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Why not Turkey? An updated analysis of citizens' attitudes towards Turkish membership in the EU

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Die „Berliner Studien zur Soziologie Europas“ des Lehrstuhls für Makrosoziologie der Freien Universität Berlin verstehen sich als ein Ort zur Vorpublikation von Beiträgen, die später in Fachzeitschriften und Sammelbänden veröffentlicht werden sollen. Die Beiträge sollen helfen, eine Soziologie Europas zu profilieren; sie stehen auch im Kontext eines im Aufbau befindlichen soziologischen Master-Studiengangs zum Thema „Europäische Gesellschaft/en“.

Gegenstand der Reihe sind Beiträge zur Analyse der Herausbildung einer europäischen Gesellschaftsstruktur und -kultur, vergleichende Analysen, die die Unterschiede und Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen verschiedenen europäischen Gesellschaften thematisieren, sowie theoretische Versuche einer Soziologie Europas.

Ziel der Reihe ist es, durch die frühe Verbreitung dieser Arbeiten den wissenschaftlichen Gedankenaustausch zu fördern. Die Beiträge sind nur über das Internet als pdf-Datei zu beziehen.

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Abstract

In a recently published article (“Why not Turkey? Attitudes towards Turkish Membership in the EU among Citizens in 27 European Countries”, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 2011, DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02155.x), Jürgen Gerhards and Silke Hans described and explained the attitudes of citizens in the 27 member states of the EU towards Turkey’s possible membership in the EU. As more recent data are now available, this paper intends to give a brief update of our former analysis using EB 69.2 data from 2008.

In a recently published article (“Why not Turkey? Attitudes towards Turkish Membership in the EU among Citizens in 27 European Countries”, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 2011)¹, Jürgen Gerhards and Silke Hans described and explained the attitudes of citizens in the 27 member states of the EU towards Turkey’s possible membership in the EU. The empirical analyses were based on Eurobarometer data from 2006 (EB 66.1). As more recent data are now available, this paper intends to give a brief update of our former analysis using EB 69.2 data from 2008. Our first analysis had shown that a clear majority of citizens reject the idea of Turkey’s joining the EU. Four factors turned out to explain this rejection rather well: the economic benefit of Turkish accession, cultural differences, political ideology, and general attitudes towards the EU. The question is whether these results can be replicated with a more current data set in which the same questions were asked. In the following section we will concentrate on presenting the empirical results. Readers who are interested in the explanatory model, in a broader discussion of the different hypotheses and how these hypotheses were derived from the literature should refer to the above mentioned article.

1. EU Citizens’ Attitudes towards Turkish EU Membership

As in 2006, Eurobarometer respondents in 2008 were asked whether they were in favor or against Turkey becoming a member of the European Union in the future. Table 1 gives an overview of how many people in each country support Turkey’s membership in 2006 and in 2008 on average.

a) On average, support for Turkish membership in the EU remains very low and did not change tremendously between 2006 and 2008. Whereas in 2006 34.4 per cent were in favor of Turkey becoming a member of the EU, the support rate increased slightly about 2 per cent.

b) Citizens of countries with a high level of support of Turkey’s EU accession in 2006 also tend to be in favor of the accession in 2008. The rank order correlation is $\rho = 0.95$.

c) However, in some countries, support has increased quite a lot (Spain, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia, Estonia, Czech Republic). In other countries, less people are in favor of Turkish membership in 2008 compared to 2006 (for instance, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Portugal, Greece, and France). There is no obvious pattern to these developments, except that support seems to decrease in most of the countries at the southern border of the EU.

¹ The article is first published online: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02155.x/full>

Table 1: Support for Turkish Membership in the EU in 27 Countries in 2006 and 2008

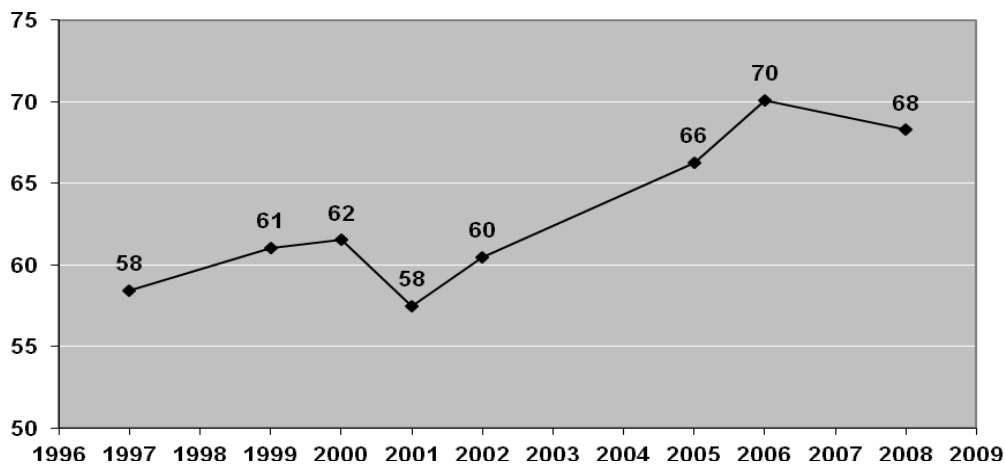
	2008	2006	Difference
EU-27	36.3%	34.4%	1.9%
Romania	80.5%	78.3%	2.2%
Spain	58.5%	49.5%	9.0%
Hungary	53.4%	45.6%	7.8%
Bulgaria	52.7%	58.5%	-5.8%
Poland	51.5%	48.9%	2.6%
Slovenia	51.4%	44.7%	6.7%
Sweden	50.9%	52.3%	-1.4%
Portugal	47.0%	50.7%	-3.7%
Lithuania	44.4%	44.0%	0.4%
Netherlands	41.9%	38.9%	3.0%
UK	41.7%	36.3%	5.4%
Ireland	41.3%	38.3%	3.0%
Malta	41.2%	39.4%	1.8%
Latvia	40.0%	37.9%	2.1%
Estonia	38.5%	32.0%	6.5%
Czech Republic	38.5%	32.0%	6.5%
Belgium	36.3%	36.0%	0.3%
Denmark	34.5%	28.6%	5.9%
Finland	32.4%	25.3%	7.1%
Slovakia	31.2%	36.7%	-5.5%
Italy	29.8%	29.9%	-0.1%
Greece	21.7%	24.6%	-2.9%
France	21.2%	24.0%	-2.8%
Luxembourg	20.8%	17.7%	3.1%
Germany	17.1%	17.1%	0.0%
Cyprus	12.2%	19.9%	-7.7%
Austria	7.2%	5.6%	1.6%

Authors' own calculations based on Eurobarometer 66.1 and 69.2 data. Percentage of those who support the EU membership of Turkey as opposed to those who reject it. 'Don't know' responses were excluded from the analysis. Spearman's rho = 0.95 for 2006 and 2008.

The question about Turkish EU accession was not only asked in 2006 and 2008, but also in past Eurobarometer surveys. This gives us the opportunity to analyze the development of citizens' attitudes within a broader time frame.²

² As Central and Eastern European countries did not join the EU until 2004 or 2007, we can only track the shift in attitudes towards Turkish accession in countries that have been part of the EU for a longer time period.

Figure 1: Rejection of Turkey's EU Membership in 15 EU Member Countries over Time (%)



Authors' own calculations based on Eurobarometer data. Percentage of those who reject the EU membership of Turkey as opposed to those who support it. 'Don't know' responses were excluded from the analysis.

As Figure 1 shows, the percentage of citizens who reject Turkey's joining the EU has risen drastically between 2001 and 2006. However, this trend towards a declining support of Turkish EU membership in the 15 "traditional" member states has been stopped in 2008. Again, the reasons for this development are not quite clear. Possibly, general fears about the consequences of EU enlargement have become less pronounced after the 2004 and 2007 enlargements were complete.

In the 2008 Eurobarometer survey, an additional question was asked: Would respondents be in favor or against Turkish membership once the country complies with all conditions set by the European Union? Table 2 reports the results.

As could be expected, more people support the accession of Turkey under the condition that the country fulfills the criteria set by the EU. Overall, about half of all EU citizens (50.1 per cent) support Turkey's membership under this condition, whereas about the same number (49.9 per cent) opposes. The order of countries in their degree of support is about the same – the rank order correlation is $\rho = 0.85$. It is obvious that fulfilling the conditions set by the EU increases support for membership in all countries – on average, by 13.8 per cent. However, the difference in support is more pronounced in some countries (e.g. Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Greece, and Cyprus) than others, indicating that people are in doubt whether Turkey currently complies with the accession criteria, but would not mind its EU membership if it did fulfill the criteria. In Bulgaria and Romania, this does not seem to influence attitudes towards Turkish membership.

Table 2: Support for Turkish Membership once Turkey Complies with Conditions in 2008

	Strongly in favor	Fairly in favor	Fairly against	Strongly against
EU-27	12,8%	37.3%	24.5%	25.4%
Netherlands	34.6%	33.4%	13.4%	18.6%
Sweden	26.9%	46.9%	13.1%	13.1%
Denmark	26.4%	33.9%	15.8%	24.0%
Greece	20.7%	26.0%	16.8%	36.5%
Bulgaria	18.8%	34.4%	26.1%	20.7%
Cyprus	17.1%	31.7%	9.8%	41.5%
Romania	15.2%	66.2%	13.7%	4.9%
Poland	15.0%	51.1%	23.2%	10.7%
Spain	14.3%	53.9%	18.7%	13.0%
Latvia	12.8%	32.6%	32.6%	22.1%
Portugal	12.3%	50.6%	28.9%	8.2%
Luxembourg	12.0%	20.0%	24.0%	44.0%
Ireland	12.0%	40.4%	19.3%	28.3%
Germany	11.8%	23.4%	24.9%	39.8%
Hungary	11.5%	49.0%	26.7%	12.8%
UK	11.1%	37.3%	22.8%	28.8%
Estonia	11.1%	40.7%	33.3%	14.8%
Italy	10.2%	36.2%	29.7%	23.9%
Czech Republic	9.8%	36.9%	32.5%	20.8%
Slovenia	9.1%	50.0%	23.6%	17.3%
France	7.5%	29.1%	29.7%	33.7%
Belgium	7.5%	42.7%	26.1%	23.7%
Finland	7.5%	40.7%	32.9%	18.9%
Lithuania	7.4%	45.1%	29.6%	17.9%
Slovakia	6.9%	31.9%	38.8%	22.3%
Malta	6.3%	43.8%	25.0%	25.0%
Austria	3.2%	14.0%	33.4%	49.4%

2. Explanation of Citizens' Attitudes

In the article mentioned above, Gerhards and Hans explained citizens' attitudes towards Turkish EU membership with a variety of approaches: cost-benefit-calculations (1), cultural differences (2), political ideology (3) and general attitudes towards the EU (4).

(1) Many studies have shown that economic factors play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards different aspects of European integration in general and towards Turkish EU membership in particular. Our first hypothesis is therefore: *The higher the economic benefits of Turkish accession into the EU, or the higher the respondent perceives those benefits to be, the more positive his/her attitude towards Turkish accession will be.* We have used both subjective and objective indicators at the individual and

societal levels with which to analyze people's economic cost-benefit analysis on Turkey's potential EU accession. Table 3, taken from our previous analysis summarizes the different indicators.

Table 3: Indicators to measure cost-benefit calculation

	Individual level	Societal level
Objective Situation	* Educational level	* Net recipient
	* Unemployed	* Country's unemployment rate
		* Percentage of foreigners in country
Subjective Evaluation	* Personal economic situation	* Country's economic situation
		* Profit from EU membership

(2) Many EU citizens feel that the cultural differences between Turkey and the EU are too significant to allow Turkey to join the EU at all. And many EU citizens also suspect that Turkey's membership in the EU would result in increased immigration, and some respondents fear that their own national culture would be threatened through this demographic shift. Our second hypothesis is therefore as follows: *The stronger the cultural difference between the respondent's country and Turkey and the stronger that Turkish membership is seen as a cultural threat, the stronger the rejection of Turkey as a prospective EU member state.* Unfortunately, in 2008 respondents were not asked for their religious denomination, which – as an indicator for fear of cultural differences – had proved quite a powerful predictor in the analysis of the 2006 data. Hence, there is only one indicator available to measure the impact of cultural differences – whether respondents believe that immigrants contribute to the country – and we cannot analyze whether religion has a similar effect on citizens' attitudes towards Turkey in 2008 as it did in 2006.

(3) As Turkey's potential membership in the EU has become a topic in the political arena of many countries, we assume that the general political ideology as it is measured by the left-right scale should have an impact on attitudes towards Turkish membership in the EU. Since migration movements from Turkey following the accession could be perceived as a threat to national identity in the older member states, we assume that *people on the right end of the political spectrum are more likely to reject Turkey's membership into the EU than are people in the middle or the left of the political spectrum.*

(4) Finally, we suspect respondent's attitude towards Turkey joining the EU will be influenced by his or her attitude towards the EU in general. Three sub-dimensions of general attitudes towards the EU can be distinguished. (a) People often view the process of deepening the existing EU structures versus widening the EU to include more members as conflicting aims. According to this argument, EU institutions in their current form are already overstrained as a result of past expansion rounds.

Turkish membership in the EU would likely further complicate the EU's decision-making process; we therefore assume that *those in favor of deepening the EU are more likely to be against Turkey's joining the EU, viewing it as a hindrance to their goals for advancement*. (b) One reason for the wide-spread skepticism towards future rounds of expansion is the fear that EU institutions are not in the position to handle the consequences of expansion. Those who believe that the EU and its institutions function well will probably be supportive of including additional countries. We therefore assume that *respondents who trust the EU's institutional capability are more likely to support Turkish accession into the EU than are those who do not*. (c) In addition to specific attitudes about the EU and its institutions, we also assume that *the stronger an individual's identification with Europe, the more likely he/she will support Turkish membership in the EU*.

Table 4 below presents the results of a multilevel model that uses not only the same method of analysis (hierarchical logistic regression), but also the same explanatory variables as the JCMS article – as far as these variables were available in the 2008 data set. As already mentioned, respondents were not asked for their religious denomination.

Overall, the results of the 2008 data are quite similar to the ones from 2006. Fear of cultural differences, general attitudes towards Europe and the EU, and economic cost-benefit calculations seem to explain individuals' attitudes towards the accession of Turkey equally well. In terms of the latter, respondents' who live in net recipient countries and who perceive their own country to profit from EU membership are far more likely to support the accession of Turkey. The same is true for those who believe that immigrants are good for their country. Those who perceive themselves at the left of the ideological left-right spectrum are also more likely to support Turkish membership than those at the center or right. The effect is not very pronounced, however. Also, trust in the EU and the support for further economic and political integration goes along with a higher support for the EU membership of Turkey.

Overall, the results based on the 2006 data were confirmed. Some of the coefficients found in 2006 did not prove to be statistically significant in the 2008 data. However, these were coefficients that were very small and did not indicate a relevant positive or negative effect in 2006.

Table 4: Multivariate analysis: Explaining attitudes toward Turkey's EU membership, 2008

	Economic Benefits	Cultural Differences	Political Ideology	Attitudes toward EU	Total
FIXED EFFECTS					
Education	1,02**				0.99
Unemployed	0,89				0.86
Evaluation of Personal Economy	1,06*				1.04
Evaluation of Country's Economy	1,04*				1.01
Evaluation of EU Membership	2,42***				1.36***
Unemployment Rate	1,01				0.94
Proportion of Foreigners	0,98				0.97
Net Recipient Country	2,39**				2.53**
Religion – None ^{a)}					
Religion – Catholic/Protestant ^{a)}		not available			not available
Religion – Orthodox ^{a)}					
Immigrants contribute		1,79***			1.56***
Pol. Ideology - Center ^{b)}			0.66***		0.67***
Pol. Ideology - Right ^{b)}			0.56***		0.60***
In Favour of Deepening of EU				1.50***	1.40***
Trust in EU				1.62***	1.37***
European Identity				1.26***	1.15***
Age	0,99***	0,99***	0,99***	0,99***	0,99***
VARIANCE COMPONENTS ^{c)}					
Country-Level Variance	0,37	0,60	0,66	0,62	0,36
Rho	0,10	0,15	0,17	0,16	0,10
Pseudo-R ² of non-hierar. model ^{d)}	7,1%	5,5%	1,3%	5,8%	12,5%
N	11964	11964	11964	11964	11964
Number of Groups	27	27	27	27	27

Multilevel logistic regression model. Dependent Variable: In favour or against Turkey becoming part of the EU (0=against, 1 = in favor). Odds ratios are reported. a) Reference category: Muslims. b) Reference category: left. c) Values for empty model are: var(country) = 0.65, rho = 0.16. d) Pseudo-R² refers to non-hierarchical logistic regression model as there is no commonly used and easily interpretable measure for multilevel models. * p<0,05 ** p<0,01 *** p<0,001

3. Conclusion

Most of the empirical results regarding citizens' attitudes towards Turkey's EU accession found using the EB 66.1 data from 2006 also hold true in 2008. Regarding the level of support, it seems that the declining trend that started around the year 2000 has been stopped in 2008. However, it is remarkable that even under the condition that Turkey met all accession criteria set by the EU, merely half of all respondents support Turkish membership. Considering the fact that in Germany and France – both founding members and among the largest EU member states – about 80 per cent of all respondent oppose Turkish EU accession, and two thirds still do so even once all accession criteria are met, the EU membership does not seem very likely in the near future.

In this light, our causal analysis suggests that if politicians want to influence citizen's attitudes towards a more positive view of Turkish accession they should emphasize the economic and political advantages that Turkey's EU membership could have for current EU citizens. To counteract the common fear that accession would create large-scale migration and threaten culture and labor markets in the EU politicians could set longer-term restrictions on freedom of movement for example. In addition, one could emphasize that Turkey as a regional power could help mediate between Western countries on the one hand and the Arabic world on the other; and Turkish membership in the EU could increase the geostrategic power of the EU overall. However, the probability that these arguments will convince people to get a more optimistic view about Turkish membership in the EU depends on whether the political elites in a country are divided or whether the arguments are brought forward consensually.

Appendix: Description of the Explanatory Variables

<i>Macro Level Variables</i>	
Proportion of foreigners	in 2008 according to Eurostat
Unemployment Rate	in 2008 according to Eurostat
Net Recipient Country	0 = net payer, 1 = net recipient country
<i>Micro Level Variables</i>	
Unemployed	0 = not unemployed, 1 = unemployed
Education	Age at which highest educational degree was obtained; maximum: 25
Evaluation of country's economy	Additive index of two items: a) evaluation of development of country's economy and b) of country's job market in the next 12 months, (0=worse, 1=same, 2=better); index from 0 (everything will be worse) to 4 (everything will be better)
Evaluation of personal economy	Additive index of two items: a) evaluation of development of financial situation of respondent's household in the next 12 months, b) development of respondent's job situation (0=worse, 1=same, 2=better); index from 0 (everything will be worse) to 4 (everything will be better)
Evaluation of country's EU membership	0 = country did not profit from membership, 1 = profited from membership
Religion	Not asked in the EB 69.2
Immigrants contribute	Agreement with statement that immigrants contribute to country; 0 = strongly disagree, 1 = tend to disagree, 2 = tend to agree, 4 = strongly agree
Political Ideology	self-placement on left-right scale from 1 (left) to 10 (right); recoded: 1-3 = left, 4-7 = center, 8-10 = right
In Favor of Deepening EU	Additive index of three items: respondent is for (1) or against (0) a common EU a) foreign policy, b) defence

	policy, c) currency; index from 0 (against everything) to 3 (in favor of everything)
Trust in EU	0 = tends not to trust, 1 = tends to trust
European Identity	Do you ever think of yourself not only as [GERMAN], but also European? 1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often
Age	in years
