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

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CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, we focused on opinions towards the European Union, specifically the issue of Turkey's potential accession. Previous studies argued that how citizens perceive other Europeans is central in the formation of EU attitudes. Are other Europeans with 'us', or do they constitute 'another'? And what does it mean if citizens define their fellow Europeans as 'others'? And what do anti-immigrant attitudes tell us about how citizens define other Europeans? By testing the role of identities in the realm of EU attitudes, we aimed to add to the literature on EU attitude formation. The studies in this dissertation support the idea that identities are a central factor in EU attitudes formation. Not only directly, through favouring in-group members or rejecting out-group members, but also because identities influence the way information about other Europeans is interpreted. Identity factors are, however, not omnipresent, and the studies in this dissertation show that there are clear patterns under what conditions these identity factors are more or less important. In the following paragraphs, we will first summarize the main findings, after which we provide context to our findings, discuss certain issues transcending the individual chapters, and how our findings fit in the larger context of literature on EU attitudes.

Summary of research findings

In *chapter 1*, we looked at how citizens framed the issue of Turkey's potential EU membership. By performing a content analysis of the answers to an open-ended question in a survey held in the Netherlands in 2008, we found that individual framing largely mirrors the political and media debates on the issue. We found three frames to dominate the responses: the first frame focuses on the degree to which Turkey has developed into 'a modern western state' with respect to issues as democracy, human rights and the rule of law; in the second frame the focus was on the question whether Turkey is a European country and/or whether Turks are Europeans; the third frame focuses on utilitarian consequences of Turkey's accession.

Having established the importance for citizens of utilitarian framing and identity framing, we asked in *chapter 2* the question who was more likely to use either of these frames. We argued that this was driven not by the specific issue, but by the importance that is attributed to more general

values. With a voter survey held in 21 countries, we found that individuals indeed frame the issue of Turkey's EU membership (either in terms of utilitarian considerations or in terms of identities) along the lines of how important more general issues were perceived to be.

In *chapter 3*, we linked the framing in terms of identities to the effect of anti-immigrant attitudes. Through a mediation analysis of the survey data, with the mediator variable of framing as out-groups derived from the content analysis of the open-ended question, we showed that the effect of anti-immigrant attitudes on EU attitudes can indeed, as previous studies argued, be explained by whether individuals frame other Europeans as an out-group.

In *chapter 4* we focused on how context may explain differences in support for Turkey's membership across Europe. Based on conflict theory, we argued that contact with 'others' would lead to a perceived threat to the in-group and thus rejection to the out-group. We argued that contact could be direct (for instance, through the presence of Turkish immigrants), but also indirect (for instance through politicians attaching great importance to immigration issues or the media often reporting about immigrants). As anti-immigrant attitudes are about defining out-groups, contact would of course have a greater (negative) effect on individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants.

Finally, in *chapter 5*, we looked at how evaluations in the news media affect support for Turkey's EU membership. As it is unlikely that everyone interprets the same information in precisely the same manner, we argued that individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants are more likely to be affected by negative evaluations of Turkey and/or Turks. Although we could not explain variation in change in support for Turkey's membership with variation in individual exposure to evaluations in the media, we did find a main effect of the information environment on average levels of support. We also found that individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants are indeed more affected by the negative news.

Discussion

Identity factors

Now what do the findings in these chapters teach us about the relation between identity factors and public opinion towards Turkey's potential accession? First of all, this dissertation has shown that identities indeed play a central role in public attitude formation about the Turkey issue. We have shown that it is common to frame the issue of Turkey's EU membership in terms of whether they are European or not, under which conditions this is more or less important and how it effects the processing of new information. To understand how the findings in chapter 1 and 2 relate to the findings in chapters 3, 4 and 5 we need to understand how the identity frame and anti-immigrant attitudes precisely relate.

Identity framing, as we defined it in chapters 1 and 2, has in principle two directions: (1) defining the other European as member of the in-group or (2) defining the other European as member of an out-group. And indeed, in both chapters 1 and 2 we found respondents who said that Turkey is part of Europe and found respondents that said Turkey is not part of Europe (with a clear majority of respondents in the latter group). Consequently, when identity considerations are perceived as important in forming an attitude towards Turkey's potential accession, defining Turks as members of the in-group will lead to a favourable bias towards them through in-group favouritism (M. B. Brewer, 1999), which likely results in support for Turkey's membership. And defining Turks as members of an out-group will lead to an unfavourable bias through out-group rejection (Brown, 2000), which likely results in opposition towards Turkey's membership. This is supported by our findings in chapter 2.

But how does this relate to anti-immigrant attitudes? We argued that anti-immigrant attitudes are also about identities, and tell us to what degree an individual is likely to think in terms of 'us' and 'them'. Given that most Europeans in general, and Turks in particular, are easily defined as the other, this means that anti-immigrant attitudes are in practical sense primarily about defining the identity of other Europeans as an out-group. So where the identity frame has two sides, individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants are likely to only apply one side of the frame.

This is supported by our findings in chapter 3, where we found that individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants more often framed Turkey in terms of an out-group and less often in terms of the in-group. That is not to say that individuals with anti-immigrant attitudes would never define other Europeans or Turks as part of the in-group, but at this point in time it is rather unlikely because it requires one or more binding factors that overrule differences in nationality, language, ethnicity, culture and religion.

Comparing identity framing and anti-immigrant attitudes, we thus argue that anti-immigrant attitudes are a predictor of the use of identity framing. But where the identity frame has two directions (Turks as part of the in-group or as an out-group), anti-immigrant attitudes also predict the direction of the frame: negative attitudes towards immigrants lead to less defining of Turks as members of the in-group and more defining of Turks as an out-group.

In the literature, anti-immigrant attitudes have been also been associated with another identity factor, namely national identity (Hooghe & Marks, 2005). As we already argued in the introduction, the difference between national identity and anti-immigrant attitudes is about the identity perceptions of one's self and of the other. Individuals with a strong national attachment oppose European integration because it may have degrading effects on the nation state. This is, however, irrespective of how they perceive other Europeans. Individuals with strong negative attitudes towards immigrants strongly categorize the world in 'us' and 'them', and are likely to also see other Europeans as an out-group. And because they define other Europeans as an out-group, they tend to negatively evaluate them and also cooperation with them (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005). This conceptual difference is likely to have some implications for the effects on support for Turkey and/or EU attitudes. For instance, we argue that anti-immigrant attitudes have similar effects on different EU attitudes, because all EU attitudes involve the idea of integration with 'other' Europeans. National attachment, however, would only negatively affect support when the nation state is perceived to be under pressure. Indeed, Boomgaarden et al. (2011) found that for different dimensions of EU attitudes, national identity had different effects. And this is also in line with Van Kersbergen

(2000) and Hooghe and Marks (2004), who argue that in cases where the EU facilitates national interests, national attachment would positively relate with EU attitudes.

Turkey's EU membership

In chapters 2, 4 and 5 we have survey data from multiple countries. As several studies have shown that national debates on the potential accession of Turkey differ considerably (e.g., Koenig et al., 2006; Negrine et al., 2008; Walter & Albert, 2009; Wimmel, 2009), we would also expect country differences in average levels of support. For instance, we would expect that opposition would be more widespread in Austria, which has a rather negative historical view of the Ottomans at the gates of Vienna, and a more favourable opinion in the United Kingdom, where the EU is still very much perceived as a cooperation of sovereign nation states (Wimmel, 2009). But in our data we found that only 6% of the variation in support for EU attitudes was at the national level. This means that there are only small (although significant) country differences in support for Turkey's accession. Given the sometimes very different national contexts, how can we account for these rather small differences? We find that although different frames seem to matter in different context (chapters 2 and 4) all different frames are primarily used to oppose Turkey's EU membership (chapters 1 and 2). That would lead to the conclusion that Europeans on average agree about Turkey's potential accession, but that they do not agree on what the important reasons behind their position is.

But what can we say about the dynamics in opinion towards Turkey's potential accession? First, in relation to the former paragraph, in chapter 4 we found evidence that differences in importance of considerations between countries depends on cues from national politics and national media. Second, in chapter 5 we found that support for Turkey's accession is affected by evaluations of Turkey in the media.

In chapter 4, we found that the variation in importance of anti-immigrant attitudes strongly depends on cues from national politics and national media. So given the differences in nationality, ethnicity, culture and religion between most Europeans and Turks, it may be hard to persuade individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants to see Turks as an in-

group. But given that the importance of anti-immigrant attitudes depends on cues from national politics and media, it appears that citizens are more easily persuaded to alter the importance given to specific considerations. We can link this to the more general theory of framing. Framing scholars have shown that media framing effects are not so much about changing beliefs about the issue, but about changing the importance attributed to the beliefs when forming an opinion (e.g., Nelson & Oxley, 1999). We should, however, be careful to approach this as a ‘simple’ framing effect, because framing effects are also about citizens learning that certain considerations are connected to a specific issue (e.g., Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010). In chapter 4, we assessed cues from national politics and media on a more general identity topic (i.e., the immigration issue). In a strict interpretation of framing effects, this would imply that these cues do not lead to citizens learning to connect identity considerations to the issue of Turkey’s potential EU membership. We argue, however, that from these cues citizens learn about the general importance of identities. Given the ease in which identities come into play in the case of Turkey’s accession, these political and media cues affect the importance of identity frames in this specific issue through altering the general perceived importance of identities. Whether these cues, consecutively, alter public opinion depends on whether the new considerations following from these cues would lead to a different conclusion. Given that we found in chapters 1 and 2 that citizens use all prominent frames in majority to oppose Turkey’s EU membership, the impact of these cues on actual support is likely to be minimal (what we also found in chapter 4).

In chapter 5 we found evidence that public support is affected by evaluations of Turkey in the media. Although we were unable to explain variation in change in support with individual exposure, we could do so with the variation in the information environment. This implies that although individual antecedents are important predictors of support for Turkey’s EU membership, can also be influenced by providing citizens with alternative information about the issue. We argued that it was unlikely that all citizens would respond similar to the same information, and found that individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants are affected more

strongly by negative evaluations in the news. Given that there was a general lack of positive evaluative news of Turkey, the question remains how individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants would react to positive news. Our theoretical assumption was that individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants would also define Turks as an out-group, and negative news about the out-group confirms existing beliefs and reinforces the perceived need to protect the in-group (see M. B. Brewer, 1999). But how would it work when individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants are exposed to positive evaluations? On one side, we may expect that positive evaluations in the news would reduce the perceived need to protect the in-group. If that is the case, there would be no difference in reception of positive news between individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants and individuals with more positive attitudes towards immigrants, and both groups would be persuaded equally. On the other side, positive evaluations in the news may contradict with existing beliefs of individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants. Following the logic of the *reversed mobilization* argument of Schuck and De Vreese (2009), we could argue that individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants may perceive the positive evaluations as negative for their own position and thus become more extreme in their position. As it is, the virtual absence of positive evaluations in the news leaves us unable to test what would happen.

EU attitudes

How does 'Turkey' help us to explain EU attitudes? Can we actually make any inferences to enlargements with other countries, or to other dimensions of EU attitudes? Other studies have already established that anti-immigrant attitudes are about whether the holder of these attitudes categorizes the world in 'us' and 'them' (Sniderman et al., 2000). In this dissertation, we have shown that in the case of Turkey's potential EU membership, individuals with anti-immigrant attitudes indeed oppose membership because they define Turks as an out-group. We argued that since individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants defined Turks as an out-group, they want nothing to do with cooperation, sharing and integrating with this out-group. But no matter how we conceptualize EU

attitudes, they are always about cooperating, sharing, or integrating with other Europeans. Other Europeans may of course be citizens of countries aspiring to become a member. And although McLaren (2007) found that support for no other applicant country's accession was as low as support for Turkey's potential membership, the effect of perceived threats from immigrants evenly affected support for accession of all candidate countries. Looking not only at enlargement, but also at other dimensions of EU attitudes, Boomgaarden et al. (2011) found that all different dimensions of EU attitudes were evenly affected by anti-immigrant attitudes. These findings are consistent with the idea that individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants would also view citizens of other EU members as an out-group. So no matter the conceptualization of EU attitudes, the explanation is applicable and findings in line with expectations that would result from this explanation. We thus argue that we can indeed generalize findings from the specific case of Turkey's potential EU membership to other enlargements and other EU attitudes. Of course, it would be prudent to confirm our argument in future studies.

But of course, Turkey's potential EU membership can probably be considered as 'the easiest case' to focus on issues of in-groups and out-groups. Except the differences in nationality and language (differences that set Europeans from most different countries apart from each other), Turks commonly have a different religion from most Europeans and Turkey's territory is perceived to lie in Asia for most part. Thus, for most Europeans who are likely to categorize in 'us' and 'them', Turks are almost guaranteed to be 'them'. But that does not necessarily need to be the case for all Europeans. For instance, Azrout et al. (in press) found in a study in the Netherlands that anti-immigrant attitudes indeed affected support for Turkey's EU membership, but not support for membership of Switzerland. They argued that this was the case because Swiss are far more likely to be perceived by the Dutch as an in-group.

This means that the effect of anti-immigrant attitudes on EU attitudes depends on where and on what grounds citizens draw the line between the in-group and out-groups. Most likely, the grounds in which relevant categories are formed is in line with the specific issue. For instance, when

the EU enters a policy area which used to be a national responsibility, or of which citizens perceive it best to be the responsibility of the nation state, citizens are likely to draw the line along nationalities. But in questions of who can be part of the EU (i.e., who is European), issues of culture, religion and geography may more easily come into play. For future studies, it would thus be interesting to see along which lines identities are formed when looking at different EU attitudes.

This also relates to the question how individuals learn where to lay the line between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Scholars have argued that ‘Europe’ is an invention (Delanty, 1995), and on many grounds the boundaries of Europe have been defined (Liotta, 2005). So why do, for instance, many citizens perceive religion as an important factor of defining Europe? Is it, for instance, that with rising Islamophobia (Poynting & Mason, 2007) and the general public and political acceptance of Huntington’s clash of civilizations’ thesis (Marranci, 2004), religion is the ‘trending’ way to categorize (see Boomgaarden & Freire, 2009)? Hinrichsen, Boomgaarden, De Vreese, Van der Brug and Hobolt (2012) show that in EU media coverage, references to religious issues increased since terrorist attack in the USA on September 11, 2001. They also show that the effect of religion on EU support depends on exposure to these religious references in the news media. These two findings suggest that religion is indeed a ‘trending’ topic and that when another topic would dominate the public debate, the role of religion is likely to decrease and citizens are likely to alter their conception of Europe according to the new dominant topic. Future studies should thus not only look at how and where people draw borders, but also take into consideration why citizens do so?

Methodological reflections

In all chapters, we used survey data to find an answer to our questions. In two chapters, an alternative methodological approach may have been beneficial. In chapter 1, we used an open-ended question in a survey to assess how citizens framed the issue of Turkey’s EU membership. To assess public discourse, other scholars have performed media content analyses (e.g., Steunenberget al., 2011; Wimmel, 2009). As we argued in chapter 1, focussing on the media would lead to knowledge of the public debate, not

how the public actually frames the issue individually. Another approach to assess individual framing would be to use a more qualitative approach as in-depth interviews. Although such an approach may be beneficial in really uncovering how the frames are build up, the qualitative approach would be less sufficient to answer the question to what degree certain frames are used. Thus, we believe a quantitative survey with an open-ended question was optimal for answering the question how and to what degree individuals frame the issue of Turkey's potential accession.

In chapter 5, we looked at the effects of exposure to evaluations in the media by assessing how actual media content (either through individual exposure or through the information environment) explained change in support between two waves of a panel survey. For assessing media effects experiments can be very beneficial and several authors have made use of such an approach (e.g., De Vreese et al., 2011; Lecheler & De Vreese, 2010; Maier & Rittberger, 2008; Nelson et al., 1997). In our analysis, we depended on what the news media happened to report. As it was (and as we already described) there was a virtual absence of positive news in the period between the two waves. This left the question open how individuals with negative attitudes towards immigrants would respond to positive news. In an experiment, the researcher controls the message subjects are exposed to, and thus we would be able to also confront subjects with positive news.

Also, in our panel survey we relied on self-reported exposure measures which are known to be biased (Prior, 2009). As we already noted in chapter 5, this measurement error may lead to an underestimation of the effect individual exposure. Using an experimental setup, we would have control over the message individuals were exposed to. And as other studies found significant media effects on EU attitudes in experimental studies, we would be more likely to also have found an individual effect.

Given all these advantages of the experimental design over the survey design, why have we chosen for the survey? Because the experimental design is also not perfect. Although experiments have a strong internal validity, they generally lack ecological validity (e.g., Morton & Williams, 2010). Experiments, as they are generally performed, model reality as if individuals are exposed to a media message in isolation from other

individuals and form their opinion in isolation from other individuals. We thus opted for the most realistic setting, but had to deal with the downsides of that.

Apart from reflecting on the designs of the study, we should also reflect on the measures we used. In chapters 2 through 5, we used the same 'simple' dependent variable: on a 7-point scale whether respondents are in favour of or opposed to Turkey becoming a member. The 'nuance' of a 7-point scale is already an improvement compared to Eurobarometer, where respondents' answers are limited to 'in favour', 'oppose' and 'don't know'. But there are nuances that our 7-point scale does not uncover. For instance, two respondents may be very opposed to Turkey's EU membership (lowest score on the scale), but one may have an idea that he would always be opposed while the other may be very opposed at this moment but leaves the possibility open (given potential changes in circumstances) to be in favour in the future. Interestingly, this nuance may also have a significant relation with how individuals frame the issue. For instance, we might argue that individuals opposing Turkey's EU membership using a development frame may have a more temporal opposition. They oppose Turkey's membership because Turkey is perceived not to be ready for accession, but in the future that may of course change. Individuals who oppose Turkey's membership using an identity frame are likely to also frame Turks as non-Europeans in the future. Future studies should try to uncover the nuances and how they can be explained.

Another measure to reflect on are the anti-immigrant attitudes. In chapters 3 to 5, we followed Sniderman et al. (2000) and argued that anti-immigrant attitudes are actually a measure for the degree to which individuals categorize the world in 'us' and 'them'. Fazio and Olson (2003) describe this as measuring an implicit concept (the degree to which individuals categorize) with an explicit attitude (anti-immigrant attitudes). As the degree to which individuals categorize is hard to measure explicit, we turn to an implicit approach. But anti-immigrant attitudes themselves may be biased through respondents giving social desirable answers (e.g., Huddy & Feldman, 2009; Kuklinski, Cobb, & Gilens, 1997). And to avoid this bias, future studies may want to turn to implicit measures. The probably most

well-known implicit measurement technique is the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). In this technique, the association between target groups and evaluative attributes is measured by how fast respondents respond, with the argument that when a specific group does not fit the evaluative attribute the response time will be longer. This has already been applied on racial attitudes with scholars arguing that, similar to our argument of anti-immigrant attitudes, it is about intergroup behaviour (e.g., McConnell & Leibold, 2001).

EU legitimacy

But what do these findings mean for *support for or the legitimacy of the EU*? Utilitarian and identity factors may well be signifiers of two different concepts of political legitimacy. Easton (1965) distinguishes between input and output legitimacy. Output legitimacy is defined as the quality of political decisions (Easton, 1965) and the degree to which they serve citizens' interests (Scharpf, 1999; Verbruggen, 2009). Utilitarian factors (as predictors of EU attitudes) revolve around the idea whether citizens profit or expect to profit from European integration and thus these utilitarian factors may be a signifier for output legitimacy.

Input legitimacy is defined as the degree to which citizens take part in or support political decision taking (Schmidt, 2010). Taking part in political decision taking can be ensured through institutions of electoral representation (Scharpf, 1999). But support in decision taking does not depend on 'institutional' solutions only, but is also the result of a collective identity among citizens (Desmet, Spanje, & De Vreese, 2012; Scharpf, 1999). And this is where our identity factors come in. EU citizens not identifying with each other results not only in lower support for political decisions made in the EU, but may also threatens the legitimacy of the EU.

Both input and output legitimacy are necessary for the legitimacy of the system. Scharpf (1999) argues that the legitimacy of the EU has always relied on the output side. We already noted that in the era of *permissive consensus*, people accepted European integration, as long as it did not negatively affect them. Thus, by utilitarian considerations, the EU received output legitimacy. But with the end of *permissive consensus*, the legitimacy of the European Union may be at stake. On one side, perhaps, through

utilitarian considerations affecting output legitimacy: for instance, does the EU sufficiently handle the economic/Euro crisis? But we have shown that the effect of anti-immigrant attitudes depends on defining other Europeans as an out-group. The importance of this factor implies that there is a lack of collective identity among EU citizens, which threatens input legitimacy. As Hooghe and Marks put it: ‘Citizens care – passionately – about who exercises authority over them’ (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 2).

Although output legitimacy may ‘easily’ be restored through proper policies at the right time (although we wouldn’t argue that this is actually easy), restoring input legitimacy for the EU is probably much harder, especially in a time of uprising populism and national sentiments. But although our studies of the effects of anti-immigrant attitudes may be a sign of decreasing input legitimacy, our studies also shows that the effect is not a given truth. In chapter 4, we established a clear link between political importance and media attention and the effect of anti-immigrant attitudes on EU attitudes. So just as political (populist?) entrepreneurs now often succeed to increase the societal importance given to immigration issues (and as we seen in chapter 4, resulting in citizens learning to frame in out-groups, making it more likely to frame other Europeans as an out-group), political entrepreneurs in favour of EU integration should try decrease societal importance of the immigration issue. And would such an entrepreneur be successful, this would not only lead to a smaller effect of anti-immigrant attitudes on support for EU attitudes, it would also increase legitimacy of the EU.