



# Turkey in the Eye of the Beholder: Tracking Perceptions on Turkey through Political Cartoons

*In Western political cartoons Turks are essentialized as anonymous, hairy, greedy, corrupt, and religiously fundamentalist Orientals*

*By Sinan Erensü & Yaşar A. Adanalı*

This paper explores the representation of Turkey in 'Western' political cartoons 2000-2004. Through the analysis of cartoons, we want to understand the ways in which 'Turks' and Turkey are portrayed, especially with respect to the question of identity and the construction of 'the other'. We attempt to reveal some common patterns of representational practices used by Western cartoonists, such as stereotyping, binary oppositions, and essentialism. Moreover, we seek to demonstrate some widespread discourses that are employed, both consciously and subconsciously, in depicting Turkey. The meanings of these cartoons, regarding the power relations between 'Turks' and 'Westerners', are explored. Furthermore, a significant concern of this paper is to point out the various elements of 'the archive' - a set of ideas and values dispersed throughout the discursive structures on which cultural material is built - that is often utilized in the representation of Turkey. On a concluding note, by focusing on Turkish cartoons, this work simultaneously argues how the representation of Turkey in Turkish cartoons differs from the depiction of the nation in Western cartoons and what effect these Western cartoons have on Turkish ones. The cartoons used to illustrate the points made in this paper refer to recent key events, such as domestic political fluctuations, steps towards EU membership and decisions about Turkey's role in the war on Iraq.

## **Cartoons as a genre**

Many analyses of the role of political cartoons emphasize their potential to generate opposition, resistance and public mobilization against oppression (Göçek 1998: 2). For the prominent Turkish cartoonist Neziha Dalyal, the effect of the political cartoon can be likened to "poking a stick in a beehive" (Dalyal 1995: 1). What is expected from a political cartoon is its representation of the hidden meanings and implications that lie behind the dominant rhetoric through satire and humour (as quoted in Göçek: 2). These features of the political cartoon are argued to have the capacity to trigger a change in society "by freeing the imagination, challenging the intellect, resisting the state control" (Göçek 1998: 1).

The impact of political cartoons on the imagination of societies is undeniable. Even so, political cartoons are not immune to dominant discourses. Instead of challenging the intellect and freeing the imagination, they

can restrict the intellect within a given discourse by reproducing or manipulating prevalent images, through the illustration of the 'archive'. In our view, in spite of their critical, sceptical stance, many political cartoons are consciously affected by dominant discourses, power relations, and in the unique context of the relations between Europe and Turkey, by the irresistible influence of orientalism. Although political cartoons are very responsive to current events, they are quite significant in producing and reproducing a visual and mental archive in the longer term. The prominent Turkish cartoonist Turhan Selçuk disputes the idea that political cartoons are short-lived. He emphasizes the permanency of political cartoons:

We often see social and political cartoons drawn years ago, drawn time and time again by different people. Yet, cartoons that seem temporary are remembered and re-published as the documents of their period when time comes... The cartoonist, who is able to grasp the unalterable essence of the changing events of the current policy, can create works that will pass on to the future (Selçuk, 1995: 6).

Due to the fact that political cartoons lack political correctness, they reveal the deepest and most spontaneous feelings and images about their objects almost without any mental filtration. Cartoonist Roger Penwill claims that any connection between political correctness and political cartoons is unacceptable (Penwill 2004: 25). He perceives the tendency towards political correctness among cartoonists as a threat to the very notion of political cartoons. So, cartoonists are usually not accountable for the way that they represent their subjects the way that academicians and political actors, who are conceived by Edward Said as the significant sources of orientalism, are (Said 1978: 31-73). Therefore, binary oppositions, prejudices and essentialisations are processed and conveyed more easily and without limits through cartoons. The responsiveness of political cartoons to current events also makes any filtration impossible: there is no time in the process to re-evaluate the material and to edit over-sensational remarks, so cartoons reflect prejudice in all its nakedness. The final product is usually the very first idea that comes to a cartoonist's mind and is open to every kind of prejudice. As Turkish cartoonist Necdet Sümer claims, political cartoons exhibit the unveiled portrait of societies due to the instant reaction of the archive (Sümer 1995: 12).



### The political context

This paper analyses a number of cartoons that we selected among ninety cartoons published 2000-2004, a period of crucial political and economical developments both in Turkey and in the world. The political events that comprise the raw material for the cartoons are Turkish Government Crises, the General Election in 2002, Turkey-EU relations, the war in Iraq, and the Cyprus question. The chosen cartoons reflect Turkey's position on these issues.

The beginning of the 2000's was marked by serious turmoil on the Turkish political scene. The coalition government formed by The Democratic Left Party (*DSP*), the Motherland Party (*ANAP*), and the Nationalist Movement Party (*MHP*) was led by Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit. Attempts were made to patch the chronic wounds of Turkish democracy and thereby meet the EU Copenhagen criteria. Despite the implementation of seven Harmonization Packages within just over a year, the government was frequently accused of not showing enough determination to follow the reform process needed for EU membership. Eventually, the political instability in the country paved the way for the economic crisis of 2001. While the government was facing these problems, Bülent Ecevit was experiencing health problems which, it has been argued, also had a detrimental impact on the economy.

The dynamic developments concerning EU-Turkey relations were not welcomed by particular circles in Ankara. A diverse political spectrum, ranging from Euro-sceptics to the nationalist left and right, equated the reforms to high treason. In August 2002, the Nationalist leader, Devlet Bahçeli, under pressure from Euro-sceptic elements within his own party, tried but failed to prevent the packages from being enacted; despite this failure, his actions destabilised the government and ultimately led to its fall.

At this point, on November 3rd 2002, the Justice and Development Party (*AKP*), which entered government having clearly won the general election by capturing 34.4 per cent of the vote, unexpectedly and paradoxically, embraced the remaining harmonization packages. Although the *AKP* predominantly adheres to the values attached to conservatism and Islam, unlike its ancestor parties, it has also been advocating a liberal economy, integration with Europe and further democratisation. Yet, a party with an Islamic heritage was considered both in Turkey and abroad as having a hidden agenda and was perceived as the velvet glove on the iron fist of fundamentalism.

While problems regarding the Copenhagen Criteria seemed to be the main issue in EU-Turkey relations in the beginning of the 2000's, the centre of attention has recently shifted towards the Islamic character of Turkey. This debate, which coincided with the period of reform in Turkey, has been portrayed in terms of 'the clash of civilizations'. There is a corresponding shift in the car-

toons of that period from arguments stressing deficiencies in the civic-political realm towards essentialist, primordial, cultural arguments highlighting the differences between Turkey and Europe based on questions of identity.

The war in Iraq and the potential role of Turkey in it, constitute another significant occasion for the intense representation of Turkey in political cartoons. The vote in parliament for the authorization of US troop deployment on Turkish soil became the turning point for discussions about Turkey. Before the vote, the US government requested permission to move into Iraq via the Turkey-Iraqi border. This demand generated a hugely critical response from Turkish civil and political society. The *AKP* government feared the political cost of the episode, and worried that the sensitive Turkish economy would encounter another crisis. In order to compensate for possible financial losses and provide an incentive to the Turkish government, the US government offered some financial 'grants'. Turkey's subsequent negotiations over the size of these 'grants' were regarded as the acceptance of a 'bribe' both in Turkey and in the Western world and inspired a representation in political cartoons in which a corrupt, treacherous, and despotic image of Turkey is easily recognised in the archive. Yet Parliament voted against cooperation with the USA and thus transformed the negative image of Turkey in the Western Media. The image of a 'corrupt' Turkey was surprisingly transformed into a 'democratic', 'anti-imperialist' Turkey.

Finally, the Cyprus problem constitutes another major theme for cartoons that take Turkey as their subject matter. For the last three years, the decades-long conflict in Cyprus has been discussed more feverishly than ever, accompanied by an increasing hope in the possibility of a settlement. The settlement process accelerated after the EU Helsinki Summit in 1999 driven by the "carrot" of a united Cyprus. According to the Annan Plan, both parties would become members of the European Union, provided that they agreed to the unification of Cyprus. Despite these high hopes, the issue was further complicated by the rejection of the third revision of the Annan Plan as a basis for settlement by the Turkish Cypriot leaders. The 14th December 2003 election in Northern Cyprus ended with a parliament evenly divided between pro- and anti-Annan plan parties. The hope for reconciliation attached to the election ended in a deadlock, and eventually Ankara's preferences emerged as the key to the resolution of the problem before the May 1, 2004 deadline. Ankara took the initiative, adopted a positive approach to the Annan Plan, and encouraged the new, pro-settlement government in Northern Cyprus. These developments resulted in a "yes" vote in the referendum held on April 23, 2004. Nevertheless, Greek Cypriots refused, and the Annan Plan has not been realized.



### Characters and topics of the cartoons

In the next section we are going to analyse typical representations of Western and Turkish characters and will present common themes and issues in the cartoons.

#### Essentialism: Western leaders versus oriental Turks.

There is a remarkable difference between the representation of 'Western' and Turkish political characters in many of the cartoons. Western leaders are caricaturized in order to criticize their responsibility for government policy and their distorted figures are still recognizable. The constituency and the leader are thus represented as different layers. Whereas Turkish leaders, in many cases, are not recognizable as individuals but are portrayed as anonymous figures with oriental appearances. So the Turkish characters; "...in the cartoons had a tendency to be stereotypical. The stylization of the graphic aspect was complemented by the stereotypification of the characters in the narrative of the cartoon" (Akman 1998: 99) Thus the state and the society are not differentiated; Turkey is understood as a homogeneous, politically undeveloped entity.

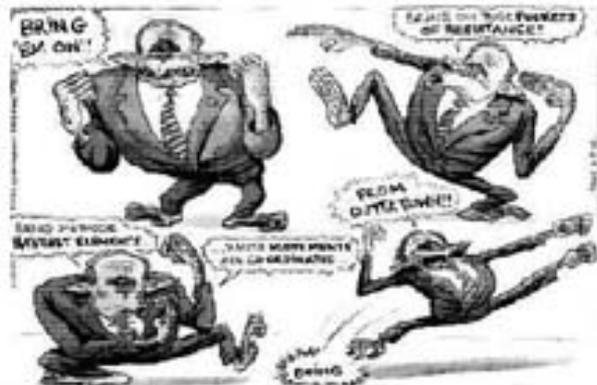


Figure 1. "Chimp Bush" (Steve Bell-Guardian-04.07.2003).

For example, look at Figure 1, a cartoon by the leading British political cartoonist Steve Bell, which depicts George Bush's reaction to the Iraqi Resistance. In this cartoon, George Bush is portrayed as a 'chimpanzee' which is a common way of representing Bush by discontented political cartoonists. Yet we can still recognize that the character is Bush, the person in charge of US foreign policy. In other words, in almost every cartoon which aims to criticize a policy of a Western state, the critique is targeted at a real person, the person who directs political action and decision making. However, when it comes to criticizing Turkey, cartoonists do not hesitate to draw anonymous and unidentified characters in control of decision-making processes.

In numerous cartoons concerning the Iraqi War, Bush and Blair are drawn with physical distortions such as a big nose and ears, or they are portrayed by personalised symbolic representations such as 'chimp' Bush or 'doggy' Blair. But Turkish characters, regardless of the event or the actor, are distorted by so-called cultural codes, i.e. they are drawn as fat, bearded, ugly, cunning creatures sometimes with oriental costumes such as fez

and turban. This form of stereotyping of the Turkish character is very widespread (see Figure 2). Moreover,



Figure 2. "Butterball" (Jeff Danziger - Tribune Media-21.02.2003).

in order to criticize Turkish government policies, the generalized anonymous Turkish character is used more often than the responsible politicians, in contrast to Western instances. Look at Figure 5 below. In this cartoon, the targets of the American 'war on terrorism' are represented on the left hand side of the cartoon under the heading "Axis of EVIL". On the other side, there are the countries, under the title of "ALLIES of Evil", which didn't support the USA in the Iraqi invasion. The interesting fact about the cartoon is that apart from Turkey and Iran, the states are represented by real politicians, but representing Iran is a bearded fundamentalist mullah and representing Turkey, a little, sneaky, ugly 'thing' (see also Figure 6). In a sense, Turkey, unlike other countries, is represented as a stateless/governmentless country in which any ordinary person can be responsible for government politics in a jungle-like atmosphere.

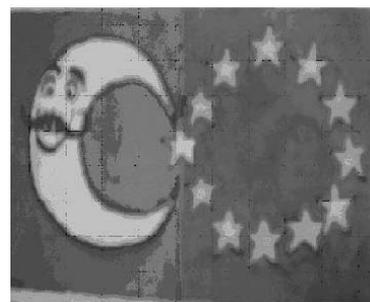


Figure 3. "Moustache on the Flag" (Jylland-Posten-01.05.2003).

#### Hairy Turks

Nedret Kuran Burçoğlu states in his research on representation of the Turk in Europe from 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards, that "the image of the Turk in Europe has gone through a dynamic process of evolution" and "this image has not played an insignificant role in shaping international and intercultural relationships between the Ottoman Empire/ later the Turkish Republic and the other European countries" (Burcuoğlu 1999: 187). Although the perception of the image of Turks has been changing in Europe, a certain typology of the Turk image has been constructed in the archive of Europeans,



which is repeatedly utilized. Accordingly, drawing Turkish characters with excess hair seems to be a common recent practice among Western cartoonists. Hair, whether as beard, moustache, eyebrows or on hands, signifies Turkey and Turks (Figure 3 & 4). Sometimes excess hair is employed to depict a ‘Taliban-like’, fundamentalist Turk image, which refers to ‘barbaric’, ‘despotic’ Turks in the archive. This way of representing the other is mostly done in order to emphasize the difference between the Turkish and the Western character. In Figure 3 the symbolic representation of Turkey by its flag is overstressed by drawing a face with a huge ‘oriental’ moustache on it, reinforcing the contrast.



Figure 4. "Doorgaze" (Peter Pismestrovic-Kleine Zeitung-05.10.2004).

### Inferior Turks

On several occasions, Turkish characters are drawn as extremely inferior, ugly, even in some instances animal-like, in comparison to their Western equivalents. Particularly those cartoons that are informed by real political discourse, represent Turkey's inferiority, ignorance, and greediness through physical deformations. Furthermore, an imperialistic discourse is at work: Turkish characters are usually drawn as small and childish as if they are waiting to be taught and/or dominated (see Figure 7).



Figure 5. "Axis of Evil" (American Source).

### Greedy, corrupt Turks

In cartoons which deal with Turkey's involvement in the Iraqi Invasion before the parliamentary vote, Turkish characters are drawn as extremely big, fat, and

dense compared to other characters in the same cartoon (See Figure 2, 8, 9). The context is the same for both Figure 8 and Figure 9 below: The Bush Government requests the use of air bases in Turkey and access to Iraq from Turkey. The Turkish government negotiates



Figure 6. "Greedy, Ugly, Peasant Turk" (American Source).

with the American administration about the details of the issue and considers the American offer of financial support to compensate for the possible economic losses of Turkey from such an involvement. This debate over ‘financial support’ generated a considerable amount of restlessness in the American media and public opinion, which is reflected in the cartoons.



Figure 7. "Kindergarden" (Rainer Hachfeld-Neues Deutschland-27.06.2004).

Not only are the Turkish authorities big and fat, but they also have a kind of foxy, devilish smile on their faces, to emphasize the greediness and corruption of Turks. As seen in Figure 7, Turkey can be portrayed like a child under the surveillance of the US regarding its entry to the EU. Yet, Turkey is drawn bigger than the US when it is depicted accepting American money. The interesting point here is that offering bribes to wage a war from a certain location is as unethical as attempting to accept the bribe; thus it would be logical if both countries were drawn equal in size, sharing equally in the same guilt.



Figure 8. "Stiffing Money" (Drew Sheneman-Newark Star Ledger-02.03.2003).



Figure 9. "Unanimous Turk" (Jim Morrin-Miami Herald-01.2003).

**Belly dancing**

Turkey as a belly dancer occupies a significant place in the cartoons of this period. Its use in connection with Turkey's ambiguous stance towards the war in Iraq reveals deep insights into Western perceptions (see Figure 10). In one way, a belly dancer reminds the reader of the exoticism of the Orient; and simultaneously, it has connotations of femininity and treachery (Burcuoğlu: 191-193).



Figure 10. "Belly Dancing" (American Source-03.2003).

**Turkey as a turkey**

In some cartoons (see Figure 11 & 12) Turkey is represented as a turkey or turkey-egg on the basis of the homonyms in the English language. These cartoons automatically place Turkey in an inferior position. Most

commonly, the 'westerner' deals with this animal with a certain degree of superiority. Using an animal to embody Turkey might be interpreted as objectifying and making fun of it in order to, intentionally or unintentionally, emphasize its inferiority.



Figure 11. "Best Ally Money Can Buy" (American Source-02.2003).



Figure 12. "the Turkey Egg" (Ann Telnaes-Tribune Media Services-04.2003).

**Religion**

In many cartoons, the discourse of religion, as a representational practice, is utilized to expose and identify the "other", i.e. Turkey. Islam is portrayed as the primary identity of Turkey and Turks; certain symbols that are associated with Islam are frequently used in these cartoons. Minarets, 'bearded men', veiled women, praying people, and 'backward' religious images are some signifiers for Turks. In this way, particular elements of the culture and society are represented as the essence of, as *the* meaning of Turkey. Religion is thus depicted as a basic principle of society and equated with despotism. This view holds that a monolithic, reactionary Islam is dominant in Turkey, and perceives Islam as the essence of the country. This mis-recognition is developed by stereotyping (Turkey equals Islam), homogenization (Islam is monolithic),



polarizing through binary oppositions (Islamic Turkey is despotic). Through such cartoons a certain degree of fear of potential Turkish EU membership and even 'islamophobia' may be generated among 'Christian' readers.



Figure 13. "the Veiled Woman" (Elifteros Tipos-04.11.2002).

In Figure 13, a veiled woman is celebrating the pre-dominantly conservative AKP's November 2002 victory in the General Election. The statement in the cartoon is "TÜRKİYE" (Turkey), and "TÜRKİYE" is embodied by a covered woman, whose veil is the EU flag. In the cartoon, an essentialist approach is quite visible in which all Turkish citizens are perceived to live merely under the domination of a certain type of Islam. The 'preferred meaning' of "TÜRKİYE" is Islam; the threat of Islam is what the EU has to face. The visual contrast between the flag and the veil reinforces the 'perceived inconsistency' between European values and Turkish values; as if a particular fundamental understanding of Islam is the *a priori* reality of Turkey.

### Democracy

In some instances, i.e. Figure 14, this stereotyping is taken to such extremes that Turkey's Islamic character is equated with fundamentalism and indirectly juxtaposed to a violent and barbaric image of "Islamic terror". Turkey is represented by a Taliban-like, angry, aggressor.



Figure 14. "Cyprus Question On the Road to Europe" (Fritz Alfred Behrent-de Telegraaf-26.02.2004).

As mentioned earlier, during the Iraqi War, Parliament voting against the authorization of US troops on Turkish soil constituted a turning point in the representation of Turkey in Western cartoons. Following Parliament's stand, the negative, undemocratic, despotic, image of Turkey immediately disappeared. This confirms how emotionally responsive political cartoons are to current events. The new image of Turkey, following the vote, was marked by democracy, pacifism, and liberty. Turkey has been depicted as standing firmly against the American oppressors.

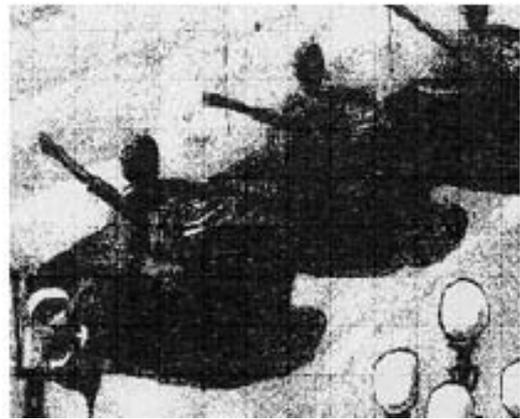


Figure 15a. "Pacifist Turkey" (Times-03.2003).



Figure 15b. "Birds of Peace" (European Source-02.2003).

Inter-textual references to the Tiananmen Square Demonstration were employed: like the Chinese student who tried to stop Chinese tanks by standing in front of them, a man with a Turkish flag stands against American tanks (see Figure 15a). In one instance, Turkey is portrayed as a pacifist 'turkey' perching upon an American tank barrel next to a white dove (see Figure 15b). In these cartoons an anti-imperialist discourse prevails, locating Turkey as part of the international community against war and the defender of universal values.

Some cartoons comment on the idea of 'bringing democracy and liberty to Iraq via invasion' by depicting US generals and the President saying: "We need more democracy in Iraq and less in Turkey" (see Figures 16a & 16b). Here, cartoonists celebrate democracy in Turkey. To understand how Turkey is evaluated through its



democratic performance, we have to historicize the matter. As Yapp claims:



"We need more democracy in Iraq and less in Turkey"  
 Figure 16a. "Democracy in Turkey" (Clay Bennet-Christian Science Monitor-03.2003).



Figure 16b. "No Democracy in Turkey" (Jimmy Margulies- The Record-03-.2003).

It [Europe] owed something to the decline of Ottoman military prowess and the removal of Christian fears of Muslim conquest. The process reached its fruition in that process of secularization of thought which we call the Enlightenment. It was especially at this last stage that the Turks became the mirror of Europe. For when the old religious marker had lost its power to put men into categories, new secular markers were needed to establish cultural and political identity (Yapp 1992: 152).

The level of democracy seems to be the new 'marker'. Democracy is perceived as a Western form of governance, and the nearer Turkey gets to democracy, the nearer it gets to the West.

**Clumsy modernization and insufficient development: The sick man of Europe**

In Figure 17, Turkey is represented as a backward, peasant society, in sharp contrast to modern European society. Furthermore, Turkey is portrayed as unable to cover the huge distance necessary without the help of the EU. Figure 18 follows the same logic and reinforces the fear that Turkey's accession would flood Europe with poor, needy people coming down from the mountains. This is one of the common themes in the representation of Turkey.



Figure 17. "Horse Card" (SZ-Zeichnung).



Figure 18. "Turkey as a Burden" (Fritz Alfred Behrendt-de Telegraf-20.07.2004).

In Figure 19, Turkey is again depicted as being in need of help; a drowning Turkey needs the self-assured EU to survive. It is a problem to be dealt with and Turkey is portrayed as unable to resolve its own problems through its own domestic dynamics. Figure 20 refers to the historically-loaded 'sick man of Europe' concept. A weak and vulnerable Turkey is unable to recover without an external remedy. These representations of Turkey commonly use binary oppositions in order to highlight the differences between Turkey and Europe. A quick overview of the cartoons would reveal the chart below that shows the perceived dualities.

Powerful car	Horse cart
Modern	Backward
Dynamic	Static
Superior	Inferior
Self-governing	Dependent
Competent	Unable
Solution	Burden
Mature	Childish
Standing	Drowning
Health	Sick



The first column corresponds to the signifiers of Europe and the latter to those of Turkey, the first one dominating the second. Unequal power relations underlined by clear-cut differences are also demonstrated by the spatial representation of the characters. In both Figure 17 & 19, there is a diagonal relationship between the characters: the EU representative is located at the upper-left hand side of the cartoon, whereas Turkey is on the opposite side and being looked down upon or carried by the other. This locomotive metaphor is frequently used not only by Western but also by Turkish cartoonists, (see below).



Figure 19. "Drowning Turkey" (Rainer Hachfeld-Neues Deutschland-10.01.2002).

These binary oppositions question the authenticity of Turkish modernity. Turkey's modernization is seen as incomplete, and because it is doubted that it will ever be completed, it is also feared that Turkey might become parasitic to the EU. Assigning Turkey and Europe to opposite poles of civilization, it is assumed that Turkey is inherently incapable of a development equal to that of Europe's. Meltem Ahiska suggests "the distinction historically made between the model and the copy lies at the heart of the hegemonic imagination concerning constructs of the East and the West" (2003: 357).



Figure 20. "PM Ecevit inspecting the Sick man of Europe" (Amer-Weiner Zeitling-22.07.2002).

### Differences in the perceptions of American and European cartoons



"Let me be sure I've got this straight... we drop the LEAFLETS over Bagdad and CASH over Turkey".  
Figure 21. "Bribe for Turkey" (American Source-Winter 2003).

An analysis of American cartoons in the context of 'the war in Iraq' demonstrates that Turkey is merely an ally to the USA and is considered only when 'American interests' are at stake. The archive is utilized when there is a dispute between Ankara and Washington. In contrast, a depiction of Turkey as the 'other' seems to be far more central to European cartoons. In other words, Turkey is just an actor, like it used to be in the cold-war era, for the USA's national interests in a broader global context, whereas it has a significant role of being 'the other' for constructing European identity and helps to define Europe itself. Look, first, at Figure 21. It is a cartoon by an American referring to the war in Iraq. In the cartoon the statement signifies that Turkey is just another pawn in the USA's 'game of imperialism'. Imperialism and orientalism are two discourses that are active in this cartoon. Turkey, once again, is represented as a corrupt country that money can buy and by placing it in the same bracket as Iraq, an image of 'Middle Eastern' Turkey is evoked.

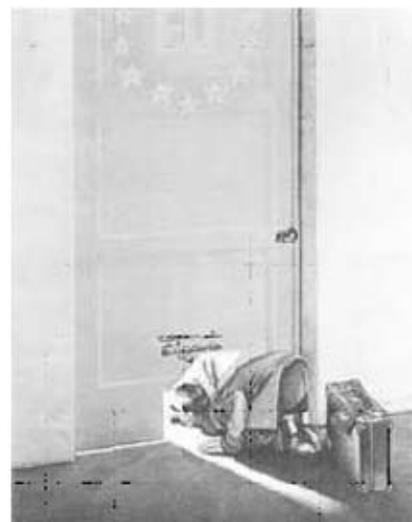


Figure 22. "The Creeping Turk" (Stern-09.2003).



Now observe Figures 22 & 23 published in European sources. In these cartoons, it is underlined that Turkey is not only quite different from European countries but is quite underdeveloped. Thus, Turkey cannot enter the EU according to normal procedure but must try and sneak into a union which it does not deserve. Generally, cartoons of European origin focus on cultural and religious differences between a homogeneous Turkey and a homogeneous Europe emphasising their incompatibility. Both cartoons have created great indignation in Turkey and caused people to question the EU-project at a time when they were most enthusiastic about possible accession to the EU.



Figure 23. "La Turquiéva" (Burki-24 Heures-10.2004).

#### Confrontation through cartoons: Responses from Turkish cartoonists

The duality of the Western image in the Turkish mind - the thin line between images of 'the imperialist West' and 'the civilized West' - has dominated almost every realm of social space, re-activated stereotypes, re-produced the archive, unearthed old suspicions towards the West and even paved the way for a certain degree of social paranoia. This section of the paper explores the confusion of a society whose perceptions are continuously exposed via significant dichotomies in cartoons. During the last couple of years, the public debate concerning Turkey's commitment to the European Union has been at its peak; the issue was perhaps discussed even more enthusiastically than the local elections that took place on March 23rd 2004. The possibility of membership was closer than ever, but as a prerequisite, Turkey was expected to fulfil the human rights criteria of the European Union. Yet, human rights related problems in Turkey used to be unquestionable taboos. These taboos, like restrictions on the cultural rights of some minority groups or problems regarding freedom of opinion, were not primarily perceived as human rights violations but, as precautions *vis a vis* separatist fundamentalist movements aided by foreign powers in an attempt to destroy the integrity of the Turkish Republic. Even though the target of EU-membership was eagerly welcomed by almost every segment of society: "The enthusiasm was nevertheless overshadowed by a doubt whether Europe or 'the West' would at least accept Turkey's

self-consciously crafted Western identity" (Ahıska, 2000: 351). Pro-EU sections of the media impatiently tried to relieve the shadows of doubt by emphasising deadlines and the changing nature of the European Union.

#### The train metaphor

Motives such as opportunity and a limited time span are integrated with the old desire for acceptance in Europe and are depicted in the "catching train" metaphor in cartoons as well as in other parts of the media.

Figure 24 was published just after the ratification of a constitutional amendment that abolished State Security Courts (DGMs), which were believed to be remnants of an old-fashioned understanding of security issues. The cartoon brilliantly suggests not only that 'the train of Europe' should be caught, but also that it has the capacity to remedy the backwardness of the country. The cartoon emphasizes the notion that such reform would not be so easy and quick in the absence of the motivation of the European Union 'carrot'. Destruction of the "DGM building" by "the train Europe", without any contribution from the Turkish administration is mocked by the cartoonist to make it more apparent that "the reforms were not meant for addressing the present problems in Turkish society, but they are part of a performance geared for the gaze of the West (Ahıska, 2000: 355)."



Figure 24. "the Train of Europe" (Salih Memecan-Sabah-10.10.2003).

On the other hand, the 'train' is neither a coincidental choice nor the self-invention of Turkish imagination. The Train symbolizes development and progress, which are the relatively new but decisive markers of difference that came into being "in the course of nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (Yapp, 1992: 152-154). The creation of wealth, commerce and manufacturing came to be seen as the "most important markers which distinguish Europe from Turkey" when the old markers



“lost their power” and needed to be replaced by secular categories. Yapp claims that Turkey not only stayed outside of this race towards progress but also became the reference point of “the study of negatives”.

What does the excessive usage and popularity of “train metaphor” derive from? Why does the Turkish imagination employ symbols that were once used by the West to mark difference in order to depict Turkey’s situation? There is no clear-cut answer to that, however. Ahıska argues that ‘the train of Europe’ might have been perceived as the quickest and the easiest way to fill the “time lag”, which is “paradoxically immobile and stands apart from the constantly onward-moving chronological sequence of Western progress (Ahıska, 2000: 354).” ‘Catching the train’ is a method to “alienate oneself from one’s own unpleasant present by projecting oneself to a utopian future” in order to make the ‘backwardness’ caused by the time lag invisible (Göle, 2000: 48; Ahıska, 2000: 354). Yet, by doing that, every train metaphor disregards the present and possibly also the past as the origin of the present, reducing the meaning of the reforms “just to a clever tactic in a game conducted and viewed by the Western world” by “severing” past and present (Ahıska, 2000: 356).

#### EU as an unconquerable castle

The castle metaphor is another popular symbol used to depict Europe in Turkish cartoons. In Figure 25 Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Gül, knock on the gate of the European Union with the hope of a date for negotiations. The new doormat symbolizes rapprochement between the European Union and Turkey due to the Turkish commitment and positive contribution to the possible settlement in Cyprus and the AKP government’s enthusiasm in enacting harmonization packages. In common with other cartoons that include the ‘Europe as a castle’ allegory, there is no one at the gates of Europe who welcomes Turkey. Yet, a new ‘welcome’ doormat was introduced this time in order to underline the changing atmosphere between the parties.

Furthermore, the ‘EU as a castle’ evokes some historical developments by pointing to a particular timeframe during which conceptions of self and others underwent a significant shift. For a Turkish citizen it is almost inevitable not to associate ‘the EU as a castle’ icon with the great defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the gates of Vienna, an event claimed to be a turning point both for the European and Turkish imagination (Burçoğlu, 1999: 194). Burçoğlu asserts that the feeling of relief, especially after the failure of the second Ottoman siege in 1683, was not only due to a change of “the impression that Turks could not be defeated.” The mental image of the Turks also changed tremendously. Concerning the Ottoman defeat at the Vienna gates Burçoğlu further argues that:



“Eu renews itself – look they’ve got a new doormat.  
Figure 25. “The Castle” (Salih Memecan-Sabah-26.03.2004).

This should be taken as the second turning point, the first being the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmet II, within the history of the image of the Turk in Europe. From that time on the Turks were associated with the concepts of ugly, treacherous, deceitful, unreliable and sensual people. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century sarcastic feelings seem to have substituted the feelings of horror that were felt for the same people in the previous century (Burçoğlu, 1999: 194).

It seems that the archive of the Vienna siege is at work also for Turkish discourse. Nevertheless, as Ahıska argues, the Turkish interpretation of failure at the doorsteps of Vienna neither encapsulates all the elements employed in orientalist discourse, nor turns it upside down (Ahıska: 365). The memory of the siege failure rather denotes a “subjectivity of the other in relation to Orientalism,” and reframes the meaning of the siege as the beginning of Turkey’s long and dramatic story in search of identity in Europe.

#### Generalization: Identification of the West with Europe

The terms ‘West’ and ‘Europe’ are usually interpreted as identical and are used interchangeably in Turkey (Helvacıoğlu 1998: 50). As argued by many scholars: while this broad interpretation includes positive elements such as development, science, democracy, quality of life, it also connotes capitalism, exploitation, colonialism, imperialism, discrimination, hegemony, and war (Ahıska 2000: 353; Helvacıoğlu, 1998: 50). This ambiguous depiction of the West leads to a reductive meaning.

Figure 26 accuses the Western alliance, namely the USA and the EU, of having a hidden agenda with regards to Turkey. The cartoon caricaturizes a speech by the Prime Minister in which he underlined the government’s legitimacy and popularity as a response to the critics of some state institutions, e.g. the military. While questioning the government’s legitimacy, the cartoon claims that Turkey is governed, or at least manipulated, by



“Western” Powers. The broad definition of the West in Turkish perception reaches such an extent that the increasing controversies and divergences between the two sides of the Atlantic can be disregarded even during the special context of the Iraq War.



-Prime Minister: “Governments come to power to solve the problems! Social consensus is not achieved by the institutions but by the people who authorized you to rule..”

-USA to EU: “It is unjust. Indeed, We authorized him...”

Figure 26. “the Source of Authority” (Ercan Akyol-Milliyet-15.05.2004).

A holistic understanding which represents North America and Europe interchangeably, also appears to disregard the diversity within the European Union (see Figure 26 & 27). The West and particularly the EU is either represented as a cluster of states, or generally as a monolithic body represented by individuals or figures often bearing the label “AB”. Malcolm Yapp suggests that especially before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ottomans coined different terms for different groupings of European states, e.g. the land of the Franks, Orthodox lands, Balkans, Spain and Scandinavia were perceived as differentiated entities (1992: 139). However, continuous wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, World War One and the following Turkish War of Independence led to an understanding of a unitary entity. The world order built up after World War Two strengthened this understanding of a united West. Now the configurations being made after the collapse of the cold war order influence the Turkish imagery of Europe.

Without any doubt, the continuous wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the disintegration of Empire, the encounter with Orientalism by Turkish intellectuals and particularly World War One, and the Greco-Turkish war 1919-1922, in Turkey called the Turkish War of Independence, had a *tremendous* effect in interpreting European geographic space as more unitary and homogeneous. Finally, The Second World War, the world order established at its close, and the

role envisaged for Turkey have all had an undeniable impact on what the West and Europe means to Turkey. Currently, the Turkish image of the West seems to be under the influence of the collapse of the cold war. Elements like the transformation of the image of Europe throughout the centuries, Europe being seen as identical with the West, and the contemporary holistic understanding of it as homogeneous and indivisible, possess a complex dynamism. It seems that this dynamism not only arose due to simple responses *vis a vis* western discourses but also symbolizes “the subjectivity of the other in relation to Orientalism” as Ahiska already suggested (Ahiska 2000: 365).



Figure 27. “the EU Dance” (Ercan Akyol-milliyet-06.05.2004).

#### Scepticism and mistrust: Anti-imperialist discourse

Scepticism and mistrust towards the European Union and the West in a broader sense seems to be the dominant theme of a number of cartoons. No matter what the context is, a suspicion and anxiety *vis a vis* Western countries is present. In some cartoons, the level of suspicion even amounts to the expression of conspiracy theories (see Figures 26 & 28). National pride and an anti-imperialist discourse is to be found either explicitly or implicitly in many contemporary Turkish cartoons.

Figure 28 depicts how a Turkish-Cypriot youngster has been cheated by the Annan Plan. The cartoon was published just before the Cyprus referendum which promised a solution, namely a united-federal Republic of Cyprus which would be a member of the EU. The referendum of April 24<sup>th</sup>, in which Turkish Cypriots voted in favour of the Plan with a comfortable majority, was ultimately irrelevant due to the Greek Cypriots’ refusal. The plan was perceived as suicide in nationalist circles on the grounds that the re-union of Cyprus based on the Annan Plan constituted the first phase of the occupation of Turkey. The outcry was so great, that the referendum was equated to selling the country to “Western Powers” (Çölasan, 2004). The very particular-



ity of the cartoon derives from the form which the harsh criticism takes. Employing the power relation between the empire and its colony, the cartoon positions the majority of the Turkish Cypriot community – because of their approval of the Annan Plan – as childish, clumsy, inferior, and gullible. Thus the idiom of orientalism is adopted, reproduced one more time, this time through the image of the passive actor.



-There are such nice people in this world!... A white bearded, dark-skinned man has this rope around my neck and I will become an European thanks to ham!

Figure 28. "the Turkish Cypriot Youngster" (Abdülkadir El-çcioglu-Aydinlik-11.05.2004).

It is highly possible to identify a particular anti-imperialist archive in this kind of anxiety about being cheated by the West. Portrayals of developments in foreign affairs are predominantly loaded with anti-imperialist sentiments and structured in a new anti-imperialist discourse. In some cartoons, this anti-imperialist discourse is evoked or strengthened by a particular archive, usually in the form of reference to the European involvement in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Sevres Treaty that disintegrated the Empire and the War of Independence (See Figure 29 referring to the European support of Greece in the War of Independence. According to the cartoon, the support is still in place today under the umbrella of the European Union). In Figure 30 it is possible to detect a reference to the frequently employed theme of "losing at the negotiation table what you won in the battle field". This kind of jargon is used in reference to the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire by the Sevres treaty due to 'Western' pressure. The way that EU pressure in the Cyprus problem is depicted in the illustration evokes the outcome of the Sevres Treaty: Imperialist hegemony, mandate government and nationalists under pressure.

National enthusiasm and anti-imperialist sentiments, which "had taken root especially during the War of Independence", have been two decisive features of Turkish cartoon art (Akman, 1998: 102). Now in the age of globalization, an anti-globalist strand adds to and awakens these nationalist sentiments of pride. Turkey on the one hand persists in its ambition to become a part of the European community, but on the other hand,

it does not know how to reconcile with and alter European perceptions of Turkey and their effects on Turkish self-perceptions. Tanil Bora describes this unique combination:

In the 1960s and 1970s, the chief principle of Kemalist nationalism, and the fundamental basis of its claim to be left-wing, were anti-imperialism and the stand for independence. In the 1990s this was replaced by secularism, and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the motifs of anti-imperialism and independence once again became marked by the influence of the anti-globalist discourse (Bora, 2003: 440).



-A Greek Cypriot to Eu: I'am really frightening for us! What happens if we lose the elections in Northern Cyprus

Figure 29. "Northern Cyprus Elections" (Ercan Akyol-Milliyet-09.12.2003).



"EU pushing PM Erdogan to push Northern Cyprus President Denktas

Figure 30. "The Eu Pressure" (Ercan Akyol-Milliyet-04.03.2004).



### Self-isolation: The feeling of being deserted

As dominant concepts in Turkish cartoons, a high level of Euro-scepticism and an emphasis on independence, are accompanied by an anxiety to be isolated from the West, due to the rejection of the 'imperialist' supremacy of the West. A fear of being discriminated against and humiliated occupies a significant place in the Turkish cartoons of this period, see Figure 31 & 32.



Figure 31. "Passport Control" (Ercan Akyol).



-Will I be really able to get to the other side if I vote?

Figure 32. "The Cyprus Referendum" (Ercan Akyol-Milliyet-12.04.2003).

In Figure 31 and 32, similar sentiments are elaborated upon. In both cartoons the notion of 'waiting on the doorsteps of Europe' is illustrated with scepticism. A relatively contemporary archive of 'long visa cues' in front of the missions of the European states in Turkey seems to inhabit an undeniable place in Turkish consciousness. Figure 31 was published after the terror attacks in Madrid and argues that even terrorists can enter The Schengen more easily than Turkish citizens.

Furthermore, the belief that PKK, the Kurdish Guerilla Organisation, is harboured by some European states seems to be the underlying archive for this cartoon. In Figure 32, the Cyprus referendum is again associated with potential membership of the European Union, while scepticism towards Europe is underlined. The Turkish Cypriot asks the EU officer whether he will be able to enter the Union if he votes yes in the referendum. Both cartoons call for further consideration of particular typologies of the EU representative and Turkish citizens. The EU representative, in this case a passport officer, seems to be indifferent and arrogant towards the Turkish citizen who is portrayed as naive and predominantly rural.

### Conclusion

This study aims to understand the underlying European/Western perceptions of Turkey through political cartoons, and then examines their reflections and ramifications in the Turkish imagination through Turkish political cartoons. Initially, the project's main concern was to find out how Turkey was represented in European cartoons. Yet, we soon realized that to understand the special relationship between the EU and Turkey, we should contrast American and European perceptions of Turkey. Eventually, it dawned on us that without considering the Turkish cartoonists' responses to these perceptions, the picture would be devoid of its dialectical framework.

We believe that this paper appears at a unique time, since the EU and Turkey have never been this close before. During the final revision of this paper, it became obvious that Turkey would be given a date for accession negotiations. Also, it became apparent that the accession process would not merely be a matter of technical/practical adaptation. The historical (mis)perceptions of both sides will be challenged. This study perceives itself as a contribution to this process.

As a final point we would like to note the personal dimension in this study. At the time this study began we were two Turkish students in Denmark. We experienced how these misperceptions operated in daily life, being both subjects and objects of them. Therefore, we ourselves became a part of our subject matter. Nevertheless, we feel that this dimension deepened our academic gaze and enriched our study.

*Sinan Erensü is a senior student in Sabancı University, Social and Political Science program (BA), İstanbul. Yaşar A. Adanalı is a graduate of Sabancı University, Social and Political Science Program (BA), İstanbul. He is currently working as Civic Involvement Projects officer in Sabancı University.*

**Contact Info:** [sinanerensu@su.sabanciuniv.edu](mailto:sinanerensu@su.sabanciuniv.edu), [yasara@sabanciuniv.edu](mailto:yasara@sabanciuniv.edu)

*We would like to thank associate professor Jan Ifversen at the University of Aarhus for his inspiration and support. We also would like to thank our friend Aslı İkizoğlu, senior student at Social and Political Science (BA) in Sabancı University, for*



her comments and support in the final revision of this paper.

## REFERENCES

Akman, Ayhan (1998): "From Cultural Schizophrenia to Modernist Binarism", In: Göçek, Fatma Müge (ed.): *Political Cartoons in the Middle East*, Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers.

Ahıska, Meltem (2003): "Occidentalism: The Historical Fantasy of the Modern", *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100:3.

Aybet, Gülnur and Müftüler-Baç, Meltem, (2000): "Transformations in Security and Identity After the Cold War: Turkey's Problematic Relationship with Europe", *International Journal*, Vol 55, No 4.

Bora, Tanıl (2003): "Nationalist Discourses in Turkey" *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol 102, No 2.

Burçoğlu, Nedret Kuran (1999): "The Image of Turk in Europe from 11th to 20th Century as Represented in Literary and Visual Sources", *Marmara Journal of European Studies*, Vol 7, No 2.

Çölasan, Emin (2004): "Sudan Ucuz Kıbrıs: Bu kadar Ucuz mu?" [Dirty Cheap Cyprus, is it That Simple?], *Hürriyet*.

Danyal, Nezh (1995): "Kovana Çomak Sokmak" [Poking Stick in Beehive], In: Nezh Danyal (ed.): *Karikatür ve Siyaset* [Cartoon and Politics], İstanbul: Karikatür Vakfı Yayınları.

Göçek, Fatma Müge (1998): "Political Cartoons as a Site of Representation and Resistance in the Middle East", In: Göçek, Fatma Müge (ed.): *Political Cartoons in the Middle East*, Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers.

Göle, Nilüfer (2000): "Global Expectations, Local Experiences: Non-Western Modernities", In: Arts, Wil (ed.): *Through a Glass*, Leiden: E.J.Brill.

Hall, Stuart (1998): "The Spectacle of The Other", In: Stuart Hall (ed.): *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: Sage Publication.

Hall, Stuart (1996): "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power", In: Gieben, B and Hall, Stuart (eds.): *Formations of Modernity*, Cambridge: Blackwell.

Helvacıoğlu, Banu (1998): "Europe in Turkish Discourse: How Does One Conceive Oneself?", In: Rickard Larsson (ed.): *Boundaries of Europe?*, Stockholm: Forskningsrådsnämnden.

İlhan, Atilla (1972): *Hangi Batı* [Which West?], Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi.

Mardin, Şerif (1962): *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Müftüler-Baç, Meltem (2000): "Through the Looking Glass: Turkey in Europe", *Turkish Studies*, Vol 1, No 1.

Oral, Tan (1995): "Politikacılar ve Siyaset" [Politicians and

Politics], In: Nezh Danyal (ed.): *Karikatür ve Siyaset* [Cartoon and Politics], İstanbul: Karikatür Vakfı Yayınları.

Oran, Baskın (2002): "TDP'nin Kurumsal Çerçevesi" [Institutional Framework of Turkish Foreign Policy], In: Baskın Oran (ed.): *Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, [Turkish Foreign Policy, Since the War of Independence up today, Concepts, Documents, Comments] Cilt 1, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

Penwill, Roger (1995): "Karikatürçüler Politikacılar Karşı", In: Nezh Danyal (ed.): *Karikatür ve Siyaset*, İstanbul: Karikatür Vakfı Yayınları.

Said, Edward W. (1995[1978]): *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Selçuk, Turan (1995): "Karikatür ve Siyaset" [Caricature and Politics], In: Nezh Danyal (ed.): *Karikatür ve Siyaset* [Cartoon and Politics], İstanbul: Karikatür Vakfı Yayınları.

Sümer, Necdet (1995): "Politik Karikatür" [Political Cartoon], In: Nezh Danyal (ed.): *Karikatür ve Siyaset* [Cartoon and Politics], İstanbul: Karikatür Vakfı Yayınları.

Yapp, Malcom M. (1992): "Europe in the Turkish Mirror", *Past and Present*, No 137.

## Internet Sources

CartoonArts International-The New York Times Syndicate, available in <http://www.nytimes.com/portal/cartoons.html>

Cartoonists & Writers Syndicate, available in <http://www.cartoonweb.com/>

Dary Cagle Pro-Cartoonists Index Home Page available in <http://www.cagle.com>

Grigoriadis, Ioannis, (2003), "Islamic Europhilia in Turkey and the AKP", Conference Paper Presented in Middle East Technical University 2nd Conference on International Relations, available in <http://www.ir.metu.edu.tr/conf/papers/grigoriadis.pdf>

Guardian On-line, available in <http://www.guardian.co.uk>

Karikatür Vakfı, [Caricature Foundation], available in <http://www.nd-karikaturvakfi.org.tr>

## Journals-Magazines

*Aydınlık* (Turkey)

*Christian Science Monitor* (USA)

*De Telegraaf* (Netherlands)



*Elefteros Tipos* (Greece)  
*El Mundo* (Spain)  
*Guardian* (United Kingdom)  
*Het Parool* (Netherlands)  
*Horsens Folkeblad* (Denmark)  
*Hürriyet* (Turkey)  
*Jyllands-Posten* (Denmark)  
*24 Heures* (Switzerland)  
*Le Monde* (France)  
*Miami Herald* (USA)  
*Milliyet* (Turkey)  
*Neues Detschland* (Germany)  
*The Record* (USA)  
*Sabah* (Turkey)  
*Star Ledger* (USA)  
*Stern* (Germany)  
*Weiner Zeitung* (Austria)  
*Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zaitung* (Germany)