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**“And when you appear to lose yourself completely, compare yourself to others, so that  
you may recognize yourself.”**

**Goethe, *Torquato Tasso, Act V*<sup>13</sup>**

Identity is not stagnant. Identity is a mental construct and as such it is subject to renegotiation that pivots on the changing elucidation of the proverbial *Other*, which in Europe corresponds with the oscillation of the external eastern border of exclusion<sup>14</sup>. Applied to European identity, Mayer and Palmowski emphasize that “...for the formation and articulation of identities, it is much more important to consider the nature of boundaries, the precise point at which identities are challenged and articulated.”<sup>15</sup>

The European Union is currently revisiting the nature of its newly acquired external boundary, which resulted from the 1 May 2004 accession of ten Central and Eastern European countries to the EU. The EU eastern frontier borders on the centuries old European perceptions and understandings of the *Other* are currently solidifying in polarization to its Medieval conceptualizations. These conceptualizations emerged with the formation of a promising European political awareness which developed under Charlemagne in 800s, and which was characterized by juxtaposition of the emerging Christendom to the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. These constructions of the *Other* were perceived as cultural, political and religious threats that needed to be abated and controlled<sup>16</sup>. Finally the EU came up with a Constitution for Europe which although failed the referendums is still a founding document that defines the values and principles developed from the *cultural, religious and humanistic inheritance of Europe*.

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<sup>13</sup> Mayer and Palmowski, “European Identities and the EU – The Ties that Bind the People of Europe”, *JCMS* 2004 Volume 42, Number 3, p. 577

<sup>14</sup> Delanty, G. *Inventing Europe. Idea, Identity, Reality*; “The Frontier and Identities of Exclusion in European History. Macmillan Press, Basingstoke and London, 1995, pp. 93-101

<sup>15</sup> Mayer and Palmowski, p. 578

<sup>16</sup> Rietbergen, P. *Europe. A Cultural History*. “Three Worlds Around the Inner Sea: western Christendom, eastern Christendom and Islam.” Routledge, London and New York, 1998, pp. 102-119.

A look at its history of fifty years shows that the EU has left behind the Cold War and started to establish institutions in order to promote a process of step by step integration and to reunite its lost parts. It is a successful story that is faced with obvious changes in values and challenges during the preceding decades, reflecting a new mood and perception in public opinion such as the accession of former dictatorship countries, the Eastern Enlargement with new nation-specific cultural and political values; the consensus reached in the long and hard debated issue whether the Preamble should contain any reference to God or to Christian values and the Greco-Latin heritage by the Convention; the compromises within the European institutions, but also the role and the impact of the European values and identity upon the external relations of the Union, especially upon the dialogue and (inter-)mediation concerning the new neighbourhood, the Mediterranean and the Middle-East. But in the last years an intensive debate about the *Christian-occidental-identity* preoccupies Europe regarding the accession of Turkey.

How does the European Union cope with this situation? Is heterogeneous Europe ready to absorb an alien culture? Will Europe prefer to defend its *Christian-occidental-identity* or demonstrate a fantastic capability of being truly plural in terms of identity?

In order to answer this question I would like to firstly concentrate on what we call European values by providing a brief historical overview. Secondly, I will focus my attention on the *general EU external identity*.

According to the Greek mythology Europe is named after *Europa*, the daughter of the Phoenician King. This continent has been the field where the ancient Greco-Roman culture flourished, where the European knights fought the Muslim Arab invaders and saved the continent from Islam's hegemony; where nation-states, new organisational models of social order were built, where great philosophers Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, St. Augustine, Rousseau, Locke, Hobbes and Machiavelli lived and paved the way for spiritual-values in the Enlightenment (e.g. democracy, separation of religion and state, individualism, equality of women and men etc.); where a kind of pan European understanding of the common cultural and religious heritage started to emerge; where internal war-waging ended with the creation of the first internationally relevant Human Rights Convention and the Hague War laws at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Finally, after continuous war-waging until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we now can see Europe gone through considerable values' changes shifting from aristocracy to spiritual and then to organised mass-values.<sup>17</sup> So what really unites Europe is the common history and experience of mutually caused common decline on the worlds-wide power politics theatre. Therefore we

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<sup>17</sup> Stadler,C. On identity and Values of Europe p.8f

may conclude that Europe has found the “tradition” of human rights based on the universal human dignity, because of its specific development and faith.<sup>18</sup>

The need for a discussion about common European values started in 1999 when the Council approved the eligibility of Turkey to fulfil the Copenhagen Criteria to access the European Union. A variety of strategies was and still is concerned within the European institutions and the Member States towards the candidature of Turkey. The basic hindering factor remains the democratic deficit in Turkey as well as the lack of common cultural, religious and humanistic inheritance with Europe. These attitudes are debated especially in Germany and France, two countries with the biggest population of Turkish Muslims in Europe. Some say that the relationship to Turkey is not marked by the same feeling of a common identity that Europeans shared even when they were at war with each other, namely the historic feeling and self-perception of a common destiny. Turkey is not a European country and has never participated in this process of Europe, it was not affected by Antiquity, Roman Law, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and thus it has no place in the European “value-cosmos”<sup>19</sup>

It is also appropriate to consider the construction of the *general* EU external identity as presented in Title V of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU). Article 11 of TEU states that within the remit of the CFSP, the EU shall

“[...] safeguard the common values, fundamental interests, independence and integrity of the Union, [...] strengthen the security of the Union in all ways, [...] safeguard international security and [...]develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”<sup>20</sup>.

According to the Article cited above, the EU commits itself to ‘developing and consolidating democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.’ In the international community the EU is increasingly perceived as a community of these particular values<sup>21</sup>, which negotiate and crystallize the external identity of the EU. Within this context, commencing accession negotiations with Turkey and thus introducing the prospect of a future enlargement of the EU to include Turkey – conditioned on strict compliance with the Copenhagen criteria designed to uphold democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights –

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<sup>18</sup> Stadler, C. On identity and Values of Europe p.11f

<sup>19</sup> Wehler, H-U., Die türkische Frage in FAZ, 19.12.2003

<sup>20</sup> Treaty of the European Union, Title V, Article 11, [www.europa.int.eu](http://www.europa.int.eu)

<sup>21</sup> Phillips, David L.: “Turkey’s Dreams of Accession,” *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 83 No. 5, Washington D.C. September/October 2004, p. 97.

upholds the previous conclusion that these developments would not pose a ‘critical juncture’ for the official EU external identity.

However, the ambiguity of the Article’s reference to the ‘common values’ establishes a ground for potential purposive problematization of Turkey’s future EU membership in the media, where various actors express their perception of Turkey as the *Other*. Despite Turkish transformation, it is still perceived as different, especially in reference to the “sharp differences between Turkish and European cultural views on the roles of men and women”<sup>22</sup>. As mentioned previously, European elites constructed European identity in opposition to the “decadent, effete, depraved, and weak societies of ‘the East’, dominated by the Ottoman Empire.”<sup>23</sup> Despite the claims that Turkey embraces and has internalised modern elements of *Europeanness*<sup>24</sup> and despite Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan’s official dedication to sustaining Ataturk’s dream of constructing secularised Turkey after the European model, France’s former president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing clearly expressed his opposition regarding the possibility of Turkish membership in the EU. In *Le Monde* issue from 8 November 2004, he “flatly asserted that Turkey simply is not a European country, [...as] it has a different culture, a different approach, and a different way of life.”<sup>25</sup> These remarks were echoed by West Germany’s former chancellor Helmut Schmidt, who publicly expressed his fears that “admission of Turkey would open the door for similarly plausible full membership of other Muslim nations in Africa and the Middle East [...which could result in the EU] degenerating into nothing more than a free trade community”<sup>26</sup>.

What if Turkey is accepted? A country that is still perceived as culturally different, a sentiment that seems to hold a great sway over the European public, would be socialized and internalized into the revised perception of the European *Self*. The EU’s external identity would break the rules of the ideological frameworks of Europeanness to include an Islamic culture. In this sense, the EU will embark on constructing a post-nationalist external identity, which would assume a thin, shared political identity on the EU level, which would in turn renegotiate the ‘European’ cultural element of the EU. The EU has officially set a course for such post-nationalist architecture, whereby the step towards accepting Turkey as a member of the EU

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<sup>22</sup> Teitelbaum and Martin, “Is Turkey Ready for Europe?” *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 82 No. 3, Washington D.C., May/June 2003, p. 105.

<sup>23</sup> Teitelbaum and Martin, p. 98

<sup>24</sup> Coker argues that Islamist Revivalism is ‘completely consistent with three major aspects of modernity: the scientific tradition, the notion that knowledge is not culture specific but universal, it constitutes a means rather than an end, which is not a “devaluation but preservation of traditional cultural values”’; Coker, Christopher, *Twilight of the West*, Westview Press, a member of Perseus Books, L.L.C., Oxford 1998, p. 160-164.

<sup>25</sup> Teitelbaum and Martin, p. 98

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

would prove to push the Union forward on its path towards acquiring its expanded regional and perhaps *global identity*.

Ultimately, this discussion has resulted in an interesting conclusion pertaining to the divergence of the identities between the one that pertains to the EU and that, which symbolizes identity of territorial and cultural Europe as such. In this sense, accepting Turkey within its ranks could on one hand ultimately divorce the EU identity from the prevailing perception of the *European identity*. The convergence of the EU and European identities would not result in a symbiosis that would merge these two meanings into one common identity. On the other hand, Turkish EU membership could prove itself as a ‘critical junction’ that would revise the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century meaning of Europe and reinvent a new understanding of popular European identity to embrace and internalize the current offspring of the Medieval *Other*. The perception construction triggered by the ‘critical junction’ would become an effort operating on two levels: the political elites would politicize the image of Turkey to become more pleasant to the general public, which would in turn embark on the process of reinventing its traditional perception of its European identity to include the *Other*. The EU could either defend its European identity by deciding to exclude Turkey from the club, or build a bridge to cross the civilizational divide. Ultimately, the EU stands before a test and a historical juncture of self-invention as it faces a challenging task in harmonizing the construction of its own external identity with its commitment to its internal identity as democracy expressiveness of the will of the people.