SUMMARY

Out of the new sources for financing films that emerged in the post-1990 Turkish cinema industry, Eurimages is the only non-domestic, supra-national one wherein decisions are taken by the representatives of various member states. Eurimages was established in the framework of Council of Europe in 1988 to foster co-operation amongst film professionals in the co-production and distribution of cinematographic works as well as to promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe’s cultural identity and diversity. The Fund was composed of thirty-six member states by the end of 2011.

Acceding in 1990, Turkey has benefitted from the Fund and its concomitant co-production, distribution and exhibition support mechanisms. Sixty Turkish-initiative co-productions - those directed by Turkish filmmakers and those in which the themes are pertinent to Turkey – have been supported by Eurimages in the twenty years of Turkey’s membership. All of these films (except one) have been successfully released. Eurimages co-production support seems to have contributed significantly to Turkish cinema in terms of helping to familiarise filmmakers with film production in multi-national environments, promoting the advancement of sound recording and processing, bringing in the possibility of working with extended budgets and marketing films internationally. French, Greek and Hungarian co-producers have been the top collaborators with Turkish filmmakers. Regarding exhibition support, Turkey has been the biggest beneficiary in terms of the number of movie theatres supported out of the countries that have a right to access that fund. Distribution support has contributed to the screening of many Turkish films across Europe and hundreds of European films have been distributed in Turkey thanks to this support mechanism.

The experience of these twenty years has shown that the Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative projects, despite the existence of non-domestic support in their co-production set-up, can be classified as national films overall. The themes, signs, characters and contexts are undoubtedly pertinent to Turkey in most of the films. A few works have been criticised for their orientalist approach – for being Western-centric or for pitching Turkey through a Western eye, or for presenting the Turkish land and people as a
mysterious ‘Oriental Other’ - and a study of these films has justified these criticisms to some extent. The majority of the films follow the traditional narrative style of Turkish cinematic tradition, but films which fall outside the mainstream are present as well. Eurimages has been a good source of support for relatively ‘difficult’ projects which have less chance of box-office success due to the style and/or content. Some of the films that fall outside the mainstream remit have won awards in prestigious festivals and have attracted international attention, therein contributing to a greater recognition of Turkish cinema.

The overall experiential history, then, reveals that in general the Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films simply affirmed the Eurimages criteria, which do not allow pornography, or violence, or the infringement of human rights, and which encourage the filmmakers to reflect and promote the contribution of diverse national components to Europe’s overall cultural identity. Likewise a considerable number of the films reflect and promote the contribution of diverse ethnic, religious and gender components in Turkey’s national identity. Some of those films have criticised the dominant taboos and established values related to certain problematised (ethnic, religious, and gender) identities – the taboos or values that are central to the official ideology of the Turkish nation-state.

Turkish nationalism and Turkey’s diverse ethnic identities are represented time and again by the filmmakers who have received Eurimages co-production support, sometimes in a neutral fashion but in many cases in a critical manner. The Turkish flag, the military, Atatürk, patriotism and national anthems appear in films either as banal reminders of nationalism or as explicitly critical themes. The national symbols and discourses are presented as being in contrast with minority identities when the director intends to question the dominant ideology of Turkish nationalism and the national identity. As the majority religious belief, Sunni Islam is presented, with its symbols and rituals, in many of the films. Ethnic and religious minority identities on the other hand, especially Kurdish, Greek, Armenian, Alevi and Christian representations, have found a significant place in the Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films compared to other Turkish films, and some directly problematise the issues while others indirectly mention them. In a similar manner, gender identities that remain outside the manliness ideology have been represented far more in Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films: they have
presented the unfavourable status of women in society due to the patriarchy of the society’s order or at times have problematized the gender roles ascribed to women, and they have conveyed representations that display LGBT identities in a neutral manner as well as representations which address the negative reaction of society towards them, an attitude shaped by the value of *heteronormativity*.

In conclusion, Eurimages – in addition to its support of movie theatres and to distribution mechanisms - has contributed to the co-production of *counter-narratives* in which diverse identities have been succinctly represented and the predominant taboos relating to Turkish national identity have been questioned with regard to ethnicity, religion and gender. In this sense, Eurimages has been a valuable source of financial support for Turkish filmmakers seeking to address the problematic aspects of national identity or to simply reflect the contribution of diverse components to Turkey’s overall cultural identity. As Eurimages is a supra-national cinema support fund which endeavours to support works that reflect the multiple facets of European society and contribute to European cultural identity, those films - reflecting the multiple facets of Turkish society and thus contributing to Turkish cultural identity – have made the same reflection of and contribution to European society at one and the same time. This study of these films has revealed that the mission of the Council of Europe to ‘promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe’s cultural identity and diversity’ is substantially justified in the case of Turkey over its twenty years of membership in Eurimages.