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Imagining Turkey

British press coverage of Turkey's bid for accession to the European Union in 2004

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ABSTRACT

This article explores British newspaper coverage of Turkey's bid to join the EU in 2004. It poses three sets of questions in relation to that coverage, namely, how does coverage deal with support for, and opposition to, the bid; how does coverage represent Turkey and the European Union; and how does coverage engage with domestic British public and political opinion. In the course of exploring these questions, the article argues that the coverage positions Britain as apart from the EU and that it represents Turkey as being more 'different' than 'similar' from Europe. More significantly, the coverage gives considerable space to non-British oppositional voices, which raises significant questions about why British oppositional voices were absent.

KEY WORDS ■ British press and EU ■ British Press and Turkey ■ Turkey accession ■ Turkey and EU

1 Introduction

In 2002, when the former French President Giscard d'Estaing declared (2002) that admitting Turkey into the European Union 'would be the end of the European Union' because 'its capital is not in Europe and 95 percent of its population live outside Europe. It is not a European country', he touched on an issue that went to the heart of the debate about Turkey's inclusion into an expanded Union. At stake, at least as far as d'Estaing was concerned, was a particular vision of Europe that would be damaged by admitting into it a country with a predominantly Muslim population that was geographically at the edge of the European continent.

Whilst d'Estaing's position may have been extreme in its clarity and openness, it did highlight a recurring theme in the relationship between

Turkey and the EU. According to Kushner (1999: 686), Turks have sometimes felt that the EU and its member states and publics did not view Turkey as part of Europe, and the EU and its member states and publics have, in turn, not seen Turkey's Islamic character as fully compatible with the secular nature of the European Union. In this respect, it was not simply a question of whether the EU should entertain another round of expansion but whether that expansion should include Turkey, a predominantly Muslim country.

But foregrounding the socio-cultural dimension to Turkey's bid to join the EU in 2004 placed somewhat firmly in the background any consideration of either the economic or political cases for membership. In terms of the economic case for membership the questions were straightforward: had Turkey fulfilled all the conditions to join and/or would Turkey's membership be more of a burden to the structure and capacity of the EU than it could bear? The political case was more complex since it played with a mix of ideas taking in such things as Turkey's human rights record, the prospect of a Muslim country joining a secular Union thus demonstrating that the Muslim and secular worlds were not in conflict, the possibility that Turkey would act as a block against religious fundamentalism, and so on.

That there could be different ways in which the issue of Turkey's bid to become a member of the EU could be framed – a socio-cultural, economic or political dimension – suggests that media organizations reporting on this issue could exercise an element of choice in their coverage. Would the British press, in other words, follow d'Estaing's lead and emphasize the socio-cultural dimension, or would it privilege the economic or political case? Would it privilege something altogether different, e.g. the prospect of terrorism, or an influx of immigrants? More critically, to what extent would the coverage in the British press reflect the wider context of Britain's position within the European Union and its ambivalent relationship to the Union's structures of governance and its socio-political character?

The argument that I wish to present in this article is that the analysis of British press coverage of Turkey's recent (2004) bid to join the EU raises three sets of questions that are of particular interest:

- How does the coverage deal with support for, and opposition to, Turkey's bid and, in the process, engage with the socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions of the issue?
- Do representations of Turkey and of the European Union highlight similarities or differences, and how are these signalled?
- To what extent does the coverage engage with domestic public and political opinion on a topic that had controversial overtones in other European Member States?

In raising these questions, this article seeks to explore the ways in which the British press explicitly and implicitly dealt with both support and opposition to Turkey's bid for accession. In so doing, it argues that whilst voicing continental European disquiet about the bid for accession, the British press appeared to overlook, sidestep or simply ignore domestic (British) concerns. At the same time, however, it did not shrink away from identifying features of Turkey that could be seen as legitimate sources of concern, e.g. differences in culture or religion. Consequently, a careful reader of the British press would be confronted by a representation of Turkey and the European Union that emphasized differences despite the overwhelming support the press gave to the bid.

Whilst these questions are raised in the context of a very specific and limited time-period in 2004, it is important to note that key socio-political relationships between Britain, Turkey and the EU (and the 'West') have developed over a much longer period. There is, in other words, a history both of Britain's relationship with the EU and Turkey, and of Turkey's relationships with Europe (the 'West'). These 'histories' play an important part in helping us to understand how the press coverage dealt with Turkey's bid, since, we would argue, it often reproduced and replayed older understandings of what Turkey was in relation to Europe. This larger historical context is dealt with in part 2 of this article whilst the analysis of the British press is dealt with later in parts 3 and 4.

2 The European Union, Britain and Turkey

It is now commonplace to observe that Britain's relationship to the European Union is in many ways problematic. With European elections attracting little attention and with those taking part representing a range of positions, including that of detaching the United Kingdom altogether from the EU, it is perhaps no surprise to find continental Europeans doubtful of Britain's depth of commitment to the European project. Despite calls from politicians that Britain should be at 'the heart of Europe', the actions signify something else: Britain has yet to commit itself to joining the Euro, it has not had a referendum on the Constitution, and it keeps demanding 'its' rebate on its contributions to the EU budget. At the political-cultural level, Marcussen et al. have argued that 'there is still a feeling of "them" vs. "us" between England (sic) and the Continent. In the political discourse, "Europe" continues to be identified with the Continent and perceived as the, albeit friendly, 'other' in contrast to Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism ...' (2001: 112).

British public opinion towards the European Union is also ambivalent. Data drawn from Eurobarometer studies consistently reveal British attitudes

towards the EU and its activities, processes and institutions to be at the extreme. According to a study in 2001, 'people in the UK are least likely to feel attached' to the European Union, followed by people in Greece and the Netherlands. British people are also more likely to see themselves as British than as either British and European or European. As the report also notes, 'in the UK (67%), Sweden, Finland (both 61%), Greece (60%) and, to a slightly lesser extent, Denmark (56%) national identity is very strong' (European Commission, 2001).

Whether such attitudes towards the EU are likely to change is a matter of considerable debate. Individuals can have multiple and over-lapping identities and it may be that such identities can be influenced by the nature of 'civic' and 'cultural' symbols that the media and political institutions of Europe are able to produce. As Bruter has argued:

... symbols of the European Union affect positively and importantly the level of European identity of citizens across countries and time ... (and) short-term news, over time, has a lasting impact on the political identity of the citizen of a political community. (2005: 147)

Hence the importance of news content for the generation of a 'European' identity or a 'European public sphere'; a point that has been forcefully argued by Philip Schlesinger who has also pointed out that it is not simply a matter of the quantity of news but also its quality:

A hypothetical *European sphere of publics* would, among other things, (a) involve the dissemination of a European news agenda, (b) need to become a significant part of the everyday news-consuming habits of European audiences, and (c) entail that those living within the EU have begun to think of their citizenship, in part at least, as transcending the level of the member nation-states. Moreover, these rational attributes would need to be accompanied by an affective dimension. (1999: 277–8)

Is there evidence to support the idea that there is 'a European news agenda'? Recent studies have shown that coverage of European affairs is not absent from the 'serious' British media (though it is from the tabloid press). Neil Gavin's research, based on a study of economic news on prime-time TV news programmes, leads him to argue that 'news about Europe is a persistent and significant aspect of coverage' (2000: 361), while Trenz shows that coverage of European issues in the *Guardian* and *The Times* is consistently high and near the average of all European papers sampled: 'One of the most striking results of our survey is that there is already a considerable degree of European political communication to be found in the quality press of the selected EU member states' (2004: 297).

But the nature of that coverage is more problematic. Neil Gavin (2001) notes that 'press reports on Europe are ... highly negative and for some there

is the added worry that this extends beyond the tabloids to the mainstream broadsheet titles'. Citing work by Anderson and Weymouth (1999), he abridges some of their findings as follows:

The bulk of the press are sceptical about the EU and about European integration and are frequently and openly hostile. Exaggeration and stereotyping, it is claimed, have in some cases spilled over into an unedifying and jingoistic flag-waving that can border on xenophobia. Even in the notionally pro-European press the positive dimensions of the single currency are underrepresented and there are occasional expressions of ambivalence towards other European developments ... (Gavin, 2001: 306)

More significantly, Gavin's analysis of economic news content shows that the coverage does not build on a sense of a European identity in contrast to another, or external, one. He points out that 'news stories emphasising a European 'us' against an external 'them' were almost totally absent from news in the 1996–97' sample, and that

much more common themes concerned ... 'multi-lateral' relations between European countries, agencies and businesses, or between British and non-European organisations. In symbolic terms this type of coverage cross-cuts the notion of 'Europe against the world' in favour of a structure of presentation highlighting 'Britain and Europe', 'Britain with Europe', 'British trade beyond Europe' or relations between European states. (Gavin, 2000: 362)

As we see presently, this sense of separate-ness or distance between Britain and Europe is a distinctive element of the coverage analysed here. In the press coverage explored below, Britain is represented both as part of Europe and the European Union but also at a distance from it: the accession of Turkey appears more as an issue of foreign policy – what should Britain do about Turkey wanting to join the EU – than a domestic European issue. Unlike for France, whose former prime minister was quoted as saying: 'Europe is no longer just foreign policy. A good part of it is now domestic policy' (*Guardian*, 2004a). One indication of this may be the locations of the journalists covering the 'story' for the British press: of the 48 British items coded during the period of analysis, 27 items (56%) listed the location of the first by-lined correspondent as being in Brussels, Turkey or Paris. The other 21 items (44%) – of which nine were news items and the other 14 were assorted features, Leaders or comment pieces – had no location listed so were most coming out of London, the newspapers' home base. By contrast, only 12 per cent of the items coded in a parallel study of the French press during this same period were located outside France, with 33 per cent having a Paris location and a large number (114 items or 54% of the sample) with no location mentioned.

One could thus argue that whilst the French press reported a 'domestic' story, for the British press events were taking place elsewhere (see Negrine et al., 2008).

If Britain's relationship with her EU partners has occasioned much debate and inquiry, what of Turkey's relationship with the EU?

Turkey's bid to join the EU in 2004 is part of a much longer history of negotiations between the two (see Kushner, 1999). Turkey first signed an agreement with the Common Market in 1963. A formal application was made in 1987, which was followed, in 1989, by a decision to delay a review of the membership until 1993. In 1995, a customs union was formed and in 1999, in Helsinki, the European Council accepted that Turkey was a candidate for accession. In December 2002, the European Council concluded that 'if the European Council ... in 2004, on the basis of a report and a recommendation from the Commission, decides that Turkey fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria, the EU will open accession negotiations without delay' (Commission of the European Communities, 2004). In December 2004 – the period on which we focus in this article – talks did open but there was still some ambiguity about the time scale and the final status of the talks. Since then, discussions have progressed with some topics, such as the status of Cyprus, continuing to be problematic.

The general lack of progress on Turkey's request to join the EU over many decades has inevitably led to a sense of frustration with the EU and helped to create a view of a country and a people whose rejection does no more than confirm the differences that divide Europe (the 'West') and Turkey (the 'East'). Even the movement towards 'modernization and Westernization' that Turkey embarked upon from the early 20th century appears to have done little to disturb the 'memory of earlier representations'. As Kevin Robins put it, the Turks may:

... have succeeded in establishing their credentials as a westernized and a modernized society ... Among Europeans, however, there has remained the sense that Turkey is not authentically of the West; the sense that it is alien, an outsider, an interloper in the European community ... (1996: 65; see also Neumann, 1999)

Furthermore, and despite Turkey being a member of such bodies as NATO and more generally playing 'an important role in contributing to the shaping of European politics', its position outside the European Community/Union appeared as nothing more than a reminder of the 'various obstacles and handicaps' (Kushner, 1999) that have been continuously placed in its path.

The election of the AKP party to govern Turkey, variously described in the Western press as rooted in 'Islamist politics' (Christensen, 2005), seemingly

continued to emphasize differences. As Christensen concludes from his study of Anglo-American coverage of recent Turkish politics:

despite the efforts of some U.S. papers to provide a layer of context, ... in the relationship between religion and politics in a Muslim country, Islam has once again been posited as the dominant partner. This supposed domination reinforces the notion of the hegemony of fundamentalist Islam over all other versions: an Islam opposed to the West, to progress, and to secularism. (2005: 126)

If such framing dominates Anglo-American coverage of Turkish politics and if contemporary representations of Turkey are drawn from earlier ones, how did the British press deal with the question of Turkey's request for accession? How did it represent Turkey's case and what grounds for or against Turkey's accession did it privilege? And finally, how did it represent the domestic view? These, and related questions, are explored below.

3 An analysis of British press coverage

In seeking some answers to our questions, we chose two periods of news coverage for analysis. In the first period of study, December 12–20, 2004, European Ministers met to discuss whether talks with Turkey should begin (or not) and what form those negotiations would take. In the second period chosen for analysis – September and October 2004 – the British press also dealt with the prospect of Turkey joining the EU but this time this theme came up in the context of the Turkish government's proposals to make adultery a criminal, rather than a civil, offence. These proposals were abandoned very quickly after much protest from inside, and outside, Turkey. Whilst the first period is specific to the core concern of this study, the second period supplements it, not only because it dealt with a topic that was controversial and could have impacted very adversely on the talks in December 2004 but also because it alerted the press, and readers, to the coming talks. The period chosen for this analysis thus covered three months in which the complex and perhaps contradictory nature of Turkey could be identified – on the one hand, seeking to become part of Europe, on the other hand, proposing to pass a law that was seen to trample on issues of human rights and personal freedoms. In this period British coverage could also highlight British perspectives on Europe, European expansion to include Turkey, and more generally British perspectives on Turkey becoming part of 'our' Europe or a more distanced Europe.

Three national daily newspapers were chosen for analysis and these reflected a range of political views: the *Guardian* represents the liberal tradition

and is largely supportive of the EU; the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* are traditional conservative newspapers and tend to be euro-sceptic. These papers were chosen for analysis in part also because of their circulation – the *Guardian* is the most successful left-leaning newspaper with nearly half a million daily sales, the *Daily Telegraph* exceeds the circulation of *The Times*, and the *Daily Mail* is recognized as the most successful mid-market tabloid with a circulation of over 2 million – and the strong likelihood that they would carry EU news items, unlike the tabloid press. This last prediction proved to be correct since only three news items were found in the sample period in the two largest selling tabloids: the *Sun* carried two, the *Daily Mirror* one, and all three items featured towards the end of the period of analysis (18 December 2004). Because so few items appeared in these two tabloids, they do not feature in the analysis reported below.

Using the Lexis-Nexis search engine, all items that contained the search terms ‘Turkey and the EU’ were identified but only those items that featured a discussion of Turkey’s accession to the EU as a dominant part of the news story were selected for analysis. Items that only made a passing reference to the topic were excluded, as were items that simply reviewed or reproduced extracts from other newspapers. The total number of items that were selected for analysis is set out in Table 1.

Are these figures small, large or merely proportionate? Following Trenz (2004), it is possible to say that the coverage in the ‘serious’ papers (*Telegraph*, *Guardian*) was perhaps proportionate – on average about one item every two or three days – but not so for the tabloids. However, when compared to the press of two other EU member states, the figures in Table 1 seem paltry: over 200 items in a selection of three Greek newspapers and over 250 in a selection of three French newspapers.¹ The figure (5) for the *Daily Mail* is particularly low if one considers its stance on the EU, and issues of religion and migration, but not so if one considers the ‘story’ as a ‘foreign news story’ and/or a European Union news story at that: the issue of Turkey’s accession was played out elsewhere both physically and politically, e.g. in Brussels, Istanbul, Ankara

Table 1 Number of items coded, 2004

	September	October and December	Total
<i>Guardian</i>	9	18	27
<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	5	9	16
<i>Daily Mail</i>	1	4	5
Total	15	48	48

and Paris and not in London. Consequently, and with no internal, domestic British political or public engagement in this issue, there is nothing much to report. In other words, there was little opportunity for the media to replay anything more than official, entirely supportive, statements from government circles made elsewhere.

What of the coverage as a whole? How does the coverage deal with support for, and opposition to, Turkey's bid and what does it tell us about how Turkey was represented in the British broadsheet press?

Table 2 sets out the main themes that were coded for each news item. For each item, three main themes could be coded since it is usual for an item to reflect different aspects in different combinations. For example, an item might begin by discussing the Turkish government's proposal to criminalize adultery; it could then turn to the impact this might have on Turkey's bid to become a member of the EU and, more generally, a discussion of human rights in Turkey. An item such as this would therefore be coded as having several themes: adultery proposals, impact on EU negotiations, Turkey's human rights record. Similarly, Turkey's bid could be treated by the press in a number of different ways: it could be treated as a purely economic issue (What are the benefits? What are the costs? Can the EU bear the cost?), as an issue about identity and difference (What is Europe? Is Turkey 'European?'), and/ or an issue about equity and 'natural justice' (Turkey is part of NATO; it has knocked at the door of the EU many times before, etc.). In this way, each item is multi-faceted and touches on different aspects of an issue. (See Trenz, 2004, for a general discussion of EU coverage.)

It is clear from Table 2 that whilst the plan to criminalize adultery dominated news coverage in September 2004, in October and December 2004 when Turkey's bid was under discussion other themes – 'Turkey upset by EU conditions' and 'European opposition to the bid' – came to the fore. This is not surprising since the focus of the story had moved from one about the proposed law to criminalize adultery to discussions about entry to the EU. What is perhaps surprising is that whilst the theme concerning the criminalizing adultery proposals disappears, and the religious and cultural differences theme subsides, the level of European opposition to Turkey's bid remains constant at around 11 to 13 percent of all main themes coded in the two periods. What is most interesting about this reporting of opposition is that the press was reporting continental European opposition and not British opposition in any form. For the press, the opposition to Turkey's bid was expressed by others, removed from Britain and the British and had nothing to do with Britain or the British public. The coverage was part of what Gavin referred to as involving 'multi-lateral' relations between European countries

Table 2 Main themes of items coded (*n* = 48)*

The main themes of the items coded	October and December		September		Total
		%		%	
Proposed 'adultery' law and its adverse impact on EU entry	-	-	20	44	20
Turkey seeking membership of EU	2	2	2	4	4
Religion and fear of Islamization	2	2	6	13	8
Turkey says 'not membership at any price'	4	4	2	4	6
EU report sets out conditions	4	4	1	2	5
Turkey wins qualified approval	7	7	2	4	9
Turkey upset by terms	14	14	-	-	14
General European opposition to bid	13	13	5	11	18
Turkey needs to resolve issues over Cyprus	8	8	-	-	8
Turkey has made political and social reforms	6	6	2	4	8
Turkey has more reforms to make	4	4	3	7	7
General controversy over talks	3	3	1	2	4
EU is 'anti-Islam'	4	4	-	-	4
Islam 'not an issue'	3	3	-	-	3
Other**	25	25	1	2	30
Total coded	99	100	45	100	

Notes: * Up to three themes could be coded; ** Includes references to, for example, Chirac's appearance on television, Britain's help to Turkey, comments about Turkey's strategic importance or poverty, comments by Gaddafi.

and, in this case, was about continental European countries (and their publics) relations with Turkey (Gavin, 2000: 362) How the press achieved this and yet, at the same time, appeared to overlook British political and/or public opinion is explored next.

A silent watchdog? The non-reporting of British opinion

While the British press reported fulsomely on public opposition in European countries such as France, Austria, and Germany, there was no reference at all to either public or political British opposition. There appeared to be no single British public act of opposition or doubt: no opinion polls were reported, there were none of the 'vox pops' that featured in reports from Austria or Turkey, no single member of the British public was ever interviewed in the press, and the British press made no mention of any public dissent. In general, it was taken for granted that the public of continental Europe was exercised by this issue unlike the British public.

The absence of any British public dissent and any representation of British public opinion in the British press is particularly odd given that reports of public opinion often feature so prominently in media discourse (Lewis et al. 2005; Negrine, 1996: Ch. 5). Perhaps more curious is the fact that given that *European* public opinion was so often reported, no one bothered to ask where *British* public opinion stood on the topic. As it is, the British press appeared to deal with the issue of public opinion at a distance: controversy over Turkey, as far as the British press was concerned, was a continental European thing, not a domestic British one.

How was this European public opposition represented? What were the sources for the claims in support of assessments of European public opinion and what were British newspapers readers to make of it? In addition to references to opinion polls, both the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* either quoted or mentioned 'ordinary' *European* individuals or *European* political actors expressing their opposition to Turkey becoming part of the EU. For example, whilst Tony Blair and Jack Straw (Foreign Secretary) were referred to, or quoted, in the items coded as making the case for Turkey's membership (admittedly along with a long list of European others such as Chirac and Schroeder), there was no single reference to a British spokesperson making the case against in contrast to French, Germans and other European politicians.²

What was the reader of the British press to make of this? Was she expected to identify with a 'European' view or with the 'official' British position? And how was the reader being positioned in relation to these views and the individuals concerned in the many items that reported opposition, as in these items from the *Guardian*:

Turks already have a hard time facing down the sort of prejudice expressed by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, whose elegant circumlocutions about 'cultural differences' are only slightly less offensive than the cruder view of another clever Frenchman, Voltaire, who called the Turks a reminder to Christians to atone for their sins. (*Guardian*, 2004b)

Or

The prime minister, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, encapsulated French concern last week when he asked: 'Do we want the river of Islam to enter the riverbed of secularism?' (*Guardian*, 2004c)

And if oppositional views were so out of line with the British position (or abhorrent), why did the press refer so often to European opposition and/or Fritz Bolkestein, the former EU commissioner, whose anti-Turkey position was quite evident, as this from the *Daily Telegraph* illustrates:

A EUROPEAN commissioner set off a furious row yesterday after warning that Europe's Christian civilisation risked being overrun by Islam.

Fritz Bolkestein, the single market commissioner and a former leader of the Dutch liberals, said the European Union would 'implode' in its current form if 70 million Turkish Muslims were allowed to join. He predicted that Turkish accession would overwhelm the fragile system and finish off any lingering dreams of a fully integrated European superstate. (*Daily Telegraph*, 2004a)

Similarly, why report public opposition, as in this piece from the *Guardian*, whose reporter was taking the pulse of 'the man in the (Viennese) street':

'I know one Turkish bloke,' said the Viennese social worker. 'He's got two wives. Neither of them can speak a word of German. He beats them up. He's got two sons as well. They're terrified of him. They're just different from us. We're Christians. They're Muslims. And these Muslims are getting more and more extreme. It's time to make a choice. I'm against it.'

What Helmut is against, like two out of three Austrians, is Turkey joining the European Union. Gerhard, the landlord serving him his wine, joined in eagerly. 'This is Europe and we're in danger of losing our identity with all these people from Turkey and Africa. We Christians are losing our faith while the Muslims are getting more fundamentalist.' (*Guardian*, 2004d)³

The concerns about religion, difference and the loss of identity that feature in these extracts, and feature more generally in the sample, usefully illustrate the extent to which they were not domestic *British* concerns. Equally significant is that references to cultural differences and identity only relate to the identity of others be they Turks, French, Germans, Austrians ... but not to any sense of British identity. In none of the articles collected for this study is there a reference to British identity or is there any British person making a reference

to the loss of her British and/or European identity. Identity, in other words, is not a British concern and does not feature in British discourse. As this extract from another *Guardian* piece implicitly acknowledges:

Worries about race, religion, identity and jobs are most evident in France, Germany and Austria, where public opposition is strongest. (*Guardian*, 2004e)

The absence of concerns about identity and about Turkey's accession more generally could be interpreted as no more than indifference to an issue that is taking place elsewhere, or that is the concern of a political elite and that does not generally connect with the public as a whole. It could also be interpreted as an acknowledgment that, in the words of Tony Blair, 'the fact that Turkey is a Muslim country does not mean it should be barred from the European Union' (*Daily Mirror*, 2004); that is, that differences between Turkey and EU countries do not matter to the extent that they are seen as obstacles. In which case, it is then paradoxical that one can find in the British press not only European opposition, as noted earlier, but also accounts of Turkey that emphasize those things that make it different from the countries of the European Union: religion, culture, human rights, etc. In this respect, the British press appears to be treading a fine line: on the one hand, differences over religion, e.g. Islam and its part in civil life, and politics, e.g. over Cyprus, are dismissed fairly easily as either being unimportant or manageable, yet, on the other, differences are so significant as to be ever-present in news reports. We can see this in the following three extracts and they are part of the key to understanding the findings in Table 3 and 4, which explore the reasons given in support of and against Turkey's accession bid.

The first extract, from the *Guardian*, strongly supports Turkey's bid and defines Turkey as 'a secular democracy with a majority Muslim population', but in the second and third extracts from a different *Guardian* story and from the *Telegraph*, respectively, Turkey is anything but the sort of society described in the first.

Jose Manuel Barroso, the president-designate of the European commission, was right to insist that Turkey must accept European values.⁴ Jean-Pierre Raffarin, the French prime minister, was wrong when he asked whether it was wise to let the 'river of Islam enter the riverbed of secularism?' The firm answer must be that Turkey is a secular state and no longer the sick man of Europe, and that the EU is not an exclusively Christian club. (*Guardian*, 2004f)

By contrast, Helena Smith, reporting from Van Turkey, makes the most of Turkey's differences from Europe:

On October 6, the day Turkey was formally recommended by the European commission to start talks with the EU, Ayse Ozgur woke up in a bank.

For three weeks she had been on the run in eastern Turkey – from the man who raped her, a mother who had starved her and a father who had sold her in exchange for money and guns.

... In recent years Turkey has made huge strides in stamping out human rights abuses.

... Yet human rights violations continue. Across the Muslim state's remote and impoverished south-east, women such as Ayse Ozgur are still prone to crimes of violence. (*Guardian*, 2004g)

And this from the *Telegraph's* Turkish correspondent:

But travel further east (from the tourist resorts) into the heavily Kurdish hinterland and a starkly different Turkey begins to emerge.

Nearly 40 per cent of women are illiterate and dozens are murdered by male relatives each year for 'dishonouring' their families with such crimes as leaving home unaccompanied.

One marriage in 10 is polygamous, even though polygamy is banned, and a 15-year separatist rebellion has left a trail of destruction and death.

Stretching across a third of the country and bordering Syria, Iraq and Iran, Turkey's Kurdish region is very poor and deeply conservative.

It is this part of the country that most desperately wants to join the European Union – but it is also the part that scares Europeans the most. (*Daily Telegraph*, 2004b)

Are these accounts contradictory in any way or can they be reconciled? Which of these accounts represents Turkey: the 'secular state', Ayse Ozgur in the bank, or the part that scares Europe most? And what role was the press playing in reporting these and reproducing representations of Turkey as poor, 'traditional', 'backward', Muslim, etc.? How was the audience to read these comments and which part was there to elicit agreement with or opposition to? The significance of these questions has been underlined by John Richardson in his study of representations of Islam when he observed that:

the (potential) effects of argument on their audiences also need to be considered: what is the audience/ readership being convinced of and, since people 'do things with words' beyond their immediate communicative environment ... how are a text's argumentative conclusions likely to be *used*? (2004: 26–7, emphasis in original)

Whilst it is clearly possible to argue that the British public and therefore the British press, and vice versa, truly did not see any 'problems' with Turkey joining the EU, such phrases as Turkey must 'accept European values' and the replaying of European oppositional comments verging on racism could

be reinforcing rather than denying differences between the 'West' and the 'Orient' (see Christensen, 2005; Richardson, 2004). Moreover, it is also possible to argue that it runs counter to some of the coverage about Turkey's bid which implicitly sets off Turkey as different, both culturally and religiously, from the Christian 'West' and as containing a potential terrorist/immigration/religious threat. Both the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun*, for example, reported Gaddafi's warning 'that Turkey will be a Trojan horse for Islamic militants if it joins the EU' (*Daily Mail*, 2004). The *Guardian*, *Telegraph* and *Mirror* did not report this item.

The sense of implicit or explicit differences constantly replayed can be seen in references to Muslims, 'the river of Islam', 'clash of civilizations' and, perhaps most notoriously, to the EU Commissioner Bolkestein's remarks that given issues of demography 'Europe's destiny was to be "Islamized"' in a news item headlined, appropriately, 'Turkey's Muslim millions threaten EU values, says commissioner' (*Daily Telegraph*, 2004a). Indeed, when we begin to explore the case in support of Turkey's accession and the case against, what emerges most clearly is the much more elaborate case against that is constructed around the idea that Turkey is different from the EU and its member countries. Table 3 sets out the reasons mentioned in support of Turkey's accession, while Table 4 sets out the reasons against. It is important to note that these are not necessarily reasons expressed by the newspapers themselves but reasons that were reported as mentioned by others (e.g. EU spokespeople, ministers, individuals) or in the context of a discussion of the issues as a whole.

Table 3 shows that the most often mentioned reason for supporting the bid identified in the coverage was that Turkey had 'met the conditions of entry' and that 'it had been waiting to enter the EU for a long time' (41% of all mentions). The economic case for membership is mentioned only nine times (11% of all explicit reasons coded) throughout the period of analysis. Other reasons in support include the prospect that the EU could help cement further reforms in Turkey and that Turkey was 'becoming' European (it was showing 'its European vocation'). While some of these reasons are 'positive' in emphasizing the benefits of Turkey joining, both for Turkey and the EU, they featured much less prominently than the reason that 'it had met the conditions' for membership. Yet the reasons put forward against Turkey joining the EU (Table 4) very much emphasize differences between Turkey and EU member states with 43 references (48% of total reasons coded) to cultural, religious, or human rights issues as major points of difference and 33 references (37%) to the adverse economic impact Turkey's membership would have on the EU as a whole. In other words, the case for and against is

Table 3 Reasons put forward in support of Turkey's bid*

	Guardian <i>n</i> = 27	Telegraph <i>n</i> = 16	Daily Mail <i>n</i> = 5	Total
Turkey has waited a long time/ met basic conditions/ needs to be rewarded	16 36%	13 42%	4 80%	33 41%
Strategic importance of Turkey	3 7%	4 13%	–	7 9%
Turkey becoming European in values and culture	4 9%	2 6%	–	6 7%
Economic benefits of membership	8 18%	1 3%	–	9 11%
EU can help Turkey achieve reforms	5 11%	2 6%	–	7 9%
Rejection would send out negative signals	1 2%	3 10%	1 20%	5 6%
EU is a shared community/ not a Christian club	4 9%	2 6%	–	6 7%
Total of above	41	27	5	73 90%
Other	4	4	0	8
Total reasons coded	45	31	5	81

Note: * Up to three reasons could be coded.

Table 4 Reasons put forward for not supporting the bid*

	Guardian <i>n</i> = 27	Telegraph <i>n</i> = 16	Daily Mail <i>n</i> = 5	Total
Economic reasons (it would overwhelm EU)	19 35%	12 41%	2 29%	33 37%
Cultural and religious reasons (change EU values, not Christian etc.)	23 43%	5 17%	1 14%	29 32%
Turkey's human rights and reform record may be an issue for EU to consider	7 13%	5 17%	2 29%	14 16%
The issue of Cyprus	3 6%	2 7%	–	5 6%
Total of above	52	24	5	81 90%
Other	2	5	2	9
Total reasons coded	54	29	7	90

Note: * Up to three reasons could be coded.

unevenly balanced: the case for is mainly that Turkey has been waiting for a long time (33 references), while the case against is economic and cultural, religious, and raising human rights issues (76 references).

Table 5 How is Turkey described?*

Description	Frequency	% of descriptions given
Turkey has made reforms	12	12
A pluralist democracy	10	10
Turkey European-like, e.g. has European vocation	5	5
Total similarities	27	26
Predominantly Muslim	28	27
Economic and social character, e.g. poor, large, urban-rural divide, weak economy	16	16
Not like Europe culturally or politically, e.g. not a European country, Muslim democracy, hostile to Europe historically	12	12
Turkey's political character, e.g. bad human rights record, has harsh laws	6	6
Total differences	62	62
Others	13	13
Total	102	100
No description	42	
Total	144	

Note: * Up to three descriptions could be coded.

Similarly, if one looks at how Turkey and the EU are described in the news reports, the sense of difference also stands out. As Table 5 shows clearly, descriptions of Turkey mainly highlight differences from European Union member states. The similarities are much less prominent.

One could argue, admittedly, that describing Turkey as a Muslim state should not necessarily be taken to be anything more than a factual description of what it is, but conversely it is rare in day-to-day press coverage to see the EU or European states described as Christian states. Not that this does not occur: in this study, there were references to the EU as Christian (18% of coded descriptions) but there were also references to the EU as a non-Christian entity (10% of coded descriptions), and overwhelmingly as 'democratic and secular' (43% of all descriptors coded). The implicit argument is that Turkey needs to become more like Europe; Europe's 'imperfect' standards, referred to by Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan (*Guardian*, 2004h), are never discussed and Europe's own imperfections are rarely held up for scrutiny.

The almost contradictory nature of the coverage – Turkey is different but the differences do not really matter – may be explained in a number of ways. One possible explanation could be that with no British spokesperson voicing opposition to Turkey's bid, the press was in no position to lead opinion.

It could only report what was being said and it could therefore not avoid reporting the fact of continental European opposition. Another possible explanation could be that in a complex political world, differences need not necessarily be problematic and/or may have to be embraced in some way. And there is evidence of both of these positions in the British coverage. For example, when Fritz Bolkestein spoke about his concerns for the future of Europe, the *Telegraph* included this quote from Andrew Duff, a British MEP, in order to counter Bolkestein's comments and to suggest that differences can be overcome:

We are not slaves to prejudice or historical nostalgia. It is most unfortunate that a single commissioner has pre-empted the commission's report on Turkey in this way. (*Daily Telegraph*, 2004a)

But perhaps Duff was being somewhat naïve in expressing his laudable position. For, as the coverage made plain, fundamental cultural, political and diplomatic problems might still continue to dog the whole debate. Wishing them away might be more preferable than dwelling on them, but they were there nonetheless. And the problems were there for all careful readers of the *Guardian* and *Telegraph* to see (but perhaps not make too much fuss about them). There was the problem of not actually being able to reject Turkey in any circumstances as this would 'be widely interpreted as a slap to Islam and a new strike in the "clash of civilisations"' (*Guardian*, 2004h). There was the problem that the EU was going to have to be watchful of Turkey's internal politics lest it back away from so-called secular European values:

The passage of the new code followed a week during which Turkey's membership application was damaged by Mr Erdogan's stated desire to outlaw adultery. EU leaders warned him against the proposal, saying it suggested that he was seeking to lead Turkey towards Islamic rule. Mr Erdogan then withdrew the proposal. (*Daily Telegraph*, 2004c)

But, more generally, there was the problem that the politics and diplomacy of EU membership and the EU's relationship with Islam created difficult conditions that were far from easy to deal with. As *The Times* reported in December 2004, the EU had to make a very critical decision:

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish Prime Minister, has told European Union leaders that they will pay a heavy price in continued and escalating violence from Islamic extremists if the EU rejects Turkey as a member and confirms itself as a Christian club.

'Accepting a country that has brought together Islam and democracy will bring about harmony between civilisations. If, on the other hand, it is not welcomed, the world will have to put up with the present situation,' he said, referring to terrorism by such groups as al-Qaeda – whose local affiliates hit Turkey last year, bombing the British consulate and three other targets in Istanbul. (*The Times*, 2004)

4 Summary and conclusion

In the above analysis of British coverage of Turkey's bid to join the EU, I argued that the coverage could be read as reflecting Britain's relationship with her continental partners. Following Gavin (2000), the case of Turkey and the EU was treated by the press as part of 'multi-lateral' relations between European countries. In his discussion of the nature and existence of a European public sphere or spheres, Schlesinger suggested that research needed to consider the processes whereby media content about Europe was produced for national audiences and also how it was 'domesticated' for reception (1999: 277–8). Our data show latitude in the way the issues were reported with differences of emphasis, and differences in the number of items published, with no real sense of the issues being domesticated for consumption. Europe, as we have seen, did not feature equally prominently across the British media and the coverage, at least in this instance, did not appear to engage with public or political concerns: only government opinion was reported and no other public or elite opinion was canvassed. Events, in other words, took place elsewhere, on foreign soil. (For comments on the media of other EU countries, see Trezn, 2004: 312.)

The non-presence of the British public was explained, in part, by the absence of elite political dissent on this topic. But it can also be understood, in part, as a reflection of the lack of historical relations of conflict between Britain and Turkey. Continental European history – e.g. the repulsion of the Turks at the gates of Vienna in 1683, which was mentioned in British press coverage as part of the rich tapestry of opposition – was reported as the opposition, and the history, of others. It was their – Austrian, German, French, etc. history – not British history, nor European history. If this intentionally reflected a particular vision of how Britain saw itself in the mix of European society and in the mix of European Union states, then it suggests a sense of separation rather than unity.

Despite the placing of Britain on the fringes of Europe – 'they' have a problem with Turkey, 'we' do not – coverage did highlight significant differences between constructions of Turkey and the European Union. Thus, while support for the bid was rife, the analysis of content shows how differences between Turkey and the European Union continued to run through the text. If Turkey was more 'different' than 'similar', what conclusions was the newspaper reader to draw? In circumstances where the process of news production produces a myriad of views and positions – many journalists, in many locations, producing volumes of copy – the question of how readers are positioned vis-a-vis the text (and the issue) is one that may need to be

addressed more carefully than it has been done in the past. In this instance, the space given to oppositional comment of a particular kind – e.g. highlighting the perils of Islam – stands alongside comments countering such views as if one can be undone by the other in a simple and rational trade-off.

If this reading of the material has some justification, then it poses some interesting questions about how readers of the British press are positioned by the press vis-a-vis Europe generally, and this issue more particularly. The absence of public dissent throws up many questions, including why the press did not seek out public views, but it also suggests that the press treated the issue as part of European affairs that they report on (scarcely, if that) without connecting it to domestic politics. More critically, it touches on the ways in which the possibilities of dissent are managed by a press that follows and does not lead.

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Notes

- 1 This was part of a cross-national study which included the study of the Turkish, French and Greek press. The content analysis of the British press was carried out by the author.
- 2 Only the names of the first three actors mentioned or quoted in each item were coded.
- 3 Reporting these 'deep-seated prejudices' raises interesting ethical questions. Would replacing Jews for Muslims be acceptable?
- 4 By suggesting that it must accept European values, it is implied that Turkey's values are not European. But which European values are at issue, and which non-European values must Turkey abandon?

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