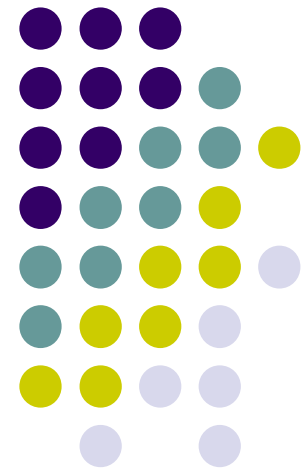


# Geography student teachers' attitudes towards the EU and Europeans in Turkey

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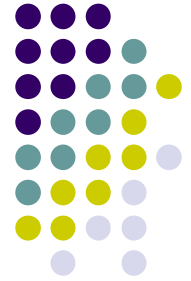


# this presentation is about...



- What geography student teachers think about Europeans and the EU is important because they will be in a position to teach about the EU and Europeans in their professional lives. This study, then, reports on the findings of a research carried out with geography student teachers in terms of their perceptions and attitudes towards the EU and Europeans.

# The context

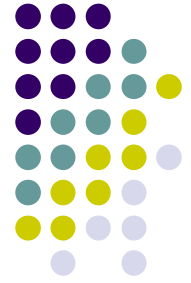


- Turkey began accession negotiations with the EU in September 2005.
- However, a number of blocks already seem to be on the way.
  - Accession negotiations on eight chapters are suspended in December 2006
  - Another chapter on ‘economic and monetary policy’ was also suspended in June 2007.
- There is a growing perception in Turkey ‘that a number of member countries noticeably intimidated at the prospect of Turkey’s membership’ (Akkus and Ozturk, 2007: 1).
  - e.g. Nicolas Sarkozy and Andrea Merkel, have offered Turkey privileged partnership rather than full-membership. In fact French President has stated several times that ‘Turkey has no place in the EU’.



# european identity?

- Creating an European identity is thought to be necessary because of the legitimacy deficit the EU suffers.
- One of the most controversial and significant issues is whether a European identity can at all be achieved (Fossum, 2004).
- In such context a probable membership of Turkey with predominantly Muslim population and historically an 'other' for Europe (Ozturk, 2005) becomes contentious issue.



## turkish context

- A new nationalist discourse is emerging in Turkey that the EU (or the West including the USA) and Turkey is incompatible in terms of their strategic interests in the new world order.
- Add to this, according to various public surveys, the popularity of the EU has been in decline in Turkey. Although it was around 70 per cent a few years ago, according to recent studies public support for EU membership has been fluctuating between 30 to 50 per cent.

# methodology



- The means of data collection; a semi-structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews with geography student teachers in March 2006.
- As a part of the questionnaire the respondents are asked to complete some unfinished sentences which sought after student teachers' attitudes and perceptions of the EU and Europeans according to their personal feelings and first impressions (first thing comes to their minds).
  - 'people in Europe are.....',
  - 'the EU means to me (that)....'
  - 'problem with the EU is (that).....'.
- The respondents' ideas on the same issues are further investigated through interviews.

# sample



- The sample of the survey is composed of 145 fourth and fifth year (final-year) student teachers in two universities in Turkey.
- The student teachers who took part in the study had completed all their geography modules including those related to the EU.
- Interviews took place in only one university and with 20 student teachers.

# people in europe are....



- This was to see what future geography teachers of Turkey think of European people.
- Responses to this statement roughly fall into two groups.
  1. General (social, cultural, and personal) characteristics of European people (statements 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12).
  2. Europe's state of development, rights that European citizens have and Europe's social structure (statements 1, 3, 6). Table 1 shows the statements and the number of respondents (f) who supported each statement.

# people in europe are...



Statements	f
1. Well-off (living standards, developed etc.)	29
2. Christian	17
3. Freer (than Turkish society)	16
4. More democratic (than Turkish people- in personal relations)	15
5. Self-seeker (self-oriented; selfish; exploiter)	13
6. Have better education system/better educated (than Turkish people)	11



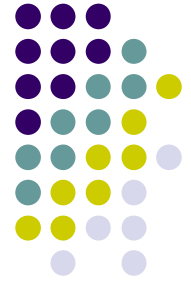
7. Do not have any values (especially sacred ones) / Morally degenerated	11
8. Hardworking	7
9. Different from Turkish people	6
10. Culturally better than Turkish people (in terms of social manners)	4
11. Culturally aware/conscious (preserve their cultural heritage)	4
12. Prejudiced towards Turks	4



...

- Europeans in terms of their characteristics are considered from more than one point of view; broadly speaking some positively, some negatively and still others more neutrally.
- The most mentioned characteristic by 17 respondents was ‘Europeans are Christians’. This idea appears to be a disapproval (marking the difference) as well as stating a fact about the EU as seen below:
  - “They are Christians and far away from Turkish culture” (Respondent 16).

## some quotations...



“They are much more democratic and tolerant in their relationships with each other” (R53).

“They are rich but a corrupt (degenerated; immoral) society” (R101).

“They are self-seeker/selfish people; they live comfortably by exploiting other nations” (R78).

“They are hardworking and respect each other as an individual” (R6).

“They are very developed and ‘cultured’ individuals; they have a high self-esteem” (R123).



“They are very developed and ‘cultured’ individuals; they have a high self-esteem” (R123).

“They have a freer society than us. They value individual liberties and human rights more than us” (R34).

“Their social systems are better (education systems, social security systems etc.)” (R140).

## the EU means to me (that)...



- This statement seeks to reveal feelings of the student teachers about the EU. Overall responses to this statement generally fall into two groups, negative and positive remarks in relation to Turkey's membership. Few number of the respondents also made general remarks regarding with the EU as an organization/project as could be seen in the Table.

# the EU means to me that...

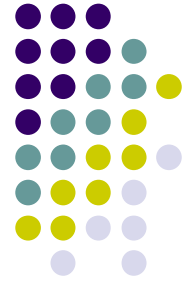


Statements	f
1. Unimportant (not important at all)	42
2. (Very) Important	23
3. Just an alternative (so should not be exaggerated)	13
4. Necessary for economic reasons	12
5. A self-seeker/imperialistic union	8



■ ■ ■ ■

6. A dream (that won't come true)	6
7. Democracy	5
8. Christian club	5
9. Good organization	4
10. Doesn't mean anything (too much)	4
11. Difficult to enter	4
12. Impossible	4



## other negative comments

‘Detaining of Turkey’ (R91),

‘trap’ (R132),

‘dangerous’ (R3),

‘It’s a scenario by those who are  
betrayers/traitors’ (R60),

‘an important question mark’ (R64),

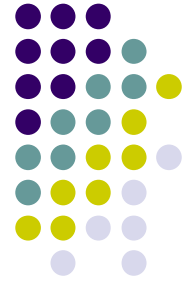
‘interference to our domestic politics’(R144).

## positive remarks..



‘a better future/life’ (R139),  
‘better education’ (R140),  
‘prosperity’ (R7),  
‘only salvation for our country’ (R106),  
‘human rights’ (R111),  
‘a club that must be entered’ (R88),  
‘moral liberties’ (R73).

# The problem with the EU is (that).....



- This statement was to see what type of problems student teachers associate with the EU.
  - Below table shows categorized responses to this statement.



statements	f
1. Cultural differences (family, values systems etc.)	38
2. Religious difference	25
3. History	21
4. Incompatible with our economy (bad economy)	15

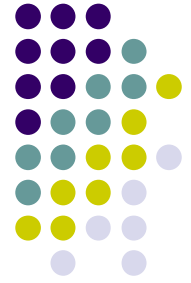


...

5. Our problems with fulfilling the criteria	9
6. Double standards to Turkey	9
7. EU' s real intentions of Turkey	7
8. Won't accept us	6
9. Being a Christian club	4
10 Race (being Turkish)	4

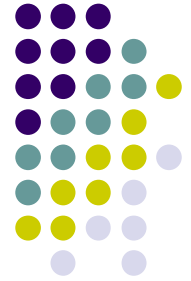


- The remarks in the table could be divided into two; the first one is concerned with problems associated with culture and society (statements 1, 2, 3, 10.) and the second one involves issues associated with the process and politics of Turkey's membership to the EU (statements 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9).
- If we take culture in a broad sense (including family, values and social structures), quite significant number of respondents believe that cultural difference is the most important problem between Turkey and the EU.



having seen cultural differences as problem, some respondents further add some words indicating what they mean by such cultural difference. These are usually negative remarks. In this respect, European culture and social structure are described such as **‘morally corrupt’** (R101), **‘prejudiced’** (R2), **‘selfish’** (R129) and **‘not having a sound family structure and youth’** (R78). Few also believe that the EU is particularly **‘racist’** towards Turks.

# Interview findings



According to interview findings, it could be asserted that almost all interview participants point out a strong attachment to the Turkish identity, which is thought to be different from the European identity in many ways. But the most persistent issues are usually centred around three issues of **religion, family and mentality**.

# religion



- it is usually believed that Turkey and the EU are not fully compatible because of their different religious heritages.

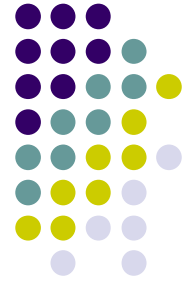
“Islam and Christianity represent different cultures and, in fact different civilisations. Huntington was right....We are different from them and this is mainly because of our religious background. Since our identities are shaped primarily by our religions, I think that we never adopt a European culture or identity” (Mehmet, Interview Transcript)

# family



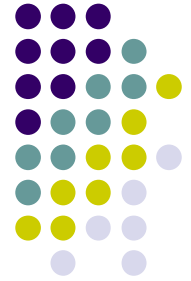
- Family ties are one of the most common shared values amongst the student teachers. The Turkish family structure is believed to be ‘intact’, whereas the Europeans’ is considered to have been ‘loosened’, ‘collapsed’ or ‘degraded’.

“...There are cultural differences and the most important one is concerned with family. They have a loose family structure that totally alien to us. For us the unity of family is very important....We never stop supporting family members unlike Europeans” (Lale, IT).



“...at the root of all differences lies the family. I should add the difference regarding state structures. When we look at it in a historical context, we see that they have been predominantly concerned with ‘exploiting’ others under different labels...But even after our conversion to Islam...we have kept a nucleus-state (not imperialistic) structure. Turkey is still a nucleus-state. Although we say that there are many different people living in Turkey, we still keep rotating around this nucleus. And this will continue. This starts within the family. This is to do with being affected by your mother, father and near environment. This, in turn, affects your life-style, your perception of events and of the wider world. We look at things from a more meta-physical perspective. In this respect there is a big difference between Turkey and the EU” (Gulser, IT).

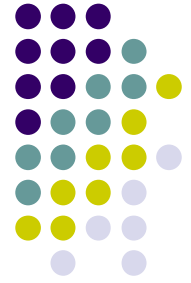
# mentality



Two opposite picture of Europeans are portrayed in terms of their mentality. In both cases, Europeans are considered to be different from Turks.

- The positive image is that Europeans are ‘rational’ and ‘responsible’ citizens. They are appreciated for their social manners (for instance, respecting others’ rights in traffic).
- The negative image is that Europeans are ‘exploitative’; by this Europeans are believed to conceive the wider world as a place to be exploited.

...



“They digested (absorb; comprehend) the democracy (as society); they are more respectful and tolerant to others” (Adnan, IT).

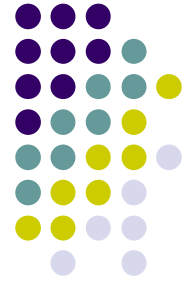
“They are and have always been an imperialistic power in the world. It is because of their mentality...They have this mental image that they are superior and have right to exploit others. Look at the situation in Iraq...They never miss an opportunity to make more profit no matter how other nations suffer” (Beylul, IT).

# Turkey-EU relationships



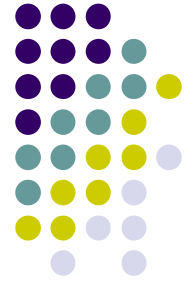
- Strategic interests
- History
- Religion
- Cultural differences

# strategic interests



“It is obvious that the EU will never accept us. Is there any other country that has waited at the door of it more than 40 years? They don’t say a definitive ‘no’ to us, because if they do so, they know that we would search for other alternatives. And they don’t want a powerful Turkey in this region of the world. They want Turkey to be always depended on them but not one of them. It is stupid to hope any good from them because we are and have always been rival” (Ibrahim, IT).

# history



“We were a threat to Europe coming from the East in the past. At the time they were weaker than us. But now we are weaker. In this respect, we can take their technology and development but nothing more. We seem to be friends but conflict between Turks and European goes back to the Crusades in the history. In this respect, what happened in history is still determining Turkey-EU relationships. For example I think a Dutch commission member once said that “What is the point of the 1683 victory (over the Ottomans at the gates of Vienna), if we allow Turkey join the EU?’ ...Don’t you think that this explains everything!” (Danyal, IT).

# cultural differences

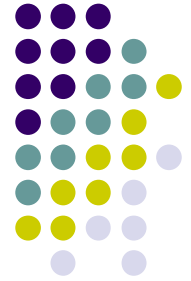


“We could learn things from Europeans in terms of technology, rationalism and scientific developments. For example I have a European mindset (because I believe in science and rationalism). Yet in my heart I am Turk because my family, religion and moral values are different. I should note our culture is already being degenerated by European culture especially in the context of popular culture. Yet we should try hard to preserve the family, moral and religious values we have” (Ugur, IT).

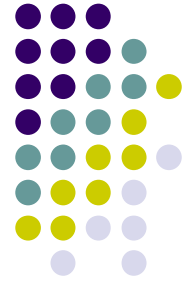
# conclusions



- The majority of student teachers who took part in this study use the term ‘identity’ – in the sense of belonging to Turkic ethnicity/nationality/culture – as an umbrella concept encapsulating culture, history, mentality and religion.
- The overwhelming majority of the student teachers point out a strong attachment to Turkish identity that is thought to be different from European identity.
- According to the interview findings main differences are religion; family structure (Europeans have loose family structure whereas Turkish family ties are strong); mentality (Europeans are ‘exploiters’ but at the same time ‘responsible and hardworking’ citizens).

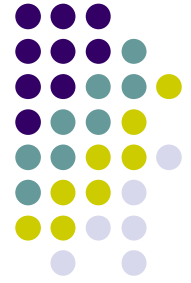


- Image of Europeans in the student teachers' perceptions is two-folded in questionnaire findings.
  - Europeans are considered to be more democratic, hardworking, educated, culturally conscious and have better social manners.
  - They are also thought to be 'Christian', 'degenerated' and 'selfish'. Yet the social and economic development of Europeans is usually seen positively and had the biggest support rate in the questionnaire when the respondents asked what they think about the Europeans (the first sentence).



...

- Considering the fact that the overwhelming majority of the student teachers do not have any contact with European people, we can argue that these impressions are formed through various mediums such as ideology, education, society, and media.
  - Then it seems that although these means picture a 'positive' Europe in terms of its economic and social development, this positive picture is not associated fully with the people of Europe but only with the system. Put differently while the EU is promoted as a system, relatively less emphasis is put on its people.



## the last word...

- many student teachers have a strong sense of distrust concerning the EU, and some even do not trust Turkish governments either. Such stance indicates a role played by ‘ideology’ in terms of shaping the respondents’ opinions.
  - Ideologies might be useful because they result from human experience in this world and when they act as maps of politics. But, geography teachers should have a critical mind (which means assessing the situation critically from different angles –through different ideologies- and in the context of ‘real’ data) rather than being bounded up with certain ideology all the time.

# THANK YOU

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