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Framing Turkey: Identities, public opinion and Turkey's potential accession into the EU

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CHAPTER 1

Thinking of Turkey. Assessing Individual Frames in Citizens' Arguments Favouring or Opposing Turkey's EU Membership.

Abstract

Several studies have found that media and political elites frame the issue Turkey's potential accession in terms of Turkey's development, Turkey's identity and utilitarian consequences. In other studies is argued that citizens also use these frames, but this has never sufficiently been tested. We fill this gap using a survey held in 2008 in the Netherlands (N = 700). By coding answers to an open-ended question, we found that citizens indeed use the frames also used in the media and by political elites. These findings give an insight in how the debate on Turkey's potential accession is structured and support previous explanations of how attitudes towards Turkey's EU membership are formed.

Knowledge of public opinion towards Turkey is important. Many studies have explained attitudes towards EU topics by looking at antecedent factors as cognitive abilities (e.g., Inglehart, 1970a; Janssen, 1991), economic circumstances (e.g., Anderson & Reichert, 1996; Gabel, 1998), or identities (e.g., Carey, 2002; De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005; Hooghe & Marks, 2005). All these explanations share that it is argued that citizens perceive EU issues in a particular way, and consecutively react accordingly. These studies find significant and substantial effects of these antecedent factors, but do not test whether citizens actually indeed see European issues as the explanations describe. So if we really want to understand public opinion towards Turkey's potential accession, it is important to also assess how citizens make sense of the issue.

To understand how citizens make sense of the issue of Turkey's potential EU membership, we use the concept of framing. A frame indicates what an issue is about and what is important in an issue. Framing scholars argue that frames exist at different locations: in the media as *media* frames, defined by Gamson and Modigliani as 'a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events' (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143); and in individuals' thoughts as *individual* frames, defined by Entman as 'mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals' processing of information' (Entman, 1993, p. 53).

Several studies have looked at how media or political elites frame the issue of Turkey's potential membership (e.g., De Vreese et al., 2011; Koenig, Mihelj, Downey, & Bek, 2006; Negrine, Kejanlioglu, Aissaoui, & Papathanassopoulos, 2008). Some studies focused on the public discourse around Turkey's potential EU membership (e.g., Steunenbergh, Petek, & R uth, 2011; Wimmel, 2009). But in these studies, public discourse is studied by, again, focussing on the media. These studies thus may tell us much about the public debate, but they may tell us little about the actual public (as what is in the media is what opinion leaders write and editors seem fit to publish). In one exception, Ruiz-Jimenez and Torreblanca (2007) look at the use of individual frames among citizens. They do this by testing for the effect of attitudes towards these considerations in these frames on support for Turkey's accession. Although they find these considerations to have

significant effects on support for accession, it leaves the question whether citizens would use these frames when they are not prompted by the questionnaire, and to what degree these frames tap citizens' individual framing. We will thus look at to what degree citizens follow media and political elites when framing the issue of Turkey's potential EU membership.

In this study, we will focus on the actual public. We do so through a survey, held in the Netherlands in December 2008 (N = 700). Because we are interested in how citizens themselves frame the issue of Turkey's potential EU membership, we ask in an open-ended question for their reasons to be in favour or not of Turkey's accession. Our findings will show that in line with studies of media frames and Ruiz-Jimenez and Torreblanca (2007), citizens frame the issue of Turkey's EU membership in terms of Turkey's development, European and Turkey's identity, and utilitarian considerations. Our findings show that these frames cover the vast majority of citizens. That does not mean that the issue cannot be framed differently, but that it happens only sporadically.

Previous studies

In the media and elite debate on Turkish accession to the EU, three main frames can be distinguished. The first frame is closely associated with the so called Copenhagen criteria, which describe the criteria the EU sets for candidate countries. In this frame, the focus is on the degree to which Turkey has developed to meet the criteria set by the EU and development towards 'western values' more in general. With the rapid reform process, arguments opposing Turkey's EU membership within this frame lost much of their momentum, and as a result opponents of Turkey's accession started using different frames. These frames revolve around two major issues: culture and identity on the one hand and utilitarian consequences of Turkish membership on the other (Karlson, 2008; Rochtus, 2008).

The first frame is related to three sets of criteria set by the Copenhagen European Council, which a candidate country must meet to become a member:

- political criteria, relating to the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and

- protection of minorities;
- economic criteria, relating to the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union;
 - the acceptance of the *acquis communautaire*, relating to the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union (European Commission, n.d.).

Within this frame, the discussion is whether Turkey has developed “sufficiently” to fulfill these Copenhagen criteria. This is a discussion of whether the bottle is half full or half empty (Gangloff, 2008). On the one hand, one cannot deny that Turkey has made impressive steps towards fulfilling these criteria, such that this progress was denoted (by some scholars) as “Turkestroika” (Rohtus, 2008). On the other hand, however, one cannot say that Turkey has completely fulfilled the criteria: as for instance journalists or writers who mention the Armenian genocide still risk prosecution and the repression of Kurds in the southeast (Gangloff, 2008). Adding to the debate here, is whether the EU should only accept candidates as members when they *completely* fulfil the criteria or should the EU embrace the idea that an EU membership will further develop and consolidate the large progress already made – which was seen as a valid argument with the Spanish accession (Redmond, 2007).

The second frame in media and political debates revolve around identities. The questions this frame revolves around is whether Turkey is European. The Treaty of Rome states in article 237 that any European country may apply for membership. Although it does not say whether non-European countries can join, Redmond (2007) argues that it was probably the intention of the article to prohibit non-European countries from becoming a member and that it has certainly been interpreted that way. But when is a country defined as being European or not? Two ways are most commonly used to define who is European and who is not: geography on the one hand and culture and religion on the other.

Commonly defined, Europe ends geographically speaking at the Bosphorus, with 95% of Turkey being in Asia. But what does that mean? On

the one hand it is argued that Turkey is European because a part of its *territory* is in Europe. But on the other hand it is argued that the majority of the country is outside of Europe, and Turkey is therefore not European (Redmond, 2007).

Within the same frame, another way of defining Europe is through *culture* and *religion*. According to Karlson (2008), the idea that the EU is based on Christian values is gaining ground, especially in Catholic Europe. In this view, EU integration is only possible when countries share a Judeo-Christian religious and Greco-Roman political heritage (Grigoriadis, 2006, p. 152). With 99% of the Turks born in an Islamic culture, Turkey is said to lack this heritage and accessing would not be an option. Others, however, argue that the EU is based on liberal democratic values and as long as one commits himself to these liberal democratic values differences in culture and religion is no obstacle (Grigoriadis, 2006). So, although one cannot deny that Turks are primarily Muslims, it is debatable whether being a Muslim prevents someone from being European.

The third frame revolves around utilitarian issues. The central question is what the *consequences* of Turkey's accession would be and to what degree member states or citizens in member states would profit or lose from Turkey's accession. In political and media debates, consequences are often discussed on three terrains: the economy, immigration and security.

The most discussed consequences of Turkey's potential membership are about economics. Although there is a clear consensus that membership will be economically profitable for Turkey (Chislett, 2008; Flam, 2004), the economic consequences for the present EU members is fiercely debated. Some argue that the size, (alleged) inefficiency and backwardness of Turkey's economy and agriculture, will have budgetary consequences and seriously strain the EU economy (Chislett, 2008; Grigoriadis, 2006). Others emphasize that Turkey's membership opens 'a large and tempting market that is far from reaching the saturation point' (Grigoriadis, 2006, p. 153) and that 'Turkey's young population can be seen as an asset, not a liability for the EU's greying labour market' (Chislett, 2008, p. 73).

Within the same frame, a second commonly mentioned consequence that is debated is the possible migration flow from Turkey to the present members. By becoming a member of the EU, obstacles for Turks coming

to live in other EU member states will disappear and Turks are feared to move to other EU members in search for a better future (Arnold, 2008). This argument is however challenged by emphasizing that an EU membership would generate more economic growth and this would decrease the urge to migrate from Turkey (Chislett, 2008; Gangloff, 2008).

A third consequence often used in this frame relates to security issues, either from the geostrategic position of Turkey or perceived threats from Islam. Turkey's proximity to the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia – volatile and crucial regions – makes Turkey an important strategic partner. Of course, Turkey is already a partner through NATO, but it is argued that anything short of full membership will alienate Turkey from the EU, so membership is important for securing EU influence in these regions (Grigoriadis, 2006). In opposition to membership it is argued that EU presence in the region itself will also bring threats to the EU: external from neighbouring countries as Iraq and internal through the lack of a common foreign policy (Gangloff, 2008; Grigoriadis, 2006).

The other security issue is about the perceived threat from Islam. Islam is here often seen as a religion that is intolerant, creates fanatics and massive despotism. 'Do we want the river of Islam to enter the riverbed of secularism?' said former French Prime Minister Raffarin in September 2004. Islam as a threat is challenged by three different arguments. First, Islam is not new in Europe, as 15 million Muslims already live in the EU and as such it should be regarded as a mainstream religion within the EU (Karlson, 2008). Second, Turkish society is said to be more secular than some of the present members' societies. This is illustrated for instance by the widespread popular opposition against a proposed (Islamic) law criminalizing adultery (Gangloff, 2008). This also makes a caricature of the idea that all Muslims are intolerant fanatics. The third argument countering Islam as a threat is that Islam should actually be considered an opportunity rather than a threat: 'The admission of a Muslim country into the European Union would constitute the most effective guarantee of its secular, inclusive, and multicultural character and provide a powerful example to the rest of the world' (Grigoriadis, 2006, p. 152).

Citizen frames

But to what degree citizens also use these frames? The above described debate about the Copenhagen criteria is rather technical and complex, and one may wonder whether citizens are competent enough to discuss within this frame. But these Copenhagen criteria are related to the idea that also citizens have an idea about a 'set of shared principles on which the Union is based' (Ruiz-Jimenez & Torreblanca, 2007, p. 6), revolving around 'universal principles such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law'. Citizens may not literally frame the question of Turkey's EU membership in terms of the Copenhagen criteria, but, as Ruiz-Jimenez and Torreblanca argue, citizens will evaluate Turkey's EU membership on whether they believe Turkey complies with the set of 'universal principles'.

The identity frame is likely to be used by citizens, as the idea of identities is central to the explanations of the effects of national identity and anti-immigrant attitudes on support for enlargement and Turkey's accession (e.g., De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005). Several scholars (e.g., Carey, 2002; De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005; McLaren, 2007) argue that individuals with a strong national identity and strong anti-immigrant attitudes are negative towards enlargement because they perceive the applicant country as 'the other', and because the applicant country is not part of the in-group it is negatively evaluated and membership is opposed (for a more elaborate discussion, see chapter 3).

In a similar vein, the utilitarian frame is likely to be used as the considerations within this frame are central in the utilitarian models of explain EU support (e.g., Anderson & Reichert, 1996; Gabel, 1998). For instance Karp and Bowler argue that '[...] responses towards enlargement are likely to be driven by short-term instrumental concerns such as, for example, a concern over how the entry of new countries may provide additional benefits or costs' (Karp & Bowler, 2006, p. 372).

In one study, Ruiz-Jimenez and Torreblanca (2007) found that considerations within these three frames indeed affect support for Turkey's accession. This is indeed an indication that citizens make use of these frames, the question that remains is to what degree citizens make use of these frames when they are not prompted and how large is the share of citizen framing these frames cover?

Methods

To assess the individual frames used by citizens, a survey was held in the Netherlands in December 2008. Out of the online panel of TNS-NIPO (N = 143,807) a sample of 2400 was taken, of which 1427 filled in the questionnaire (response rate 59.4%). From the sample 700 respondents were randomly selected to receive the open-ended question from which we coded the presence of the frames.

We proceeded in four steps to arrive at our data. The first step was asking the respondents (on a 7-point scale) whether they were not at all in favour (1) or very much in favour (7) of Turkey becoming a member of the EU and next asking in an open-ended question why that was their opinion. The second step was to identify the different arguments that respondents used. This resulted in a list of 65 different arguments².

The third step was to merge the 65 different arguments into three categories relating to the three frames, and a rest category. In the *development frame* we merged arguments about the state of Turkey's development and whether that development is sufficient to become an EU member, as for instance the functioning of Turkey's democracy, the degree to which Turkey respects human rights, or the position of women in Turkey's society. In essence, these arguments refer to factual information about Turkey, but not in every case do respondents accurately reflect these facts. For instance, several respondents oppose Turkey's membership because they argue that there is no separation of state and religion. Turkey's constitution, however, defines Turkey as a secular state (with the army in the role of protector of the secular state, and having intervened multiple times when the army assumed the secular character of the state was compromised), and, although there are political parties with Islamic roots, the role of religion is far less compared to several longstanding EU members as for instance Denmark, the Netherlands or the United Kingdom. But for coding which frame a respondent uses, it is not necessary whether an individual has the facts correct. We care if the respondent believes, in this case, whether there is no

² . These 65 different arguments could in principle all be used in favour and against Turkish membership, and thus leading to 130 arguments. For a full list of the 65 arguments, see Appendix 1A.

separation of state and religion and whether the respondent uses that argument.

In the *identity frame* we merged arguments about whether Turkey or the Turks belong to 'us' or 'them'. As this is about the European Union, often this is referred to as whether Turkey is European. And whether Turkey is European, is often assessed on geographical, historical, cultural and/or religious grounds. Of course, these items are far less fact driven, as how someone defines 'us' or 'them' is very subjective. Some issues may be fact related, as for instance most Turks are Muslims or that Turkey is a NATO member, but more subjective is whether an individual believes that religion or NATO membership is of any importance when deciding on what is Europe or not.

Arguments about how Turkey's accession may affect respondents were merged in the *utilitarian frame*. These arguments were often about how accession would affect the Dutch or EU economy (either positively or negatively), but also for instance mentioning threats of increased immigration or opportunities of remigration, or strategic consequences with the EU having a presence in the Middle East. As these arguments are about what would happen in the future, one cannot say whether an argument is really true or false. But again, we are not interested in whether an argument is valid or not, but whether someone uses it.

Since we are interested in to what degree citizens use these three frames, we merged arguments that did not fit one of the three frames in an 'other' category. In this category, we also included the arguments which were unclear how they should be interpreted. This included, for instance, references to the environment or multiple nationalities of Turks living in Europe. Also several respondents argued in favour or opposition of Turkey's membership by referring to how membership would affect Turkey or the Turks. As the utilitarian frame is about what 'we' gain or lose with Turkey's membership, these arguments will only fall under the utilitarian frame when Turkey is considered to be part of the in-group. Since we do not know this, we opt for the conservative route and merged the arguments about the effects on Turkey in the 'other' category.

In the fourth step, the answers of respondents were coded on the use of the different frames (based on the merged 65 arguments), together with

whether the frame was used to support or oppose Turkey's membership and which frame was used first in the response (in case more than one frame was used).³

Results

The descriptive statistics of the presence of the frames are presented in Table 1.1. It shows that in the answers of 270 respondents the development frame was found present, in 240 responses the identity frame was present, and in 205 responses the utilitarian frame. Within all 700 respondents, Table

Table 1.1
Arguments used

	Absolute	Relative to 700	Relative to 593	Absolute	Relative to 700	Relative to 593
Development frame	270	38.6%	45.5%			
Positive				13	1.9%	2.2%
Negative				255	36.4%	43.0%
Identity frame	240	34.3%	40.5%			
In-group				44	6.3%	7.4%
Out-group				197	28.1%	33.2%
Utilitarian frame	205	29.3%	34.6%			
Opportunities				60	8.6%	10.1%
Threats				147	21.0%	24.8%
Other argument	87	12.4%	14.7%	87	12.4%	14.7%
Total respondents with arguments	593	84.7%	100.0%	593	84.7%	100.0%
No argument	107	15.3%		107	15.3%	
Total n	700	100.0%		700	100.0%	

Note: Entries are numbers of respondents from whom we found the particular frame to be present in their answer. Values do not add up to total, because respondents could use more than one frame. 48 respondent (8.1% of respondents who presented an argument; 6.9% of all respondents) who presents at least one argument do not use one of the above mentioned frames.

³ The last step was also performed by a second coder. The inter-coder reliability was high, with percentages of agreement between the coders ranging between 92.4% and 99.4% and Krippendorff's alpha ranging between .81 and .96 for the presence of (valenced) frames. For first frame and first argument the percentages of agreement were respectively 88.7% and 89.1%, and Krippendorff's alpha respectively .85 and .87. For full details, see Appendix 1B.

1.1 shows that in respectively 38.6%, 34.3% and 29.3% the three frames are present. However, 107 respondents actually didn't respond with an argument (but for instance only stated they had no idea or only inserted question marks). Looking at the 593 responses that actually present an argument, the proportions of responses to have the development frame, identity frame and utilitarian frame the frames present are respectively 45.5%, 40.5% and 34.6%. These results show that large portions of the respondents make use of these frames.

The percentages of the present frames add up to more than 100%. As we coded and counted the presence of each frame in each response, it is of course possible to have responses in which more than one frame is present. In Figure 1.1, we split the percentages to show how large a share of

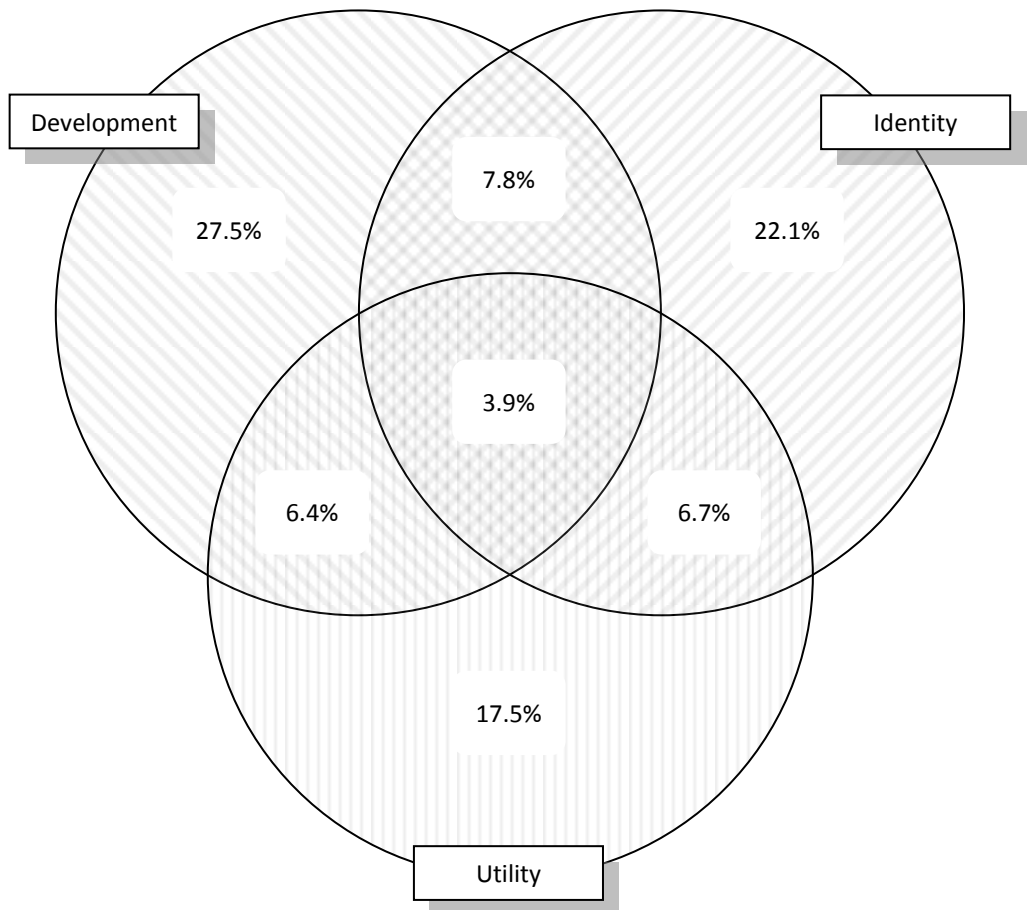


Figure 1.1. Percentages of individuals that are covered by the different frames. N = 593

respondents we found to only one specific frame present, a combination of two specific frames or all three frames. It shows, for instance, that 22.1% of respondents (who gave an argument) only have the identity frame present and not either of the other two frames. Combining the identity frame with the other two, we find that 7.8% of respondents have both the identity frame and the development frame present, 6.7% have both identity frame and utilitarian frame present, and 3.9% have all three frames present. Adding the percentages in different parts of the figure that cover the presence of identity frame, we find the 40.5% already found in Table 1.1. Finally combining all the percentages in the figure, we find that 91.9% of respondents who gave an argument have at least one of these frames present. These results show that the three frames indeed have a strong presence in how individuals frame the issue.

Going a little deeper into the data, we see that all frames are being used

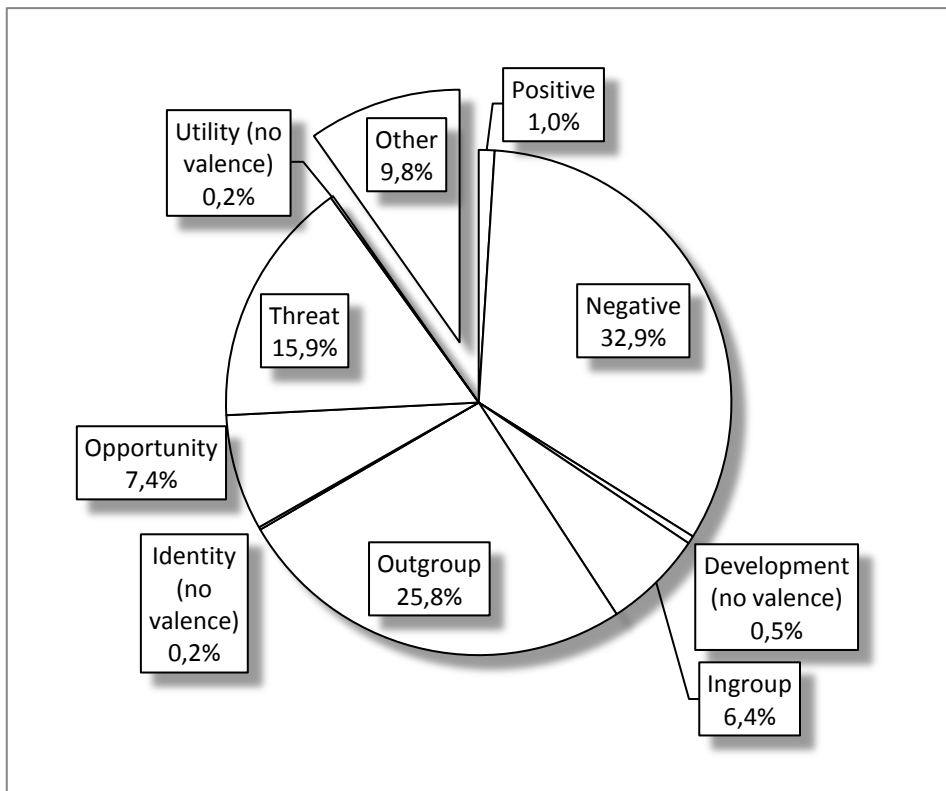


Figure 1.2. Distribution of frames/arguments of the first argument in an answer. Respondents who gave no argument are not included. N = 593.

both to support or oppose Turkey's EU membership. The ratio between positive and negative is most extreme for the development frame. It is used only 13 times to express that Turkey has developed sufficiently and/or is ready for EU membership, but 255 times to do the opposite. Although less skewed, we find a similar tendency for the other frames to be used negatively towards Turkey's accession, with a majority of out-group arguments over in-group arguments and a majority of threat arguments over opportunity arguments.

Finally, we turn to the first argument each respondent presents. In Figure 1.2, we plotted the distribution of the first arguments in a circle diagram. The three frames cover more than 90% of the first arguments. In 58 (9.8%) responses we could not identify one of our three frames in the first argument. Again, this suggests that for the overwhelming majority of respondents the three frames are most important. Comparing the use of the frames and valence of the frames, we see similar patterns as before. Most respondents use the development frame, followed by the identity frame. And all frames are in majority used negatively, with the ratio between positive and negative most extreme for the development frame, followed by the identity frame.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we asked the question how 'ordinary' citizens frame the issue of Turkey's potential EU membership. Following the literature on media framing of the issue, we argued that citizens are likely show similar individual frames, namely a Turkey's development frame, an identity frame and a utilitarian frame. Using an open-ended question, we assessed to what degree these frames were present in respondents answers and thus in their minds. We found that the three frames cover the vast majority of the respondents and that only a fraction of the arguments is not part of these frames.

Since we found that citizens on one side, and media and political elites on the other, use similar frames to discuss Turkey's potential accession, it raises the question who is cuing whom? Scheufele (1999) argued that in a process model of framing, researchers should focus on both the possibility that individual frames are affected by exposure to media frames, but also on

the possibility that individual frames, through for instance journalists exposed to interpersonal communication, affect media frames. Steenbergen et al. (2007) found evidence that political elites are both cued by their constituencies. Thus, given the similarities between public, media and political elites, an interesting question would be to see who follows who, and where potential shifts in frame use originate.

Our findings also showed that all frames are in majority used to oppose Turkey's EU membership, which is in line with previous findings that Turkey's accession is highly contested among citizens (e.g., McLaren, 2007). But if one would try to persuade the public to be in favour of Turkey's accession, he would do well to reckon with the different characteristics in each frame. Individuals using the development frame are probably most easily persuaded, provided that Turkey sufficiently fulfils the Copenhagen criteria and political elites succeed in communicating this to the general public. Individuals using the utilitarian frame may also be persuaded when, for instance through economic growth in Turkey and the economic crisis in the EU, consequences of Turkey's accession are perceived differently. Persuasion of individuals using the identity frame is probably much harder. Many identities are the result of a socialization process and are thus hard to alter. The implications of identities, however, emerge from debate (Hooghe & Marks, 2004) and thus also users of the identity frame can potentially be persuaded.

Finally, we turn to the explanations of EU attitudes and support for enlargement and Turkey's accession. As we discussed in this chapter, scholars assume that citizens frame the issue in terms consistent with their explanation. That is, economic circumstances affect support because individuals frame the issue in terms of economic consequences (e.g., Anderson & Reichert, 1996; Gabel, 1998); identity factors affect support because individuals frame the issue in terms of identities (e.g., Carey, 2002; De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005). This study shows that these scholars are right. Or at least that they are partially right.

With the utilitarian models and identity models being the most prominent and powerful explanations of support for EU, enlargement and Turkey's EU membership, this study shows that the frames consistent with

these explanations are indeed very prominent in individual framing. But this study also shows that not everybody uses these frames. That leads to the next question on who actually uses particular frames and why they do so. Future studies should focus on these questions, not only to understand who uses which frame, but also to better understand when certain models of explanations lead to better results.