational clash (as was the UN initiative 'Alliance of Civilizations'<sup>8</sup>, conceived by Spain and co-sponsored by Turkey).

More generally, and also in the context of Turkey as a mirror of European identity discourses, religion rose to become a key identity component of European debates on Turkey (See e.g. Jung & Rad-vere (eds.), 2008 and Levin, 2011). If the literature tends to depict this almost exclusively

<sup>6</sup> See note 2 for references to general treatments of these topics. Also, particular voices have been left out simply due to pragmatic scope-related considerations. One such voice, to be included briefly in the final forward looking parts of the paper is that of Austria, that perhaps most notorious and skeptical voice of them all.

<sup>7</sup> Inversely, the more recent return to discussions—also in light of the ongoing Brexit negotiations—of differentiated forms of European integration (Tekin, 2017) and, by implication, differentiated forms of association between Turkey and the EU (Müftüler-Baç 2017)—could arguably come to ease the pressure and salience of identity-related debates on Turkey-EU relations. More on this in Chapter 3 and 4 below.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unaoc.org/>



as a conflictual driver, that was not always the case, especially not early on, and by liberal stakeholders across Europe as well as in Turkey.

But, as Ayhan Kaya brings out in his 2009 book on Islam, Migration and Integration – The Age of Securitization (Kaya, 2009), the Turkish immigrant was no longer just about being a 'Euro-Turk' (Kaya & Kentel, 2005), 'immigrant' or 'guest-worker' to the European imagery, but about being 'Muslim' and hence about being a potential security threat. The fronts outlined.

With a view to only including a treatment of elements that help bring out drivers that this paper deems to retain a salience, pertinence, and durability in its 2023 framework, we now turn to some key examples of how identity and culture has influenced EU-Turkey relations in the 1999-2013 period, with the main focus being European representations of Turkey.

## 2.1. From shared European convergence to growing continental scepticism

In December 1999, in a speech before the Bundestag, the German social democrat SPD Bundeskanzler, Gerhard Schröder included the following two identity-related points on his lists of reasons for supporting the Helsinki decision to accept Turkey as an EU candidate country: First, it is key for the integration of and living together with the some 3 million German citizens of Turkish back-ground. Secondly, it proves that the EU-15 of 1999 is not a "Christian Club" (Klub des christlichen Abendlandes), but a community of values such as respect for rule of law, democracy, humanity, and solidarity (Schröder, 1999).<sup>9</sup>

Schröder also deferred to US President Bill Clinton's support for the Helsinki decision. Schröder and Clinton apparently shared a wish that Turkey would turn to Europe and avoid a descent into an Islamic Fundamentalism (ibid.). Later, in 2004 in Die Welt, Schröder again emphasized the community of shared values, now coupled with the expressed belief or hope that a democratic Turkey committed to European values would be a proof that there is no contradiction between Islam and enlightened modern societies (Schröder, 2004).<sup>10</sup>

In the UK, Toni Blair was also a strong supporter of Turkish EU membership. Putting a positive spin on the securitized debates of the post-9/11 era, Turkey was portrayed as a bridging country between the east and the west, as a strong case for disproving "claims of a clash between Muslims and Christians" and as a vital partner to guarantee "the peace and security of the world" (Blair, 2004).<sup>11</sup> Adding pressure on other European leaders, Blair referred to the Copenhagen 2002 summit as a "historic opportunity to act" (Blair, 2002a). This optimism also reflected the UK's stance on the Enlargement debate, envisioning the future of Europe as a wide and porous cooperation of culturally diverse members rallying around thin, civic values rather than, as indicated, a deeper Christian club.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Later, in 2004 in Die Welt, Schröder again emphasizes the community of shared values, now coupled with the expressed belief or hope that a democratic Turkey committed to European values would be a proof that there is no contradiction between Islam and enlightened modern societies (Schröder, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> For a further treatment of identity-related German representations of Turkey, see Buğday (2003), Diez (2007), Kösebalan (2007), Yılmaz (2007).

<sup>11</sup> See also Tocci (2011) for the securitized importance of Turkey as a bridging country.

<sup>12</sup> See also Tocci (2011) for the securitized importance of Turkey as a bridging country.





Even the conservative Jacques Chirac in France—and remarkably with the support of the Gaullist right—backed Schröder and Blair in their support for opening negotiations with Turkey, even if the identity-based criticism came sooner and in harsher terms in France than elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> In Brussels, the President of the European Commission (EC), José Manuel Barroso also rallied behind the “historic” opportunity for Turkey to join the EU because of the country’s “size, historical background, its geographical situation and its potential role as a bridge between Europe and the Islamic world” (Barroso, 2004). Barroso made his statement, mindful that the “real challenge for Turkey” would be the need to “win the hearts and minds of those European citizens who are open to, but not yet fully convinced of, Turkey’s European destiny” (Ibid.).<sup>14</sup>

The general trend of the early days of this period thus seems to be characterized by an insistence that recognized civilizational and religious difference, also in relation to Turkish background immigrants to Germany, but a difference that still made convergence on thin, civic, universalist principles of the kinds espoused in the Copenhagen criteria possible. Also, Turkey’s liminal identity as a bridge or gate to the Muslim world played a key role in securitized European debates as a guarantor of stability.<sup>15</sup>

As already indicated, growing scepticism along more culturalist lines had already begun to rear its head, especially in continental Europe and especially in France. Already in 1999, the leader of the Christian Democrat opposition to Chirac in France, Francois Bayrou, for instance stated: “Allowing Turkey to join the EU [would] change the nature of Europe” (Bayrou, 1999). And the Sovereignist Philippe de Villiers opened the new millennium thus: “Europe died in Helsinki while deciding to allow Turkey to enter the EU.” (de Villiers, 2000). Of course, much here hinges on what the stakeholders take “Europe” to mean.<sup>16</sup> The former openly “Catholic” President, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, for instance, openly stated that Turkey had a different culture (d’Estaing, 2002), and later campaigned for including Christianity into the preamble of the European constitution.

Nicolas Sarkozy rose to prominence on the popularity he gained from his hard-line stance on integration during his two terms as a Minister of Interior in the early 2000’s. To him, the issue of integration and allowing Turkey into the EU were part and parcel: “Because we do have a problem of integration, which points to the question of Islam in Europe. To pretend that this is not a problem would be to hide reality, if you take in 100 million Muslim Turks, what will happen?” (Sarkozy, 2006). Geography was also invoked. Sarkozy repeatedly referred to Turkey as a country

<sup>13</sup> For further reading of a generally more critical examination of the French identity political discourse on Turkey, see Le Gloanec (2006), Yilmaz (2007), Tekin (2008).

<sup>14</sup> Debates in the European Parliament reflected the same tension (see De Angelis, 2013) as a culturalist exclusivist line soon emerged to challenge Turkey’s status as a European country (Levin, 2011) and (European Parliament, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> As the paper will return to below, this was largely mirrored by both the AKP and liberal groups in Turkey in this period.

<sup>16</sup> Going off of the prominent French debates on the Muslim head garb, the hijab and the face veil, the arguments from “Europe” often invoked secularism (Laïcité), gender equality and in general a resistance towards allowing Islam any role in the public and political spheres. See e.g. Christian Joppke’s 2009 book *Veil – Mirror of Identity*, where he compares and contrasts the headscarf debates in France, Germany and the UK. A notable difference between the three countries is to be found in their various conceptions of the public sphere. In France, the public sphere e.g. included students in public schools, in Germany the question of banning the headscarf only concerned state employed teachers in the schools, whereas the UK to a larger extent saw the schools as extensions of the private sphere, which meant that accommodations were made and headscarves were produced in school uniform colors. This only changed in the UK, when the face veil became an issue (Joppke, 2009).



in Asia Minor, not Europe (Sarkozy, 2007a). This is also reflected in his statement: "Turkey is not a European country, and as such it does not have a place inside the European Union. A Europe without borders would be the death of the great idea of political Europe." (Sarkozy, 2007b).

Already since 2001, Sarkozy was also a vocal supporter of the French push to be the first to officially recognize the Armenian genocide and then making the denial thereof illegal in France.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Sarkozy differed from e.g. d'Estaing by not basing his stance on integration and Turkey on Christianity, but on an assertive version of enlightenment values such as Secularism, gender equality, freedom of expression, etc. As with the Muslim headscarf during the heated 2003-4 debates in France,<sup>18</sup> majority Muslim Turkey was seen as a threat to an integrated Europe held together by Enlightenment values.

Even before she was elected German Bundeskanzler in 2005, Merkel introduced the now (in)famous idea of offering Turkey a "Privileged Partnership".<sup>19</sup> In a letter to the Conservative heads of EU states in the run-up to the inauguration of the actual accession negotiations on 3 October 2005, Merkel and CSU chairman Edmund Stoiber argued that Turkey's accession would jeopardize the much needed European integration process. Like Schröder in 1999, the argument was one of integration, if now on an EU level and with a negative spin. It is implicitly understood that in relation to European integration, Turkey is too diverse, too different. The blunter Stoiber and CSU framed it this way: "Should the EU also admit Morocco and Tunisia, who also want to join?" (Stoiber, 2005) and "The country on the Bosphorus does not belong to our circle of culture (Kulturkreis). Accession of Turkey into the EU would alienate Europe to its own identity. It would be the end of Europe as we know it."<sup>20</sup>

Domestically, Germany were belatedly catching up to countries like The Netherlands, France and Denmark, where Post-Cold War, Post-9/11 identity related anxieties already had fanned nationalist voices for years.<sup>21</sup> Relating to Turkey, this came to a head towards the end of this period when then Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2011 used a rally in Düsseldorf to speak out against what he perceived to be German assimilation of the Turkish-background population and called for the children to learn Turkish first. Unsurprisingly, the CSU pitched this as directly counterproductive to German integration efforts (Dobrindt, 2011 and Friedrich, 2011), and CDU

<sup>17</sup> France publicly recognized the Armenian Genocide already in 2001. Jacques Chirac's supportive stance on Turkish EU-membership helped restore the relations, however. In October 2006 the French General Assembly passed a bill rendering illegal the denial of the Armenian Genocide. The Sarkozy-led UMP introduced the bill. It was not passed but reappeared again in 2011, where it was passed in the lower house. It was deemed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court in January 2012, infringing on the highly lauded freedom of expression. In July of 2016, a revised version of the bill was passed unanimously by the French Parliament.

<sup>18</sup> A debate that started already in 1989 — the year the Berlin Wall came down — with the suspension of an subsequent debate on three girls wearing the hijab to the Gabriel Havez Middle School in Creil.

<sup>19</sup> E.g. in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 16 December, 2004

<sup>20</sup> CSU election flyer, 2005

<sup>21</sup> Werner Schiffauer pins a polemic label on this development: Moral Panic (Schiffauer, 2006), to Schiffauer, is a five-fold phenomenon: (i) a strong concern over the behavior of a certain group, (ii) Us-them hostility, (iii) consensus amongst actors normally very different (against shared other), (iv) An exaggerated representation of threat, (v) a felt volatility, disorder, discomfort. Schiffauer points to the rising assertiveness of second and third generation immigrants historically based expansive and thick criteria of citizenship, and the noted rise of identity- and security-related anxieties in the population as some of the drivers underlying this development. It is easy to see how the debate on Turkey to a large degree fits this bill.



criticized Erdoğan for opening loyalty conflicts. The problem, according to the CDU, was that only Turkish is spoken in the families of the Turkish-background population. Language is a key marker of integration (Grindel, 2011, Westerwelle, 2011, and Lasotta, 2011), a core identity issue.

Though the European Parliament (EP) and the EC kept up a constructive and civic orientation, Turkey as a partner buffer against threats stemming from the Middle East against European identity and security grew to play a key role. Thus, the then chairman of the EP, Martin Schulz, reminded everyone in 2005 of "the increase in security that could result from Turkey's full membership" (Schulz, 2005). Calls of this kind were also made more out of necessity than a belief in a shared identity-based set of threat perceptions. Levin (2011) spells this out. Many of MEPs depicted Turkey as a "dangerous country", especially for women and Christian minorities. As opposed to its representation as a bridging country, for instance by consecutive UK governments, Turkey was portrayed as a "gateway of terrorism" due to "fears of uncontrolled immigration" and "Islamization of Europe" (Levin, 2011).

Still, Turkey was invoked as a model country in EP debates about the Arab uprisings, if with the caveats of having to respect the institutional commitments it has already made especially in the areas of freedom of opinion and of the press (Schulz, 2012).

In the UK, David Cameron carried on the Blair torch on Turkey and reminded everyone that Turkey "had a 'unique influence' in helping to build a stable Afghanistan through political and economic co-operation and fostering understanding between Israel and the Arab world" (Cameron, 2010). He, furthermore, re-emphasized a civic understanding of European identity by claiming that values of Islam could very well coexist with those of "other religions, societies or cultures" (ibid). Turkey was also pitched as a model country to the Arab Spring. In his 2012 address to the UN General Assembly, Cameron thus stated that "in Turkey, we see a government with roots in Islamic values, but one with democratic politics, an open economy and a responsible attitude to supporting change in Libya, Syria and elsewhere in the region" and that "the same path is open to Egypt, Tunisia and their neighbours" (Cameron, 2012).

The general trend of the latter days of this 1999-2013 period thus seemed to be a turn in continental Europe towards an identity-based scepticism about Turkish EU-membership. Europe as a geography and 'Kulturkreis' was under threat, whether conceived in Christian or assertively Enlightenment terms. This was of a concern to those who cared about a future of a deeper integrated Europe. The 'moral panic' (Schiffauer, 2006, see also note 20 above) over immigrants as a threat to European identity was extended—by loose association—to Turkey, also through language as illustrated by the case of speaking German vis-à-vis Turkish in Germany. Finally, Turkey rose as a perceived threat to not only groups within Turkey that many in Europe identified with such as women and non-Muslim minorities, but also through migration, Islamization, and even terrorism in Europe. Turkey was still invoked especially in the UK as a country that shared in on European security interests and values in relation to the Arab Spring, but this stance grew thinner, and was completely marginalized as the Gezi demonstrations hit Turkey and the Western press during the summer of 2013.



## 2.2. In Turkey, difference also got the better of initial convergence

For the government of Turkey, defining Turkey's place in the world as a foreign policy actor, especially in the aftermath of 9/11 went hand in hand with claiming a place for Turkey in the European Union. According to the Prime Minister since 2003, Erdoğan, to "set the West and Islam against each other" was a "trap" that could be avoided through accepting a scenario "where western institutions can coexist with values of Islam" (Erdoğan, 2004). Such a step would "be contributing to the reconciliation of civilizations and the EU [would] prove that it is not a Christian club" (ibid). This opinion reflects the belief that Turkey comes from a different 'civilizational background'. However, by embracing similar universal values, Turkey will be able to provide the EU with a bond beyond religious affiliation.<sup>22</sup> If this marked the AKP as distinct from previous attempts by the Kemalist elites to hold that Turkey and Europe belong to the same civilization, appeal to universal values still pointed to the possibility of convergence. The AKP government also welcomed the image of Turkey as a bridging country that would strengthen Europe's position as an important global player. For instance, then Prime Minister Erdoğan stated what he perceived to be Europe's options: "either [the EU] will show political maturity and become a global power, or it will end up a Christian club" (Smith, 2005).

Even before the advent to power of the AKP in 2002, Europe was presented as an objective that most subnational Turkish groups could rally around, as a source of unity. The non-discriminatory Copenhagen Criteria were touted as the 'Ankara' criteria by both the Ecevit government of 1999 and subsequently by Erdoğan, to be deployed domestically even if Turkey were to be denied accession by the EU (Dağı, 2006 and Tocci, 2005). But more importantly, there was a tendency to focus on the Universalist, civic aspects of Europe rather than the exclusionary culturalist aspects (Müftüler-Baç, 2005, Aydın-Düzgit, 2006, and Arkan, 2016).

That said, identity-based scepticism was there, even in the early days. First, the former Kemalist and Nationalist elite—seen by many as quintessentially Western—were sceptical of the EU, because they saw in the EU a supporter of the Kurdish separatist cause and thereby a threat to Turkey's national integrity (Güneş Ayata, 2003, Aydın-Düzgit, 2006, Gülmez, 2008, Avcı, 2011, and Celep, 2011). Also, to them the EU ensured that the so-called 'reactionaries': the conservatively religious periphery were to return to the centre of power and threaten the secular nature of the Turkish state. Being historically hostile towards Greece and the Greek Orthodox Rum minority in Turkey, the 2004 inclusion of Greek Cyprus into the EU following their rejection of the Annan Plan for a reunification of Cyprus also saw the Kemalists and Nationalists raise their identity-based criticism of Europe.

The AKP circles also came to join the scepticism, especially when the European Court of Human Rights upheld a Turkish secularist ban on veiling in public institutions in the 2005 Leyla Şahin case, and more generally as government representatives and pro-government media honed in on

<sup>22</sup> This possibly reflects the first signs of a slide or transition in Turkey's uneasy role from construing itself as part of the European civilization prior to the advent of the AKP (Dixon, 2008), through the often-invoked liminal status of the 'bridge' or 'crossroads' metaphors (Yanık, 2009) to the one published by later Foreign and Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu as center of a distinct civilization that can enter into a 'dialogue' or 'alliance' with other civilizations (Bilgin & Bilgiç, 2012).





perceived Islamophobia in Europe. With the rise of Erdoğan's foreign policy advisor, Ahmet Davutoğlu, to foreign Minister in 2009, the civilizational discourse was invoked to self-confidently pitch the European civilization as 'inferior', and with Turkey holding the potential to turn a crisis-ridden Europe (mindful of the 2008 financial crisis) into a "stronger, richer, and safer" union (Macmillan, 2013: 114).

### 2.3. From Copenhagen Criteria to Religion, Nation, History, and Geography

Pre-empting the analysis of drivers in Chapter 3 and assessment of the most likely future scenario in Chapter 4, what can we glean from the trends of this 1999-2013 period that can prove instructive in looking forward? First, identity-related issues within either Europe or Turkey are the most important drivers of the perceptions of other. Domestically in Europe, debates on Muslim immigrants as perceived threats to national identities, whether conceived in Christian or Secular terms, were a key backdrop to representations of Turkey. On a pan-European level, Turkish EU membership also defined positions in the deepening-widening debates. Other drivers of Europe-based representations of Turkey include identity-related anxieties about everything from personal security to national identity and Europe's role in the international community following global shifts such as the end of the Cold War, enlargement optimism, and post-9/11 securitization. The same seemed to be the case in Turkey, with perceptions of the EU figuring as functions of identity related interests along ethnic, national, and religious fault-lines as well as access to state powers. Also, questions of Turkey's role and identity in the international community following the end of the Cold War were key, e.g. as a leadership figure of an 'alliance' of civilizations.

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Secondly, representations pointing in the direction of convergence during this 1999-2013 period are primarily based on thin Universalist, civic conceptions of identity vis-à-vis the thick particularist, culturalist conceptions.<sup>23</sup> But culturalist positions were also invoked to present Turkish membership as helpful towards integration of Turkish immigrants in Europe, as emphasizing a need to find a *modus vivendi* of co-existence between two distinct civilizations, and that we can enjoy identity-based common security interests in spite of the differences.

## 3. New trends in European representations of Turkey

The 2010 Arab Spring, the 2011 Syrian Conflict, the 2013 Gezi demonstrations, and the 2015 refugee crisis were events that either drove or reflected a change of identity-based representations of other. Also, debates integral to several European elections as well as Turkey's constitutional referendum of April 2017 provided new avenues for discussing Turkey's relationship with Europe, in particular a growing scepticism on both sides about the prospects of a joint future within the EU.

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. Baban & Keyman (2008), Kuzmanovic (2008), Scherpereel (2010), Levin (2011), and Rumelili & Çakmaklı (2011) for further treatment of this point.



### 3.1. Conflictual European representations of Turkey gain width and change character

The UK is an illustrative example of how rising Nationalism got the better of one of the last vestiges of Turkey-support in Europe. Different from continental Europe, the 2013 Gezi demonstrations did not rattle Cameron's support for Turkey. When asked specifically about his British Government's stance on the protests and Turkish government's reaction to it, Cameron replied that despite the events "Turkey's journey over the last few decades in terms of political freedom and economic freedom has been remarkable, and has been very important for the stability of our world" (Cameron, 2013).

It took the far-right UKIP campaign for BREXIT to finally force Cameron to change. According to UKIP's campaign, it is "crystal clear that Turkey, an Asian country, cannot join the EU" (Legge, 2013). Turkey's possible entry into the EU became a key component of the campaign for the UK to leave. The UKIP also put together a twitter campaign with video footage of a physical fight among MPs in the Turkish Grand National Assembly running at the same time as Cameron's statement that he "feels passionate about paving the way from Ankara to Brussels" (UKIP, 2016).

This forced Cameron to issue the infamous response: "at the current rate of progress it would be the year 3000 before Turkey joined" (Cameron, 2016).

In France, François Hollande largely mirrored Cameron. Hollande took over the reins from infamously critical Sarkozy in a 2012 election campaign that hardly touched on Turkey. The responses to the Gezi events were also measured, and Hollande even paid an official visit to Erdoğan on 27 January 2014 to calm down the previously tense relationship between France and Turkey. According to Hollande, "The [membership] process must be carried forward with the most difficult subjects." (Hollande, 2014) When he has been critical, and he has, he has kept the criticism based solely on the level of a civic conception of European values. For instance, he has held that "there cannot be any concessions on the matter of human rights or the criteria for visa liberalization" (Hollande, 2016a) and that it was "understandable that Turkey wants to defend itself" against the spring 2016 Kurdish insurgency, but that "violations of human rights and the freedom of press cannot be accepted" (Hollande, 2016b). He also stated that a "country that at one moment wants relations with the European Union, including negotiations to join, cannot rightly introduce the death penalty" (Hollande, 2016c).

Throughout Hollande stays on a principled high ground, but also makes clear that Turkey's perceived transgressions against perceived core European values is not acceptable. Arguably, this reflects a new trend towards (or a return to) the invocation of thin Universalist, civic values, and not thick of law and democratic rights" (Piri, 2017), avoidance of "excessive use of force" against demonstrators (EP, 2013), but also against Kurdish groups in the Turkish southeast, and avoid the extensive jailing of both journalists and opposition members of parliament (Ibid.). In sum, the main concern has been the perceived rise of authoritarianism in Turkey, culminating in the adoption through a claimed skewed election campaign of the constitutional amendments granting President Erdoğan expansive powers with minimal checks and balances.

Finally, and in response to the 'Nazi' analogies mentioned, the EU leaders responded in unison. Martin Schulz stated that "Turkey is now in the process of developing into an authoritarian state." (Schulz, 2017) and Donald Tusk agreed by arguing that "If anyone sees fascism in Rotterdam, they are completely detached from reality." (Tusk, 2017). Also Jean-Claude Juncker followed the joint response in declaring that "[he] will never accept this comparison between the Nazis and [these] governments. The one who is doing this is taking distance from Europe and not trying to enter Europe." (Juncker, 2017). Invoking a Nazi-analogy to depict the identity of European leaders in 2017 is an identity-based red line with clear historical dimensions, a thick identity-based reference that will unify European leaders.

In sum, however, this most recent period in general witnessed a return to the invocation of thin, civic markers of European identity and values in debates on Turkey, if this time invoked not as platform of convergence, but of difference and conflict. The liberal left that had initially supported Turkish EU membership turned to be some of the most vocal opponents of the perceived rise of authoritarianism and oppression of leftist and minority groups such as the Kurds. Perceived differences or even threats based on religious identity were largely absent here, though religion were of course present in other discourses on Turkey. This can for instance be seen in European worries over Turkey's initial support for seemingly unpalatable Islamist groups around in Syria until around the summer of 2015, and in domestic debates especially in Austria and some of the new Eastern European EU member states. Insofar as thick, culturalist aspects played a role it was in the rebuttal of comparisons of European leaders to the Nazi period. Finally, identity-related representation of Turkey arguably grew less salient during this period, perhaps as the prospects of Turkish EU-membership grew increasingly unlikely, or perhaps as the Turkish leadership became but one of more political leaderships with significant power and reach that did not seem to share European values or identity.

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### **3.2. Conflictual Turkish representations of Europe also gain width and change character**

Turkish identity-based representations of Europe since 2013 have largely mirrored the European tendencies towards a downturn, a broadening across most of the political spectrum, and a change in character. European criticism of Erdoğan's perceived disproportional crackdown on the Gezi demonstrators not merely fanned public criticism in Turkey of a European lack of understanding given the outcomes of similar protests in the region two years earlier. It also reinvigorated a deep-seated perception in Turkey of a conspirational West bent on undermining Turkish national integrity, often through the support of fifth column activities of internal enemies. It was this perception that not merely grew in both depth and width, but also changed the character of Turkish representations of Europe.

At first, however, there were two sides to representations of Europe. On the one hand, Turkey had friends in the European Union, such as David Cameron, whose support for Turkey's government as an ally had not diminished due to these events (Hope, 2014). On the other hand, according to Erdoğan, there were those who did not want Turkey in the European Union, with



whom the opposition parties were collaborating in escalating protests within Turkey (NTV, 2013). However, the two sides merged into one as Cameron was forced into stating that Turkish membership to the EU would not be possible before the turn of a new millennium (Yorke, 2016).

Representations of Europe got embroiled in the narrative that there was some 'mastermind' (Üst Akıl, 2016) or 'interest rate lobby' (Zalewski, 2013) involved in covertly curbing Erdoğan's power and Turkey's might. Most colourful were later advisor to Erdoğan, Yiğit Bulut's claim that German airline, Lufthansa had supported the Gezi protests because they were afraid that the giant new airport to be built north of Istanbul would divert traffic from Lufthansa's Frankfurt base (Reynolds, 2013 and Gibbons, 2013). More concretely, this evolved into representations of Europe as supportive of the two identity-based groups to top the list of not merely the AKP government's but also to a large extent the opposition groups' threat perceptions, the PKK and the Gülen movement (e.g. DW, 2016, Reuters, 2016, and Gümüş, 2017).

This paper will expand on the analysis of the underlying nature and implications of this new tendency in Chapter 3 below. What is of immediate interest is that members of the CHP, the main opposition party, to a large degree support the Government's argument that Turkey is being treated unfairly by Europe on a shared nationalist footing. Even though they criticise the AKP government in the Parliament and most recently on the streets for eroding democracy and justice in Turkey (Kilicdaroglu, 2017), they align with them on Europe. Examples here count CHP criticism of the 2017 vote in Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) for restarting the monitoring process for Turkey (Mikko & Godsken, 2017) and the diplomatic crisis with the Netherlands, where CHP called for tough sanctions against the Netherlands (CNN Türk, 2017).

One final trope that has seen increasing salience is the claim that Europe is deploying double standards in its critique of Turkey's failing democratic record. Examples here count the French declaration of state of emergency in 2015 in response to European criticism of the Turkish state of emergency. Another example is the German hypocrisy of denying Erdoğan and other AKP ministers the right to exercise free speech in Germany as Germany criticises the AKP government for curbing free speech in Turkey (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2017).

### 3.3. Differences of political cultures and identity-based threat perceptions in the ascendant

As in Europe, thick, Culturalist representations of Europe have continued in the Turkish pro-government media; primarily of Europe as a Christian club and an Islamophobic continent. But reli-gion-based representations of Europe during this 2013-2017 period also have taken a back seat to new forms of criticism, mainly about Europe applying double standards on the claimed universal principles it allegedly identifies with, and about a Europe in support of groups in Turkey which are pitched as internal threats to Turkey's national integrity.

Negative representations of other have also been in the ascendant since 2013, with more political actors on both sides joining in on negative representations of the other, including the liberal left in Europe and the leftist Kemalist opposition in Turkey.





In order to understand what has driven these developments, what direction identity-based representations of other are likely to take in the 2023 FEUTURE timeframe, and what stakeholders could do to approach these challenges, the paper now turns first to an analysis of the most salient, pertinent, and durable drivers that underpin these representations and which are the most likely to obtain in the near future.

## 4. Identity-related drivers

The question now is how identity-related drivers of especially European representations of Turkey, but also vice-versa, are likely to influence the development of the EU-Turkey relations in a 2023 timeframe. As indicated already in the introduction, absent any black swans the orientation is likely to be conflictual. As also indicated, this is unlikely to surprise anyone privy to the development of these representations. What is perhaps more interesting is what it exactly is that is likely to drive identity-related representations of each other in that timeframe, what implications this is likely to have, and what stakeholders can do to address it.

In this chapter 3, we turn first to an analysis of the key underlying factors that have driven the representations of other since 1999, with priority given to those that are assessed to be the most salient, pertinent, and durable in the near future. The paper highlights four key drivers that have driven European representations of Turkey (chapter 3.1), three drivers that have driven Turkish representations of Europe (chapter 3.2), and one driver that appears to be shared by both sides (chapter 3.3.). In conclusion, the chapter will rank the drivers as outlined.

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### 4.1. Four drivers of European identity-based representations of Turkey

First, representations of Turkey have been a mainstay function of domestic European debates on immigration and integration. They span from the hopes of the globally oriented liberal left's initial dream of a multicultural and inclusive Europe at the one end of the spectrum to the rising anxieties about the loss of Particularist sources of belonging in the nation, religion, tradition, history and the like, at the other end. Schröder's main argument for supporting the 1999 Helsinki decision, recall, was thus the proper integration of Turkish background citizens in Germany. Turkish accession would be a proof to these citizens that Europe was not a Christian club, and that exclusion on religious grounds would not happen. Sarkozy's scepticism on Turkey also could seem to mirror his hard-line stance on immigration and integration in France as the Minister of Interior during the early 2000's. As the European political centre-left parties lost ground to the rising nationalist sentiments on integration—either in rising nationalist parties or domesticated into traditional more mainstream conservative parties—so did the identity-related argument in support of Turkey.

If the outright nationalist stance on these debates for various reasons caught up with mainstream debates in Germany and the UK rather late, it is a good question how much of a role this driver will play in the future. As the paper has already outlined, representations seem to rest on different drivers today. The initial identity scares that drove nationalist movements in Europe can also seem to have



peaked at least in the EU-15 countries, as the initial identity-related worries seemed to reflect new types of perceived initial opportunities and subsequent threats following the upending of global fault lines in the wake of the Cold War.<sup>24</sup>

That said, integration-related debates on religion, nation and the like can still influence representations of Turkey e.g. from countries such as Austria and newer Eastern European members of the EU. This will be of a very different kind, however. Poland, for instance, recently aired its support for Turkish EU membership as Erdoğan visited Poland to sign trade deals on 17 October 2017, just two days before the 19-21 October EU summit, where Turkey's EU membership were to be discussed. (Broniatowski, 2017). In this case, other factors override domestic Polish nationalism, and religion-based worries about Muslim immigrants (Cienski, 2017).

A second driver of identity-based European representations of Turkey, has been the invocations in foreign political debates of Turkey as a model country. Turkey been represented as an identity-related model country, and a partner in European attempts to further European values and interests at least five times. At first, Turkey was invoked as a model democracy to the post-Soviet Caucasian republics in the 1990's. Secondly, it was invoked as a Muslim majority country not prone to terrorist violence and even an ally against terrorism in the post-9/11 years. Thirdly, Turkey was heralded as a Muslim majority country with a secular democratic system and well-functioning market economy for the Arab Spring countries to emulate. Fourth, Turkey was a helpful Sunni Muslim ally for the European countries involved in the US-led Operation Inherent Resolve against Sunni-Muslim ISIS. Fifth and finally, Turkey has been depicted as a humanitarian actor providing asylum and support to the around 3 million refugees primarily from the Syrian civil war that Turkey is hosting today.

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In the context of the present paper, especially Blair and Cameron have taken up such positions, but also Martin Schulz in his 2012 position as chairman of the EP.

This driver has played a centripetal role in EU-Turkey relations, reminding everyone that Turkey still converges with the EU on a sufficient number of identity-markers to be an important partner in the proactive projection of European values or at least as a bulwark against the ultimate identity-related threat to European citizens, radical Islamist terrorism. This has been the case, even at times where other identity-related drivers seem to have driven Europe and Turkey in a conflictual direction. If not heralded as a model by Macron, Turkey is still invoked today as a much-needed partner for Europe to address identity-related challenges, such as immigration and terrorism. As Macron phrased it in September 2017:

Turkey has indeed strayed away from the European Union in recent months and worryingly overstepped the mark in ways that cannot be ignored. But I want to avoid a split because it's a vital partner in many crises we all face, notably the immigration challenge and the terrorist threat. (Macron, 2017)

If out of necessity rather than want, Turkey is still a key partner for Europe to avoid another escalation of acrimonious identity-related debates on immigration and integration; and it is a vital partner in our

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<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that nationalist anxieties no longer drives debates or political activism in Europe. The so-called Identitarian movement is a solid case at point ([The Independent, 2017](#) & [DW, 2017](#)), as are the cases of mainstream nationalism in some Eastern European countries, as well as the stance on Turkey by the new Austrian Government ([Hürriyet Daily News, 2017](#)).



fight against Islamist terrorism that threatens our European lifestyle of frequenting cafés, enjoying concerts, visiting Christmas markets, etc.<sup>25</sup>

A third driver lingering in the background of identity-related European representations of Turkey has been the deepening-widening debate, viz whether the EU is envisioned as a deeply integrated coherent political and cultural unity or a looser more porous cooperation pivoting merely on the arguably original economic and security-related concerns. Should the EU be a union of values or a union of interests?

More precisely, it has been a twofold issue. First, Turkish EU accession was anathema to those nationalist voices who were critical of most any further EU sway over domestic affairs. Expanding the EU to include Turkey would mean that Turkey would gain a say on this EU influence on domestic issues. On this count, dual nationalist stances on both Turkey and the EU came together to buttress each other. Secondly, on a pan-European level the stances on Turkish accession very much depended on whether or not a given country leadership envisioned a deeper, more integrated European identity or a looser more differentiated Europe. The differences outlined above between the UK under both Blair and Cameron, on the one hand, and Merkel and Sarkozy, on the other, manifest a clear example here.

There are of course a set of caveats to be addressed here as well. To those in especially the EC, a deepening of the EU on a set of thin, civic values along the lines of the Copenhagen Criteria has been compatible with a more forthcoming stance on Turkish EU accession. However, even if other primarily national-level supporters of a deepening stance, such as Merkel and Sarkozy, might invoke ostensibly thin, civic conceptions of European identity, they are arguably driven by less inclusionary versions of European identity. Unfolding this a bit, underlying motivations seem to have been one of two types. Either they have held a more exclusionary view of ostensibly thin, civic values such as secularism, gender equality, etc.—rendering these claimed European values incompatible with a particular image of Islam—or the ostensibly thin, civic lines of argument directly mask underlying thicker more Culturalist motivations.

Granted, this is all a bit speculative, if highly relevant to identifying the underpinning drivers. Such detail aside, however, the deepening-widening debate has constituted a relatively clear fault line and a clear driver in the identity-related European representations of Turkey. And, more importantly for the present paper, a new drive towards further integration amongst the remaining EU members (primarily) on the European continent following Brexit could push identity-related representations of Turkey in a less convergent direction.<sup>26</sup>

The fourth and final driver identified in this paper of European identity-related debates on Turkey is one that has emerged especially following the 2013 Gezi events. It is a conception that Turkey holds a political culture entirely distinct from European political values. This driver has three important dimensions. First, it is a marked change from identity-related worries pivoting on Islam—whether based on a felt Christian or secular identity—to worries with the perceived rise of

<sup>25</sup> As of November 2017, the EP has also banned PKK and affiliate groups entry into the EP, and PKK banners have been banned from a rally in Berlin, to accommodate Turkish terror-related concerns (Idiz, 2017), though the EU counter-terrorism coordinator Gilles de Kerchove made it clear that there would be no European recognition of the Gülen movement as a terror organization, due to the lack of evidence (Reuters, 2017)

<sup>26</sup> For further discussion of these aspects see Müftüler-Baç (2008) and Sjursen (2008).



authoritarianism in Turkey. This is clearly perceived as incompatible with even thin, civic conceptions of European identity such as freedom of expression, separation of powers and rule of law.

The second dimension is the striking point that this criticism is shared across the political spectrum on domestic levels, across nations, and especially within key EU institutions such as the EP, the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), and even the EC. Arguably, Cameron's year 3000 comment during his anti-Brexit campaign reflected the width and depth of this anti-authoritarian attitude.

The third dimension of this perception of difference of political cultures arguably comes with the recognition that especially thick, culture-based representations of other, but also thin value-based ones have to take a back seat in the European manoeuvring of an increasingly authoritarian world order, especially in the ever-unwieldy Middle Eastern neighbourhood. In a context like this, Europe cannot afford the luxury of indulging in normative identity-based concerns with values and identity, but must accept the need to engage with e.g. Turkey on an interest-based, strategic basis.

#### **4.2. Three drivers of Turkish identity-based representations of Europe**

This paper has found three identity-based drivers of Turkish representations of Europe in the 1999-2017 timeframe under consideration. First, religion has been key. In the beginning, this played a positive role, especially in the AKP discourse that the EU would ensure freedom of religion for especially Turkish women wearing the symbolically loaded headscarf (the *türban*) as well as a wider hope that it would prove Huntington's 'clash' of civilizations theory wrong. But representations of Europe as an Islamophobic, 'Christian club' soon gained salience to complicate relations. Secondly, a return to unity amongst otherwise diverse Turkish groups on a deep-seated Turkish nationalism has re-enacted representations of Europe as a continent bent on undermining Turkish national identity and integrity. Third and finally, identity has played a key role in the turns of Turkish foreign policy during this period and is likely to do so in the near future.

Religion first. Already, between 1999 and 2002, as Turkey was being led by a coalition government with a centre-of-the-left prime minister, Bulent Ecevit, and a foreign minister who was deeply committed to Turkey's European path, Ismail Cem, Europe was represented as an ally on religion. According to Cem, Turkey was certainly "European" for being committed to a "European value system" that had "respect for democracy, religious tolerance, gender equality and cultural plurality" (The Economist, 2000).

For the AKP, the religion-based demands of its roots in the Islamist Milli Görüş movement were at least initially transformed to be pro- rather than anti-European. On a domestic level, the AKP saw in Europe a leverage against the forces in Turkey that denied especially headscarf-wearing women from enjoying their freedom to be religious whilst getting an university education or working in the public sector. On the level of international relations, a primary AKP argument for Turkish membership to the EU was that this would create a "harmony of civilisations" by bridging the Muslim world and the Christian world. Differently from Ecevit and Cem, the AKP government thus





insisted that Turkey was distinct from Europe in civilization and religion, but at this point claimed that this was compatible with joint commitments to thin, civic values.

However, in 2005, Turkey's self-perceived "otherness" on religion was reinforced with the idea that it was up to Europe to decide what it wanted to be – "a global actor" or a "Christian club" and that Turkey had done everything it could, given its reach. On a domestic level, the verdict in 2005 at the ECtHR against Leyla Şahin's claimed right to take her exams at Istanbul University whilst wearing her türban headscarf vis-à-vis the Turkish state were met with disappointment about EU institutions' ability to guarantee freedom of religion in Turkey. Turkish identity as being Europe's "religious other" was mostly expressed in terms of a concern for growing islamophobia, xenophobia and racism in Europe. The 2005-6 cartoon crisis with Denmark was an early example of this (MacAskill et al., 2006), if more widespread references to Islamophobia in Europe escalated only around 2010 by Turkey's government representatives (Gül, 2010; Gül, 2012; Connolly, 2010; Hurriyet, 2013; Siddiqui, 2012).

Representations of Europe as an Islamophobic continent have continued into 2017, if recently levelled as a defence against European leaders' and institutions' criticisms of Turkey's deteriorating human rights record and increasing authoritarianism. President Erdogan, for instance, regarded the decision by PACE to reopen the monitoring process for Turkey to be "entirely political", claiming that the reason for Europe "[to close] its door on Turkey" was due to the extent of islamophobia (Nakhoul et al., 2017).

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The second driver of identity-based Turkish representations of Europe is the return to Turkish nationalism as a broad identity-political platform, now shared also by the AKP.<sup>27</sup> This has many faces, but is driven primarily by a turn by the AKP-government to a staunchly anti-Kurdish stance following the relatively poor AKP showing at the June 2015 general election, and, in particular a shared animosity against the Gülen movement. These turns have led to representations of European values in Turkey as a foreign, imported element at odds with originally Turkish values, to representations of Europe as supporters of e.g. the Kurdish PKK—along with its Syrian affiliates, PYD/YPG—and the Gülen movement (known in Turkey under the terrorist designation, FETÖ), and hence as supporters of anti-Turkish terrorism, and to representations of a conspirational Europe bent on the destruction of Turkey's national integrity, often through the exploitation of internal fifth column elements. In the literature, this has been dubbed the 'Sèvres Syndrome' after the 1920 Sèvres treaty, representing to many groups in Turkey all but the entire disintegration of the piece of land that is today the Republic of Turkey.<sup>28</sup>

Of interest in the current context is the fact that this identity-based anxiety is shared to differing degrees across the political spectrum, and finds a basis in both Islamist, Kemalist and other Nationalist ideological camps. Along with conditionality, the EU here is depicted as supporting the two foremost threats to Turkish national security, the PKK and FETÖ. Also, this creates an

<sup>27</sup> Examples of the new alliances on a nationalist footing that the upheavals of the last couple of years have given rise to count one between Erdoğan and Doğu Perinçek, the leader of the nationalist Vatan (Motherland) party (Akyol, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> For references to this 'Sèvres Syndrome', see e.g. Kösebalaban (2002), Yılmaz (2006), Guida (2008), Uslu (2008), Bardakçı (2010), Avcı (2011), Yılmaz (2011), Nefes (2013), and Gülmez (2014).



atmosphere where support from EU, e.g. to perceived pro-democratic groups and purposes is likely to be framed as examples of European support to anti-Turkish fifth column activities within Turkey. By implication, these types of representations walk hand-in-hand with perceptions of Europe as being dishonest, as applying double standards about its real purpose of wanting to curb Turkey's rising power.

If invoked to very different degrees, this underpinning driver has gained salience in the latter years and is likely to add further conflict to an already conflictual identity-related representation of other in the years to come.

Thirdly, identity-based representations of Europe have been a function of the role and salience of identity in the turns of Turkish foreign policy during the 1999-2017 period. First, it is worth noting that Turkey in the post-1999 period gained both a self-representation and foreign representation as a pro-active foreign policy actor. Not least in relation to the EU, the developments of Turkey's newfound foreign policy activism have played a defining role. Thus, the role culture and identity has played in the construal of Turkish foreign policy has doubled as an increasingly salient backdrop for identity-related representations of Europe in this period.

Before the advent of the AKP, FM Ismail Cem was committed to Turkey's "Westernization" objective (Cem, 2005). With the advent of the AKP, a different identity of Turkey's role in relation to the EU followed, representing itself first as a partner and a bridge for the EU to reach out to the greater Middle East<sup>29</sup>, but also subsequently with an ambitious nostalgia of being a lead figure at the centre of an independent civilization. This role was unthinkable to the previous Ecevit government, which aimed to isolate Turkey from this "troubled" region as much as possible. Ahmet Davutoğlu and his idea of "strategic depth" not merely saw Turkey take on a more active role in the region (Önis, 2011), it also completely changed Turkey's entire foreign policy identity in the direction of becoming a patron—yet again—of the region.

Arguably, Strategic Depth traversed three major phases, all compatible with versions of a revival of Turkey's Ottoman identity, scoffed upon by earlier governments: (i) an early multilateral and multi-cultural phase including a pro-active and multiculturalist outlook also to Europe, (ii) a later pan-Islamic phase of outreach also to autocratic Shia regimes in the region, with both periods characterized by the pragmatic "zero problems with neighbours" strand, and (iii) a final phase following the Arab Spring of a pro-active and more assertive engagement on the side of conservative Sunni Muslim populations in the region. The (re-)turn to nationalism outlined above—also marked with the departure of Davutoğlu as PM—reflects a fourth phase, if still permeated with key aspects of the identity-based dream that Strategic Depth represented.

Without going into more detail here, each of these phases have come with different aspects of self-representation in foreign policy, and with different representations of Europe. For example,

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<sup>29</sup> This new foreign policy identity as a "bridge" was received warmly in the EU, especially by successive UK governments, but also in the EP, as many MEP's were in favor of the EU playing a more active, global role (e.g. Schulz, 2005 & 2012). This is also yet another example of how representations of other more often than not are functions of roles for the other to play in own outlooks, such as the dream of playing proactive roles in an attempt to spread European values to the world.



this includes representations of Turkey as a country that could help Europe develop a role as a multicultural and normative soft power in the world based on civic principles, avoiding a slide into a role as a reactionary "Christian club". And it includes representations of European foreign policy identity shot through with notes of Islamophobia—not least in the Sarkozy years, but also recently through Austria.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4.3. One shared driver of identity-based representations of each other

As already indicated, identity-based representations of other more often than not have reflected domestic wants and needs in relation to either domestic debates on integration, on role of religion in society, to the pan-European deepening-widening debates, or to various inceptions of foreign policy identities. As both Europe and Turkey are likely to stay on the path of inward turns, this tendency is likely to persist into 2023.

What is also likely to persist is an identity-related driver of Europe's and Turkey's representations of each other that both sides seem to share in on; a tendency by the political establishment to exploit various identity-based narratives involving the other in one way or the other for domestic—in particular electoral—gains. Examples here count everything from the exploitation of Turkey in the UKIP lead Brexit campaign, where physical brawls in the Turkish parliament were juxtaposed with Cameron's expressed support for Turkish EU membership, over Cameron's "year 3000" response to the pressure he was put under during that campaign, to Erdoğan's infamous Nazi-analogies and representations of Europe as a deceitful continent of double standards in the run-up to the April 2017 referendum on amendments to the Turkish constitution, turning Turkey into a de jure presidential system.

As this tendency is also likely to persist, much will come to hinge not merely on domestic electoral calendars and agendas in the near future, but also how political figureheads will exploit the other to further their electoral prospects. We turn now to the final chapter, where will make an attempt at ranking the drivers based on their salience, pertinence and durability into 2023 and unfold the conflictual orientation this constellation is deemed likely to push the identity-based aspects of EU-Turkey relations into in 2023.

### 5. The 2023 scenarios of identity-related representations of other

As indicated in the Introduction and immediately above, the assessment of this paper of the most likely of the possible identity-based scenarios of representations of other in the 2023 timeframe is one of conflict. But as recent developments have already suggested—as outlined above—the content and nature of this orientation is likely to continue down a track of change. Also, identity-based representations of each other will not merely pursue a changing track—with high degrees of uncertainty and unpredictability in mind—but also enjoy salient and prominent positions only relative to the perceived likelihood of membership. And the likelihood of membership, also from

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<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, Eastern European tendencies towards anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments has received relatively scant attention in Turkey.



an identity-related point of view, is growing less likely by the day at the moment, which, in turn, is likely to see a drop in the salience and influence of identity-related representations of other.

This final chapter will unfold this outlook, leaving some initial recommendations to the Conclusion.

First, we rank drivers outlined as well as possible emergent drivers according to their deemed salience, pertinence and durability and make some assessments as to where this is likely to leave identity-related representations of other in 2023.

Recall, the main drivers of European representations of Turkey in the 1999-2017 timeframe were:

1. that Turkey has been invoked as part of the emergent integration debates, first as a possible asset, but also and increasingly so as an extension of perceived challenges relating to Muslim immigrants and descendants in Europe
2. perceptions of Turkey in the context of foreign policy debates as a role model of one sort or the other, due to its unique identity
3. Turkey's role as a variable in the identity-related aspects of the deepening-widening debates, with proponents of a wider, more porous EU prone to more positive representations of Turkey
4. Growing perceptions especially in the European political leftist circles that Turkish culture—especially during the reign of Erdoğan—is prone towards authoritarianism, noting that those circles initially voiced more inclusive representations of Turkey vis-à-vis more nationalist representations as part of the integration debates of driver 1

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And the drivers of Turkish representations of Europe were deemed to be:

- I. A key role of religion, ranging from perceptions of Europe as the guarantor e.g. of the freedom to exercise your religion to Europe as an Islamophobic, Christian club
- II. The more recent (re-)turn to nationalism (see e.g. Candar 2017) that have seemed to entail representations of Europe not merely as a supporter of groups considered terrorists in Turkey, viz. the PKK and FETÖ, but also a continent historically bent on undermining the strength and sovereignty of the Turkish Republic
- III. Representations of Europe as reflections of key turns in Turkey's often identity-based foreign policy outlook

And a shared driver was assessed to be:

- A. A tendency on both sides to exploit various identity-based narratives for domestic, electoral purposes





Looking forward to 2023, whilst mindful of the developments since 1999, the most salient and durable driver of European representations of Turkey will seem to be (4) the imagery of Turkey as country with a proclivity towards authoritarianism. Rightly or wrongly, this driver has expanded the scope of identity-related misgivings about Turkey in Europe, now also to include the liberal left that initially came out in support of an ostensibly democratically strong and religiously moderate AK party, often to illustrate a point made within the integration debates of driver (1) against rising nationalist tendencies in Europe.

When it comes to the distinction between thin, civic and thick, culturalist conceptions of European identity, (4) has also allowed many European leaders to sidestep the more contentious religious, culturalist grounds for exclusion. This happens in concert with a prolific perception that Turkey identity-wise is farther from Europe—in particular EU membership—than before.

And it happens, perhaps more importantly, in concert with a waning salience and pertinence of identity-related drivers in representations of Turkey. Though (3) the deepening-widening debate continues both in light of Brexit and the rising issues between Brussels and the most recent Eastern European member states, Turkey plays only a marginal role in these discussions. Insofar as Turkey does play a role, it does with an air of paradox compared to the drivers of the 2000's. As proponents of a wider, more porous EU, Eastern European countries have been prone to support Turkey. This is in line e.g. with the UK's proclivity towards Turkey-support. But they also share in the strongest driver of identity-based scepticism against the compatibility of European and Turkish cultures in the 2000's, the strong anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim, nationalist positions in the integration debates. Arguably, this could be due to the fact that they share with the Erdoğan government tendencies towards more authoritarian and nationalist forms of Government, aside of course from the obvious fact, that Turkey is invoked as an ally in a complicated relationship with Brussels.<sup>31</sup>

This is a good example of how the roles various drivers can play can change, depending on the constellation they are in with other drivers. Also, and finally, it is unlikely that Turkey will be invoked as a role model and serve a positive role in relations to European wants and needs in foreign policy, aside from the emergent fact that Turkey will remain a partner for ensuring stability and fighting terrorism primarily in the region, but also in Turkey (Danforth, 2018). Thus, driver (2) that has had the potential to driver European representations of Turkey in a constructive direction is likely to lack salience, pertinence and durability.

In sum, drivers of identity-related European representations of Turkey are likely to drive EU-Turkey relations in a more conflictual direction insofar as the prospect of joining forces in a joint union will seem ever more distant. The potential silver lining here is that identity-related drivers tout court are likely to enjoy a less salient and pertinent role in EU-Turkey relations moving forward, and are as such less likely to the deep impact they have enjoyed in the years following 1999.

The drivers driving Turkish representations of Europe, on the other hand, have also undergone a number of shifts. Here, as well, questions of (I) religion have receded into the background, if they

<sup>31</sup> For a Polish example of this already included above, see e.g. Broniatowski, 2017.



are still there and hold the potential to return to the centre of attention. Turkey's outlined (III) foreign policy turns have seen Turkey first slowly turn away from Europe, ending up with a pro-active support for conservative Sunni Muslim population groups in the region, including Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, and a number of insurgency groups in Syria, and secondly (re-)kindle a form of (II) Turkish nationalism sceptical of claimed European support for subnational identity groups deemed by the AKP government to be a terrorist threat such as the Kurdish PKK, but also the Gülenists depicted since May 2016 under the terrorist acronym, FETÖ. In the extreme, Europe is also called out as being two-faced when it comes to deploying the heralded thin, civic conceptions of identity such as free speech when it denies free speech to Erdoğan and other AKP-ministers in Europe, ultimately invoking nazi-analogies.

There is a deep sense of hurt and not being treated as an equal partner to be found at the base of these drivers, entailing a combustible cocktail of a nostalgia for the grandeur of the past with the also historic fears of losing it all. Blunt criticism of Europe is often born of the frustration to be found in the representation of Europe as not only oblivious to the precarious geostrategic identity of Turkey, but also as a continent with a proclivity to exploit this precariousness.

To offset the potential gloom that these drivers hold out for Turkish identity-based representations of Europe is an astute ability to turn towards realism and pragmatism in times of need. In the early days of 2018, this seems to be the case. This does not mean that identity-related drivers will help mend fences with Europe. Rather, such drivers are likely to assume roles that are less salient and pertinent compared to narratives of mutual economic and security-related interests. Also, the reorientation in foreign policy towards countries such as Russia and Iran thus need not reflect an "eastward" orientation, as it is often claimed, but could equally well be seen as an "inward" orientation on the issues mentioned above and a pragmatic realization that economy and security is well-served by transactional engagements with countries such as Russia and Iran.

Finally, the shared driver of a political invocation and exploitation of identity-based narratives often in a populist style to serve the political leaders differently in different domestic contexts is likely to continue, not least with no less than three elections coming up in Turkey before the end of 2019. In both Europe and Turkey, this driver is also likely to drive the relationship in a more conflictual orientation. But this is again augmented by the fact that the prospect of joining forces in the EU will be further remote in the time to come compared to the post-1999 years, as well as a rising salience of a realism and pragmatism with a primary focus on economy and security that will leave identity-related matters to lesser roles.



## 5. Conclusion

Identity has been, is, and will remain a strong driver of EU-Turkey relations. Even if this paper has argued that the salience and pertinence of identity as a driver of EU-Turkey relations is likely to be less prominent for the reasons outlined, it will remain an area of relations that are as important as it is elusive. In conclusion, this paper will provide a brief summary of the forward-looking aspects of the findings, and make some initial recommendations for stakeholders.

Some of the main trends of European representations of Turkey within the field of identity count (i) an expansion of the critical voices from initially counting mainly right wing political voices to now also including the political left, (ii) a development from an invocation of thick, Culturalist arguments during the reform-years in Turkey of the early 2000's to thinner, more civic lines of argument representing the orientation of the AKP government as incommensurable with the values of the Copenhagen Criteria and the Council of Europe, (iii) religion's less salient (if not entirely absent) role in identity-based representations of Turkey, (iv) the loss of salience and pertinence of identity more generally as the likelihood of EU membership has receded into the background of the European imagery, and (v) that identity-related representations of Turkey grow even more dependent on intra-European and domestic positioning as the knowledge and awareness of Turkish affairs also recedes into the background.

Gauging from these trends and the drivers identified, the 2023 timeframe is likely to see a continued deterioration of identity-based European representations of Turkey, with the key qualification that the drop in salience and pertinence of identity-related issues make them less likely to take centre stage in engagements between Turkey and the EU.

In brief, the Turkish identity-based representations of Europe have developed from concerns primarily with issues of religious identity to a (re-)kindling of classic nationalist tropes that perceive in Europe a support for identity-based terrorist threats in Turkey as well as a continent bent on undermining Turkey's hard-fought territorial integrity and sovereignty. As from the point of view of Europe, there is a good chance that identity will assume a lesser role in the time to come as economic and security-related interests will join hands with a new tendency towards "going bi-lateral" on European countries to focus—in a transactional style—on shared interests such as stability and prosperity in Europe, Turkey, and the region.

Insofar as identity-markers and -narratives are invoked—for electoral purposes mainly—they are likely to push EU-Turkey relations into a more conflictual orientation in the 2023 timeframe under consideration here.

This leaves the initial recommendations. The recommendations to be outlined here at the end will be conditional on the wants and needs of political stakeholders, or at least purport to be as realistic as possible within the context of the current political situation. Based on the findings of the present paper, the paper will make three lines of recommendations.

First, it could be worth working to defuse on both sides the idea that Turkey as well as Europe represents only a few, deep and unifying markers of identity. Talking up the idea in Europe that



Turkey enjoys simple and unifying markers of identity such as Islam, Turkish Nationalism or Secularism is not only counterfactual; it also relaxes the often high-strung idea of one, unified state of affairs that is either compatible or (more often) incompatible with the EU. This is easier said than done in the often populist state of political play, but support for this line could add to a sense of at least cooperation on identity. Turkey is not one large "Muslim" nation and Europe is not one single "Christian" club. It would arguably be a helpful beginning to cooperation on identity-related issues if mutual representations could be brought a few levels down and in the direction of a more adequate representation of other than such stereotypes.

Secondly, if top tier political stakeholders could share the fact that representations of each other in Europe and Turkey often seem to mirror each other's worries and anxieties—not least through the rising nationalisms on both sides—this could act as a catalyst for identification with the other, how-ever roundabout that might seem at first. If nationalisms often appear to be mutually exclusionary, they also often feed on some of the same identity-based fears. Rendering explicit that such fears bear structural identities, even if the target thereof sometimes is the other, could provide a mutual identification and understanding that fears of similar kinds drive us on both sides of the artificial divide.

Finally, there are identity-related tropes and narratives on both sides that have driven Turkey and the EU closer together, which could be invoked again with success, not least in light of the challenges Europe and Turkey face with Trump in the West and Putin in the East adding pressure on both Europe and Turkey. Recall, for instance, the early phase of Strategic Depth and the also Neo-Ottoman idea built on particular perceptions of the Millet system of the Ottoman past to the effect that Ottoman Turkey were a multicultural and inclusionary system displaying tolerance and recognition of religious and other minorities. On a transnational level, this is in sync with the idea that Turkey is uniquely poised to lead initiatives to foster alliances between civilizations. From a European point of view, following the Cold War, Europe felt uniquely placed to act as a normative base for an open and inclusionary outreach to its neighbourhood and the world more generally. Rekindling this image, now in the face of adversity rather than surplus, could fit a less conflictual orientation towards Turkey into European identity politics; something that would also surely benefit EU-Turkey relations.



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## About the Authors



**Dr. Jakob Lindgaard**

Dr. Jakob Lindgaard is a researcher at Danish Institute for International Studies. He contributes to the FEUTURE project research on the identification of drivers of the development of EU-Turkey relations within the fields of Politics, Identity and Security.



**Ayça Uyğur Wessel**

Ayça Uygur Wessel is an external lecturer at Copenhagen Business School. She has contributed to FEUTURE project's research in the context of identity and culture drivers of EU-Turkey relations during the post-1999 period.



**Cecilie Felicia Stokholm Banke**

Cecilie Felicia Stokholm Banke is a senior Researcher and the head of Foreign Policy Unit at Danish Institute for International Studies. She is specialized in European history and politics she works on EU-Turkey relations and European security debates.



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# ABOUT FEUTURE

FEUTURE sets out to explore fully different options for further EU-Turkey cooperation in the next decade, including analysis of the challenges and opportunities connected with further integration of Turkey with the EU.

To do so, FEUTURE applies a comprehensive research approach with the following three main objectives:

1. Mapping the dynamics of the EU-Turkey relationship in terms of their underlying historical narratives and thematic key drivers.
2. Testing and substantiating the most likely scenario(s) for the future and assessing the implications (challenges and opportunities) these may have on the EU and Turkey, as well as the neighbourhood and the global scene.
3. Drawing policy recommendations for the EU and Turkey on the basis of a strong evidence-based foundation in the future trajectory of EU-Turkey relations.

FEUTURE is coordinated by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wessels, Director of the Centre for Turkey and European Union Studies at the University of Cologne and Dr. Nathalie Tocci, Director of Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome.

The FEUTURE consortium consists of 15 renowned universities and think tanks from the EU, Turkey and the neighbourhood.

*Coordination Office at University of Cologne:*

Project Director: Dr. Funda Tekin  
Project and Financial Manager: Hanna-Lisa Hauge  
Email: wessels@uni-koeln.de

Website: [www.feuture.eu](http://www.feuture.eu)

 [facebook.com/feuture.eu](https://facebook.com/feuture.eu)

 [@FEUTURE\\_EU](https://twitter.com/FEUTURE_EU)

