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# “A torn country”: deconstructing the debates surrounding the Turkish accession to European Union through the prism of the myth of *The Clash of Civilizations* (2002-2005)

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This paper aims at analysing the debates surrounding the possible Turkish accession to the European Union. The officialization of the candidacy of this Muslim-majority state in 1999 has been passionately debated since the early 2000s in the media as well as in political and academic circles within the EU member states. In order to identify the different aspects of this debate, the period from September 2002 to December 2005 will be privileged. This timeframe goes from the coming to power of the Justice and Development Party, headed by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to the European Summit of Luxembourg, which led to the opening of the negotiations on Turkey's membership of the European Union.

Within a geopolitical context marked by an increased instrumentalization of religious and ethnical factors in the understanding of world affairs, my goal is to understand how press articles construct the current events of EU when it is confronted with a country which profoundly challenges its identity. In that respect, the main paradigms referred to by two internationally diffused European newspapers: *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* will be deconstructed. Based on the theory developed by Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand in their book, *The Myth of the Clash of Civilizations* (2010), my hypothesis is that this event of the European integration is constructed by the press, in symbiosis with the European Union's representatives, as a readapted variant of the political myth constituted by the thesis of Samuel P. Huntington. In other words, the Turkish candidacy is presented as an opportunity to westernize the Islamic civilisation (i.e. Turkey) through European democracy standards in order to avoid a clash between the West and the Muslim world.

European identity – Turkey – media coverage – political myth – Huntington

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## Introduction

“Their leaders refer to them as a ‘bridge’ between two cultures, and observers describe them as Janus-faced. (...) ‘Turkey: East, West, which is best?’ (...) For a torn country successfully to redefine its civilizational identity, at least three requirements must be met. First, the political and economic elite of the country has to be generally supportive of and enthusiastic about this move. Second, the public has to be at least willing to acquiesce in the redefinition of identity. Third, the dominant elements in the host civilization, in most cases the West, have to be willing to embrace the convert. The process of identity redefinition will be prolonged, interrupted, and painful, politically, socially, institutionally, and culturally. It also to date has failed.”

The enlargements of the European Union (EU) in the early 2000s led to heated debates about the identity of institutional Europe. Turkey's application for EU membership especially generated passionate discussions around the Muslim component of the Turkish Republic. The controversy is explained by the profound questioning that it produced. It is indeed the nature of the European political project, its religious and cultural identity and its geographical borders that have been the subject of the underlying controversy in European political, media and academic circles<sup>2</sup>.

The purpose of this paper is to deconstruct and clarify the main themes related to this episode of the European construction. My hypothesis is that the controversy surrounding Turkey's candidature to the European Union is a variant of the political myth represented by the thesis of the American intellectual and academic Samuel Phillipps Huntington<sup>3</sup>. In order to verify this assumption, I will firstly go back to the myth of the Clash of Civilizations; which is the main matrix of the staging of Turkish accession. Secondly, I will deconstruct the various elements of the debate developed in the columns of two major daily newspapers, *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*. The press is considered here as a sounding board that echoes the paradigms developed in the British and French public spheres.

The chronology considered here covers three periods: from September 1 to December 31 of the years 2002, 2004 and 2005. They cover the current events of three key dates in Turkey's candidacy: the Copenhagen European Council summit (December 12-13, 2002); the publishing of the European Commission's rapport about Turkey's progress (October 6, 2004) regarding the Copenhagen criteria<sup>4</sup>; and the Brussels European Council (December 16-17, 2004) which sanctioned the opening of accession. Finally, the Turkish accession procedure started on October 3, 2005.

## The Turkish question, an avatar of the "Clash of Civilizations"

Based on Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand's book, a political myth will be understood here as follows:

"A myth is a narrative that must respond to a need for significance that changes over time. It is ultimately because in order to be a myth it has to provide significance within changing circumstances that a myth is best understood as a process, as a 'work on myth', rather than as an object (...) What makes a political myth out of a narrative is the fact that it coagulates and reproduce significance, that it is shared by a given group and that it can address the specifically political conditions in which a given group lives. (...) Political myths have become the unperceived lenses through which we experience the world. They became part of our everyday perceptions of politics and for this reason they tend to remain unquestioned."<sup>5</sup>

This need of *significance*, illustrated by the thesis of the "Clash of Civilizations", is linked to a new contemporary phenomenon: the "return of the religious" to the international political scene. By "return of the religious", I mean the dynamic favouring a key to interpret conflicts and wars from a religious perspective. Since the 1980s<sup>6</sup>, this interpretation key has acquired new visibility in political and scientific discussions on contemporary conflicts<sup>7</sup>.

However, this preponderance of religion in the political, media, cultural, identity and symbolic spheres has to be interpreted less as a change in the intensity of the spiritual factor, implied by the term "return", but rather as a profound transformation of its nature. The religious reference lost its social relevance to gain cultural weight<sup>8</sup>. The convocation of the religious underlines a deficit of the political: the spiritual is required in a global situation of floating criteria traditionally mobilized in terms of identity definition. In other words, the religion is mobilized as an identity marker in order to redefine a fictionally stable identity in a context characterized by profound and brutal transformations of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>9</sup>. In Europe, the political instrumentalization of religion is at work in three different fields: post-communist societies, the management of Islam in the Western European public spaces and the construction of the European identity<sup>10</sup>. Religion is thus transformed into a symbolic repertoire grasped for the purpose of defining the "Other" and the nature of its otherness. Religion is therefore used to give meaning to contemporary events and becomes a marker of identity. However, this reinvestment of the religious variable should not create an illusion: it often conceals a more complex reality<sup>11</sup>.

This political instrumentalization of the religious is at work in Samuel Huntington's writings. During the 1990s, Huntington tried to explain the end of Cold War as the substitution of an ideological conflict (liberalism vs. communism) by a civilizational/cultural one<sup>12</sup>. He first defined the concept of "civilization" in an article, "The Clash of Civilizations?" published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993. Civilizations are defined as cultural entities constituted by different elements, considered by the author as objective like language, history, religion, customs and institutions<sup>13</sup>. Faced with the interest aroused by his article, Huntington wrote a book which "is not to be a work of social science. It is instead meant to be an interpretation of the evolution of global politics after the Cold War. It aspires to present a framework, a paradigm, for viewing global politics that will be meaningful to scholars and useful to policymakers."<sup>14</sup> In this book, he deepened his theory and delivered his vision of the world:

"A central axis of post-Cold War world politics is thus the interaction of Western power and culture with the power and culture of non-Western. (...) Of all the objective elements which define civilizations, however, the most important usually is religion (...). To a very large degree, the major civilizations in human history have been closely identified with the world's great religions; (...)."<sup>15</sup>

The collision announced by Huntington would therefore be above all a religious conflict since the common denominator of a "civilization" is its religious component. Moreover, according to this author, Western and Islamic civilizations<sup>16</sup> differ particularly from each other in their cultures and their religion:

"Les principes philosophiques, les valeurs fondamentales, les relations sociales, les coutumes et la façon de voir la vie en général diffèrent sensiblement d'une civilisation à l'autre. (...) les différences majeures dans le développement politique et économique d'une civilisation à l'autre s'enracinent à l'évidence dans leurs différences culturelles. (...) La culture musulmane explique pour une large part l'échec de la démocratie dans la majeure partie du monde musulman. Celles [*les civilisations*] qui ont une tradition héritée du christianisme occidental deviennent prospères et démocratiques (...); quant à celui des républiques musulmanes, il s'annonce mal."<sup>17</sup>

This excerpt shows how much its author considers Islam, the matrix of the Muslim religion as Western Christianity is for the West, to be intrinsically hostile to democracy. However, the idea of a civilizational conflict between the West and Islam, or the Muslim East, is not new. Huntington has re-labelled images and concepts that were already circulating in the scientific literature. Indeed, myth and theory often go hand in hand: political myth gives theory a practical impact, when theory gives myth the appearance of a scientific discourse<sup>18</sup>. This is the strength of Huntington's thought, which has been criticized by many experts<sup>19</sup>: it is based on well-established beliefs.

*Le Monde* and *The Guardian* and the Turkish challenge

*Le Monde* and *The Guardian* have been chosen because they belong to the “quality press” of the centre-left of the political spectrum and because they both enjoy a wider national and international audience<sup>20</sup>. However, these two influential newspapers emanate from two large European Union Member States with different views on European integration. Produced from the occurrences “Turkey” and “European Union”, my search in the *LexisNexis Academic database* initially collected a total of 943 articles. In the end, 261 of them<sup>21</sup> were selected: those directly related to Turkey's religious identity. The exclusion of a large part of the other articles is explained either by the fact that they did not address, or very little, the Turkish candidature or because it was addressed from other angles: for example, the Turkish military occupation of Northern Cyprus or the condition of the Kurdish minority. Additionally, in the case of *Le Monde*, some of the sources were excluded since the Turkish question had been domesticated to the point that it was only a background to national electoral struggles.

Indeed, they adopt a similar discourse towards Turkish accession: both are in favour of it. Moreover, their rhetoric is marked by Huntington's thinking when it comes to Turkey and its religious component. However, the way in which each of the daily newspapers positions itself on the issue differs. This can be explained by the government line defended by their respective states. The British government, an ally of the United States in Iraq, and for which Turkey was a valuable partner, was in favour of Turkish membership. On the other hand, the situation was different in France: the government of Jacques Chirac (1995-2007) had to face opposition from part of the French political elite, including within the President's party, and from public opinion. As a result, *The Guardian* published, through its columnists, journalists and editorialists, a smaller number of articles on the subject. The issue was less a major national issue: Tony Blair's government is in favour of this enlargement. On the contrary, *Le Monde* and its editorial team, mobilized a large number of public and/or intellectual personalities in favour of Turkey. Moreover, Turkey's accession to the Union has been linked, particularly in that Member State, to another European issue: the adoption, by referendum, of the EU's Constitutional Treaty; the supporters of the “no” vote having seen in the approval of the latter text, a means of refusing to allow Europe's enlargement to its Turkish neighbour<sup>22</sup>.

## The Civilizational reconciliation

“Ces islamistes sont favorables à l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne. Ils sont pour le maintien de leur pays dans l'OTAN. **Voilà un test grandeur réelle pour la théorie de Samuel Huntington sur le choc des civilisations.** Selon Huntington, la Turquie ne sera jamais admise dans l'Union parce qu'elle n'est pas de tradition chrétienne. Pour être européen, il ne suffit pas, selon lui, d'être un pays démocratique et économiquement développé. Il faut avoir appartenu à l'aire d'expansion du christianisme. (...) Mais si les Européens bloquent, une fois de plus, la candidature d'Ankara, les Turcs regarderont dans d'autres directions, plus traditionnelles pour eux. L'Europe aura manqué le coche.”<sup>23</sup>

Published on Monday 4 November 2002, this article comments a TV reportage on the victory of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the Turkish parliamentary elections of the previous weekend. This brief commentary highlights how the debate on Turkish accession will be structured in both France and Great Britain. This is part of an international context marked by the attacks of September 11, when Muslims are increasingly being stigmatised by Western governments and opinions. The underlying question is the Islam's compatibility with the values on which the European institutions are based<sup>24</sup>. The Turkish candidacy is therefore presented as an opportunity to westernise the Islamic civilisation (i.e. Turkey) through democracy:

“Consider this amazement. A nation of 68 million goes to the polls (...). And consider a second amazement. Last summer, while the rest of Europe slept, this same nation (within a matter of weeks) abandoned the death penalty, lifted draconian curbs on its press and reached out inclusively towards the separatist minority repressed for decades. The biggest victory for human rights<sup>25</sup> (...) This election [*qui consacre la victoire de l'AKP au parlement turc*] raises fundamental questions of principle. We say – Bush says, Blair says – that we have a mission to bring democracy to the Muslim world, beginning with Iraq. Well, good on us. But do we start by conniving at the destruction of **a genuinely democratic Muslim government** on our doorstep?<sup>26</sup>”

“A juste titre, l'Union a salué les décisions du Parlement d'Ankara<sup>27</sup>. Elles vont dans le bon sens. Dans le climat ambiant de suspicion générale portée sur l'islam, elles prouvent qu'un pays musulman peut faire le choix de la réforme démocratique. Elles manifestent **la puissance d'attraction de l'Union européenne.**”<sup>28</sup>

These extracts from articles on the current events of Turkish accession seem to indicate that it can be interpreted as a reminiscence, on a reduced scale, of the myth of the “Clash”. Indeed, the grid for interpreting Euro-Turkish events is marked by this theory. In other words, Turkey's otherness is expressed in a religious way<sup>29</sup>. As Bottici and Challand prescribe: a “myth is best understood as a process, as a “work on myth”, rather than as an object<sup>30</sup>.” A myth does not consist of a fixed and definitive story. On the contrary, a myth is evolutionary and tends to adapt to the situations in which it is called<sup>31</sup>. If Huntington defined the causes of the clash between Islam and the West like:

“They flow from the nature of the two religions and the civilizations based on them. Conflict was (...) a product of difference, particularly the Muslim concept of Islam as a way of life transcending and uniting religion and politics versus the Western Christian concept of the separate realms of God and Cesar.”<sup>32</sup>

In the media analysed, the Turkish question is most often seen in the sense of a civilizational reconciliation, not as that of a war. Nevertheless, the Huntington's vision of the world order permeates the round of discourses and constitutes the background of the two daily newspapers' various speeches.

## A "unique" example of Muslim democracy

“Tayyip Erdogan (...) said in Helsinki that giving Turkey a starting date from Copenhagen summit would have a ‘positive effect’ on the way Muslims viewed the European bloc. ‘We don’t see the EU as a club of Christians and we don’t want to see it as a club of Christians, but if we can’t get a date from Copenhagen, suspicions will emerge’, he said. ‘It is important **to prove that culture of Islam and democracy can indeed coexist and be in harmony.**’ (...) Britain argues that an increasingly multicultural Europe and a post-September 11 world **threatened by a ‘clash of civilizations’ will both benefit from EU membership for a democratic muslim country.** The stakes are high. If France gets its way, the summit might agree to do no more than undertake to review Turkish prospects at some undefined point in the future. That would be a clear snub to the new Ankara government. It feels increasingly strongly that Turkish efforts on human right and social and economic reforms over the past 18 months, (...) merit far more than that.<sup>33</sup>”

“A leading Islamic intellectual and Koran translator, Ali Babuc, describes Turkish Islam as like modern Christianity: ‘We interpret the deep meaning of the Koran, not the literal words.’ (...) He too is passionate about joining, ‘to show the Islamic world that democracy and Islam are compatible’.<sup>34</sup>”

“Un parti islamique a les moyens de gouverner la Turquie. (...) Cela représente un défi énorme pour l’Union européenne qui, **en ces temps huntingtoniens de prétendu conflit de civilisations**, s’apprête à accueillir prochainement la Turquie dans ses rangs. (...) L’AKP a la responsabilité historique **d’afficher la compatibilité de l’islam avec la démocratie.** Elle doit prouver qu’un ‘islamisme centriste’ est concevable (...) et qu’il peut intégrer le jeu politique sur un mode effectivement proche de la **démocratie-chrétienne.** (...) Si l’AKP sait réconcilier l’islam et la modernité, **la leçon vaudra pour le monde arabe.** L’exemple pourrait être déterminant d’un parti qui ferait la synthèse entre un **ancrage** culturel à l’islam et un attachement indéfectible à la démocratie, au respect des droits de l’homme – et surtout de la femme. Ce serait un tournant au Proche-Orient.”<sup>35</sup>

“Le vrai défi est celui de la **comptabilité de l’islam avec la modernité**, c’est-à-dire sa capacité à accepter la division radicale entre le pouvoir temporel et le pouvoir spirituel, que certaines Églises chrétiennes ont d’ailleurs mis plusieurs siècles à admettre. Ce défi concerne certes la Turquie, mais pas elle seule.<sup>36</sup>”

“Si l’on arrive à faire adhérer la Turquie, ce sera un formidable signal au monde : le signal que l’Europe est capable d’accueillir en son sein un pays musulman et **le signal qu’un pays musulman est capable de se moderniser assez pour intégrer l’Europe.**<sup>37</sup>”

“Le problème-clé des relations de l’Occident avec cette immense communauté d’un milliard d’hommes : **peut-elle accepter des institutions séculières ?** J’aimerais écrire laïques, mais il est essentiel d’utiliser ici un vocabulaire mondialement compréhensible. Rejeter la Turquie, ce serait rejeter le plus important, et presque **le seul des pays musulmans qui se soit doté d’institutions séculières** et les préserve depuis plus d’un demi-siècle.<sup>38</sup>”

These extracts highlight two fundamental aspects of the discourse that the actors are building around Turkish membership in *The Guardian* and *Le Monde*. First, Turkey is presented as a "democratic muslim" country, or as one with a "Christian-democratic" political regime. The question of democracy is preponderant in the case of Turkey. Constantly called upon, this concept serves as a barometer of the Turkish political climate. The country is thus presented according to the state of progress, or decline, of its model of liberal Western democracy.

This emphasis on democratic development in 2002 can be explained by two factors. The collapse of communism in 1989, but also the victory of the US-led coalition in Iraq in 1991, triggered a wave of triumphant statements by Western experts and analysts who considered that all alternatives to Western liberalism were now obsolete. Many of them have developed a scientific literature advocating the need for the peoples of the so-called "developing" countries to recognize liberal democracy as the only plausible form of governance in the contemporary world<sup>39</sup>. Support for democratisation should therefore be a priority for the diplomacy and external assistance of the so-called "developed" countries. Moreover, this new thinking goes hand in hand with the Orientalist canon<sup>40</sup>, redeployed by Huntington, according to which Islamic societies are irreparably "allergic" to any form of democracy. The democratic deficiency in this region of the world would come from the absence of civil societies within it, which would favour despotic regimes. In their attempt to explain the situation, the orientalist point of view has always favoured Islam as a causal factor. For them, despotism is an integral part of the Muslim religion, as illustrated by the image of the pious believer represented in Islamic doctrine: fatalistic and prostrate before a God that he/she obeys no matter what<sup>41</sup>. This representation serves as a catalyst in orientalist discussions on the religious, but also on the political, behaviour of individuals belonging to Islamic societies. In this perspective, Islam is seen not only as a religion but also as a totalizing way of life. Islam would have therefore a tendency to promote, through an anti-modern and anti-state dogma, totalitarianism as a political regime flow. The theme of "Muslim democracy", applied to Turkey, must be recontextualized in a tradition of thought that favours a point of view marked by Orientalism.

Additionally, the comparison with the "Christian democracy" is supposed to positively illuminate the government efforts<sup>42</sup> undertaken in the early 2000s to meet European standards. The European Union's historical foundations were initiated by Christian democratic parties. Sanctioned by the Vatican, this project had occurred at a time of a general religious regain after the World War II<sup>43</sup>. However, in 2002, the AKP presented itself as a conservative democratic party without any explicit Islamic reference in its programme or statutes, even if it was the result of the evolution of the Turkish Islamist parties<sup>44</sup>. Moreover, although the AKP electorate covers a public with very diverse political sensitivities due to its varied social origins, the party's electorate between 2002 and 2007 had a profile that was less reminiscent of a Western European Christian democracy than of the American popular conservatism represented by the Republican Party. For Turkish and American conservatives, religion is perceived as a set of social values, moral precepts, which regulates daily behaviour. Besides, the conservatism of the AKP is expressed in particular when it comes to women and family, a trend that is not unrelated to the political line developed by its American counterpart<sup>45</sup>.

However, this insistence by the European media on the country's Muslim identity has two consequences: on the one hand, it obscures the Turkish societal reality where the benefits of the reforms undertaken by the Turkish government<sup>46</sup> between 2002 and 2004 are not always felt. On the other hand, the relationship between democracy and notions such as modernization, Westernization, secularization and secularism are blurred: they substitute each other without critical scrutiny<sup>47</sup>. In Europe, as "it is taken for granted that a democracy must be secular<sup>48</sup>", these confusions show the European perplexity in front of other possible forms of modernity<sup>49</sup>. Indeed, the Turkish conception of secularism allowed the state to exercise close control over religion. At the time of the emergence of the AKP in the November 2002 parliamentary elections, official Islam was reduced to its strictest expression, i.e. the practice of worship without interference in political, social or cultural life. The advent of the Justice and Development Party marked effectively a turning point in Turkish political history because of the arrival in power of a party that emerged from Islamism. Yet the Franco-British media imagination surrounding this country has failed to provide a thorough analysis of Turkish Islam. Secularism is undeniably a subject of debate in Turkey between supporters of Kemalist orthodoxy and a growing number of citizens. By demonstrating their attachment to their Muslim faith, the latter are challenging the forms of regulation between the public and private spheres established by the Kemalian regime since the founding of the Republic in 1923. They are often in search of moral principles in a society they consider increasingly mercantile and in loss of references<sup>50</sup>. Moreover, the mobilization of Islamic repertory occurs as a resource to counter the authoritarian imposition of a national identity based on secularism. The instrumentalization of Islamic repertory provides meaning to social groups of citizens unsatisfied by this rejection of religious and ethnical identities from the public representation<sup>51</sup>. These factors may therefore be behind the AKP's electoral victory in autumn 2002, just as they clearly express the phenomenon of the resurgence of religion mentioned in the introduction. This seems to bring the dynamics at work on the European continent closer and closer to those of its Turkish Other.

## The European Union as a peace-making power

Secondly, the idea that Turkey, capable of reconciling Islam and modernity, would set an example for the "Arab world", or the argument that the European Union and the international order would benefit from an enlargement including a Muslim country, echoes the American military campaign in Iraq. In preparation during the autumn of 2002 and initiated in the spring of 2003, the Iraq war is justified by the American ambition to establish democracy in the Middle East. The war's official objective was to invent democracy in Iraq by imagining that it would contaminate its neighbouring countries<sup>52</sup>. That idea of democratic establishment is reused and readapted in Europe in order to enhance "European soft power". This concept emphasizes the normative engagement of EU institutions around principles like "liberty", "democracy", "respect for human rights" or "fundamental freedoms" when they come into contact with other states. It is a European identity construction based on the image of a normative power whose coercive force is peaceful<sup>53</sup>. However, this dynamic tends to favour stereotypes that make "Northern" societies models against which the rest of the world should define itself by default. It cultivates consequently the supremacy of the West as Huntington does in his description of this civilization<sup>54</sup>. The power of attraction of the European Union would thus compete with the invasion led by the United States:

"En s'adjoignant un territoire et une défense comme ceux dont dispose la Turquie, l'Europe serait au contraire capable, pensent-ils, d'opposer son « impérialisme pacifique » et « intégrateur » au « modèle belliqueux » et « messianique » prêté aux États-Unis.<sup>55</sup>"

"Au-delà de la Turquie, c'est toute la stratégie européenne d'encouragement de la laïcité dans le monde musulman qui est en jeu.<sup>56</sup>"

The same idea is found in an article by Jonathan Steele entitled "The EU can help democracy: Nato failed to stop human abuses. Brussels can do better":

"Giving Turkey an early date to join is one the key issues, fuelled by the argument that this predominant Muslim country needs to be brought into a major organization that is dedicated to democracy. (...) Its rigorous membership criteria are having an effect in getting countries in eastern and central Europe with authoritarian traditions to start implementing the

concepts of individual human rights, rule of law, and democratic governance. While Nato ignores human rights violations by its members, the EU conditions progress on their coming to an end. (...) They [*older states of Europe*] take a wider view of security and understand that cooperation with neighbours, aid for development, and conflict resolution through dialogue are at least as important as military arsenals. The EU should take Turkey in.<sup>57</sup>”

According to journalists, the EU should therefore not miss the opportunity represented by “its rare marriage of Islamic and Western values, an exemplary tryst in these divisive times<sup>58</sup>” and seize the opportunity offered by the Turkish candidacy to demonstrate its normative power by succeeding in the feat of switching from an Islamic country to Western standards.

From Turkey's argument as a “model” follows the geopolitical metaphor that turns Turkey into a “bridge” between the two Western and Islamic worlds. This allegory refers to Huntington's “torn country”. The idea that Turkey would bring together the West and the East implies the existence of a “*fracture*”<sup>59</sup> between these two imagined entities. The epicentre of this *fracture*, in the Western historical imagination, would be located in the Mediterranean. Updated through the post-Cold War geopolitical conditions of the world and the impact of the September 11 attacks<sup>60</sup>, this imaginary makes Turkey the ideal dressing for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is also the opinion of the Turkish government, which is widely quoted, interviewed and/or invited by the two newspapers analysed. This is illustrated by the article written by Abdullah Gül, then Turkish Prime Minister, in the columns of *Le Monde*:

“La Turquie est un modèle qui unit son identité avec la modernité, l'islam avec la démocratie laïque, l'État social avec la voie du droit. La signification de ce modèle est encore plus flagrante dans la conjoncture internationale actuelle. (...) L'UE jouera un plus grand rôle dans la résolution des conflits régionaux, dans la sécurité et la stabilité des réseaux principaux de transport et d'acheminement d'énergie. Elle deviendra ainsi une puissance globale capable de contribuer mieux encore à la paix et à la prospérité mondiales.<sup>61</sup>”

And corroborated by the president of the AKP in *The Guardian*:

“The majority of the Turkish people are Muslims. Turkey's entrance to the EU will influence and affect how other Muslim nations of the world view the EU in a very positive way. It will be the best example of how Islam and democracy can function together. Turkey will bring a harmony of cultures rather than a clash of civilizations. The Copenhagen summit will be a test because we do not see the EU as a Christian club. (Turkey's accession) will help the countries of the Black sea and Caspian sea perceive the EU in a positive way. The EU will gain a lot and become a major force in the world.<sup>62</sup>”

If the thesis of the “Clash” was only translated into Turkish in 2001, the notion of “civilization” has been debated in intellectual and political circles, Ottoman and Turkish, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century already<sup>63</sup>. However, since 2002, “civilizational” grammar has been recurrent in the speeches of the AKP itself, which has also readapted it in the form of an alliance or dialogue between civilisations. In this way, the Turkish government effectively admits the existence of a conflict between these two meta-entities while raising his country to the rank of a bridge between cultures<sup>64</sup>. However, the rhetoric of “Turkey as a model” is not scientifically relevant: the democratization process cannot be transposed; especially when it comes to Turkey. This country has a historical trajectory making it impossible to compare with its neighbouring countries<sup>65</sup>. Not having known the European colonial enterprise, the Turkish Republic was forcefully modernized by Mustafa Kemal and then was ruled by the authoritarianism through the period of alignment with the Western block during the Cold War<sup>66</sup>.

## Conclusion

The European Commission's report published on 6 October 2004, which was decisive for possible accession negotiations, incorporates all the arguments developed above. Although critical and mixed on the actual implementation of reforms on the ground, the report recommends that the process be opened up:

“L'adhésion de la Turquie serait différente des autres élargissements en raison des effets conjugués de sa population, de sa superficie, de sa situation géographique, de son potentiel économique et militaire, et en matière de sécurité. Ces facteurs donnent à la Turquie la **capacité de contribuer à la stabilité régionale et internationale**. (...) Beaucoup dépendra de la façon dont l'Union elle-même réussira à se poser en **véritable acteur de politique étrangère** à moyen terme dans des régions traditionnellement marquées par l'instabilité et les tensions, notamment au Proche-Orient et dans le Caucase. (...) **La Turquie ferait figure d'exemple** en tant que pays à population majoritairement musulmane adhérant à des principes aussi fondamentaux que la liberté, la démocratie, le respect de droits de l'homme et des libertés fondamentales ou encore l'État de droit.<sup>67</sup>”

In other words, Turkey's integration would be beneficial: EU should be strengthened by the presence in its ranks of a Muslim state converted to its values and whose geographical position would make it possible to intervene more effectively at the international level. The Turkish “Other” is therefore considered to be able to reinforce the political identity that Europe tries to build itself: promoter of democratic values and major actor on the international scene as a new interlocutor for the Middle East. Between 2002 and 2005, a symbiosis is at work between the imaginary of Turkey built within *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* and the European and Turkish political discourses on the subject.

This narrative of identity around Turkey highlights its compatibility with the European institutional project making this episode an example of a possible reconciliation between the West and the Muslim East.

Before concluding, it is necessary to return to an ambiguity inherent to the press taken as a historical source. The words summoned by a newspaper are a means of expressing opinions that are not its own, but close to it. The diversity of voices that are expressed in a newspaper is therefore less about staging the expression of contradictory opinions than about the standardized representation of acceptable opinions. The newspaper builds within itself what it considers to be understandable, but also what it wishes to reflect and gives importance to<sup>68</sup>. In this perspective, *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* involve alternately supporters and detractors of Turkey while siding with the former. Nevertheless, whether the argument is for or against Turkey, the rhetoric remains deeply fogged up in an orientalist vision of the country. This is illustrated, for example, by an article in *The Guardian* entitled "European mission unearths torture claims in Turkey: Reports follow launch of EU membership talks: Ankara dismisses findings as 'silly stories'". Published in October 2005, one week after the opening of accession negotiations, it reports on the visit of a European Parliament delegation to Turkey "to check on its progress in human rights". The delegation was reportedly informed of the actions of the Turkish security forces:

"(...) found 'shocking' reports of murders and mutilations, a British MEP said yesterday. The findings, (...) **highlight the scale of progress the predominantly Muslim country needs to make in its quest to join the European Union.** Richard Howitt, part of the mission by the parliament's seven-member human rights subcommittee, told the Guardian: 'What we heard was shocking. **There were accounts of soldiers cutting off people's ears and tearing out their eyes if they were thought to be Kurdish separatist sympathisers...**You can't hear these things without being emotionally affected.' The MEP, Labour's European foreign affairs spokesman and a champion of Turkey's EU accession, said the abuses had been corroborated by human rights organisations. A trip by the group to Turkey's Kurdish-dominated south-east had also confirmed allegations that security forces were reverting to tactics from '**the bad old days**' (...). Indiscriminate shootings, widespread extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and instances of masked men raiding homes in the night were reported to have made a comeback. 'Our sources were very credible and the evidence was corroborated by all the different groups we spoke to' said the MEP. 'They left me in no doubt of the veracity of the claims.'<sup>69</sup>"

The actual implementation of the reforms adopted with a view to European accession, particularly with regard to Kurdish separatists, can legitimately be questioned<sup>70</sup>. Nevertheless, the way in which events are recorded here freezes them in a stereotypical and caricatured image of a violent and bloody Islamic society. Not to mention the almost exclusive support of this article on the symbolic authority of Richard Howitt, pro-Turkey MEP, the veracity of the other mobilised testimonies leaves much to be desired. The description of the violence suffered by separatists, or Kurdish sympathisers, is squarely reminiscent of the opening of Disney's famous animated film *Aladdin* (1992):

"Oh I come from a land,  
From a faraway place,  
Where the caravan camels roam.  
**Where they cut off your ear,  
If they don't like your face,**  
It's barbaric, but hey, it's home!"<sup>71</sup>

The events related to Turkey are therefore full of stereotypes. Stereotypes built from a large production of images of the West on the East in various forms and media. This stock is also particularly abundant in the case of France and Great Britain in view of their respective colonial histories. It continues to feed, as the last two examples above show, the European imagination. Repetitive, these different social representations of Turkish society generated by the press penetrate the collective unconscious. In this way, they bring to life the political myth of the "Clash". Consequently, a civilizational antagonism seems to be more than ever under development.

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<sup>1</sup> Huntington, Samuel, 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 139.

<sup>2</sup> Monceau, Nicolas. 2009. "L'Europe au miroir de la Turquie". *Politique européenne* 3, No. 29, 7-8.

<sup>3</sup> See Bottici, Chiara, and Benoît Challand. 2010, *The Myth of the Clash of Civilizations*, New York: Routledge. The authors' ambition is to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis of the "clash of civilizations" in the hope of arousing the interest of academic research.



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<sup>4</sup> Defined in the Treaty on European Union, the Copenhagen criteria refer to all the conditions that a country wishing to join the EU must meet: “the presence of stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities; a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with market forces and competitive pressure within the EU; the ability to assume the obligations of membership, including the ability to effectively implement the rules, standards and policies that form the EU's legislative corpus (the ‘acquis’) and to subscribe to the objectives of political, economic and monetary union.” The first criterion must be met for accession negotiations to begin. See European Commission. n.d. “Accession criteria (Copenhagen Criteria)”, Accessed May 1, 2019. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/accession\\_criteria\\_copenhagen.html](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen.html).

<sup>5</sup> Bottici, and Challand 2010, 15-16.

<sup>6</sup> The formation of the “return of the religious” is favoured by a series of international political events with major consequences. For example, the election of Pope John Paul II (1978); the strong personality, highly mediatized, of the Pope gave back ardour to the Catholic world. Or even, the Iranian Revolution (1979) during which the fall of the Shah led to the rise to power of Imam Khomeini. 1979 is also the year of the founding of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum by President Jimmy Carter. This event highlighted internationally as never before the massacre of Jewish communities of Europe. There is also the creation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), initiated by Saudi Arabia, which marks the birth of an international organization whose membership criterion is religion (1969). It was also at the origin of the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990). Furthermore, Saudi financial assistance will also push some OIC countries into a new Islamic rigorism tinged with Saudi Wahhabism. Finally, the collapse of communist regimes put an end to the American instrumentalization of the great religions instituted in the fight against Soviet ideology. See Corm, George. 2014. *Pour une lecture profane des conflits : sur le « retour du religieux » dans les conflits contemporains du Moyen-Orient*. Paris: La Découverte.

<sup>7</sup> Corm 2014, 18-19.

<sup>8</sup> Foret, François. 2015. *Religion and Politics in the European Union. The Secular Canopy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Michel, Patrick. 2008. “Religion, identités nationales, identité européenne.” In *Religion(s) et identité(s) en Europe. L'épreuve du pluriel*, edited by Antonela Capelle-Pogăcean, Patrick Michel and Enzo Pace. Paris: Sciences Po les Presses, 318-322.

<sup>10</sup> Capelle-Pogăcean, Antonela, Michel, Patrick and Enzo Pace. 2008. “Introduction.” In *Religion(s) et identité(s) en Europe. L'épreuve du pluriel*, edited by Antonela Capelle-Pogăcean, Patrick Michel and Enzo Pace. Paris: Sciences Po les Presses, 22.

<sup>11</sup> *Idem* 17-18.

<sup>12</sup> Eriksson, Johan, and Ludwig Norman. 2011. “Political utilization of scholarly ideas: the ‘clash of civilisations’ vs. ‘Soft Power’ in US foreign policy.” In *Review of International Studies*, No. 37, 426.

<sup>13</sup> Huntington, Samuel. 1993. “The Clash of Civilizations ?.” *Foreign Affairs* 72, No. 3, 23-24.

<sup>14</sup> Huntington 1996, 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Idem* 29 and 42.

<sup>16</sup> By “Western civilization”, Huntington means Europe, North America and Latin America, while “Islamic civilization” includes the territories covered by Arab, Turkish, Persian and Malaysian cultures. See Huntington 2000 (1996), 52.

<sup>17</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. 2000. *Le Choc des civilisations*. Translated by Jean-Luc Fidel, Geneviève Joublain, Patrice Jorland and Jean-Jacques Pédussaud. Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Bottici and Challand 2010, 51.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Edward W. Said's article first published in the American weekly newspaper *The Nation* in 2001: Said, Edward W., 2014. “The Clash of Ignorance.” In *Geopolitics: an introductory reader*, edited by Jason Dittmer. London: Routledge, 192-193.

<sup>20</sup> Pfetsch, Barbara, 2004. “The Voice of the Media in European Public Sphere: Comparative Analysis of Newspaper Editorials.” Accessed May 1, 2019. <http://europub.wzb.eu>.

<sup>21</sup> Respectively 152 out of 670 for *Le Monde* and 109 out of 271 for *The Guardian*.

<sup>22</sup> Duchenne, Geneviève, and Pierre Gerbet. 2009. “Turquie.” In *Dictionnaire historique de l'Europe unie*, edited by Pierre Gerbet, Gérard Bossuat and Thierry Grosbois. Paris: André Versailles éditeur, 1050.

<sup>23</sup> Dhombres, Dominique. 2002. “Télévision: Ankara et Huntington.” *Le Monde*, November 4, 2002. LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>24</sup> Monceau 2009, 15.

<sup>25</sup> On August 3, 2002, the Turkish Parliament adopted a set of laws and reforms aimed at meeting the European Union's demands. One of the most important of these was the abolition of the death penalty, a prerequisite for EU membership. (Unsigned article. 2002. “La Turquie abolit la peine de mort et autorise l'enseignement kurde.” *Le Monde*, August 3, 2002. LexisNexis Academic).

<sup>26</sup> Preston, Peter. 2002. “Comment and Analysis: Look into the dark heart of Europe: Turkey is now a real Muslim democracy. We cannot ignore it.” *The Guardian*, November 11, 2002. LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>27</sup> See note 27.

<sup>28</sup> Unsigned article. 2002. “Le tournant turc.” *Le Monde*, August 5, 2002. LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>29</sup> Articles such as: Bourcier, Nicolas. 2002. “Les paradoxes d'une conversion de l'AKP à l'Europe.” *Le Monde*, November 1, 2002. LexisNexis Academic or Tincq, Henri. 2002, “La Turquie, une chance pour l'islam.” *Le Monde*, December 17, 2002. LexisNexis Academic, are part of this logic. Henri Tincq is furthermore specialist of religious questions for *La Croix* (a French catholic daily newspaper) and *Le Monde*; the paradigm is hence adopted by people considered as experts on the question.

<sup>30</sup> Bottici and Challand 2010, 13.

<sup>31</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>32</sup> Huntington 2000, 307-308.

<sup>33</sup> Black, Ian, Henley, Jon and Jeevan Vasager. 2002. “Turkey demands talks on joining EU: Skepticism grows in Europe key capitals as Muslim nation pushes for a place at the top table.” *The Guardian*, November 27, 2002. LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>34</sup> Toybee, Polly. 2002. “Copenhagen summit: Open your eyes Europe, open your gates: Despite censorship, torture and an interfering army, Turkey is ready to join our club, says Polly Toynbee in Istanbul.” *The Guardian*, December 13, 2002. LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>35</sup> Frontpage. 2002. “Notre enjeu turc.” *Le Monde*, November 04, 2002. LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>36</sup> Vernet, Daniel. 2002. “L'Europe sans frontières.” *Le Monde*, November 9, 2002. LexisNexis Academic.

- <sup>37</sup> Tréan, Claire. 2002. "Europe-Turquie : mettre fin à l'hypocrisie." *Le Monde*, November 26, 2002. LexisNexis Academic. The journalist quotes here Dominique de Villepin's, then Foreign Minister, comments without questioning his way of thinking.
- <sup>38</sup> Rocard, Michel. 2002. "Turquie: dire oui est vital." *Le Monde*, November 26, 2002. LexisNexis Academic.
- <sup>39</sup> Sadowski, Yahya. 1993. "The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate." *Middle East Report* 183 (Jul.-Aug.): 14.
- <sup>40</sup> See Said, Edward W. 2005 (1978). *L'Orientalisme. L'Orient créé par l'Occident*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 30-33.
- <sup>41</sup> Sadowski 1993, 16.
- <sup>42</sup> Yilmaz, Özcan. 2017. "Le difficile ancrage de la démocratie en Turquie." *Geneva Hub for Democracy. Policy Papers* 8, 7.
- <sup>43</sup> Casanova, José. 2008. "The problem of religion and the anxieties of European secular democracy." In *Religion and Democracy in Contemporary Europe*, edited by Gabriel Motzkin and Yochi Fischer. Londres: Alliance Publishing Trust, 70.
- <sup>44</sup> Yilmaz 2017, 13 (Note 12).
- <sup>45</sup> Billion, Didier. 2011. "Laïcité, islam politique et démocratie conservatrice en Turquie." *Confluences Méditerranée* 1, No. 76, 46-47.
- <sup>46</sup> Turkey has undertaken a series of reforms aimed at bringing its legislation and institutions closer to European standards. In 2001 and 2004, two major constitutional reforms were adopted. Then, under the AKP, the Turkish Parliament validated eight legislative reform packages between February 2002 and July 2004. See *Communication de la Commission au conseil et au Parlement européen. Recommandation de la Commission européenne concernant les progrès réalisés par la Turquie sur la voie de l'adhésion*, COM (2004) 656 final, 06.10.2004, al. 2.
- <sup>47</sup> Yilmaz 2017, 3.
- <sup>48</sup> Casanova, José. 2008. "The problem of religion and the anxieties of European secular democracy", In *Religion and Democracy in Contemporary Europe*, edited by Gabriel Motzkin and Yochi Fischer. Londres: Alliance Publishing Trust, 2008, 63.
- <sup>49</sup> Kentel, Ferhat. 2008. "La nouvelle polarisation turque." In *Religion(s) et identité(s) en Europe. L'épreuve du pluriel*, edited by Antonela Capelle-Pogăcean, Patrick Michel and Enzo Pace. Paris: Sciences Po les Presses, 129-132.
- <sup>50</sup> Billion, 2011, 40.
- <sup>51</sup> Capelle-Pogăcean, Michel and Pace 2008, 27. On the relation between nationalism and Islamism in Turkey.
- <sup>52</sup> Gueldry, Michel. 2005. "Des origines de la guerre de 2003." *Outre-Terre* 4, No. 13, 28-30.
- <sup>53</sup> Diez, Thomas. 2005. "Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering 'Normative Power Europe'." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33, No. 3, 13.
- <sup>54</sup> Hancock, Claire. 2007. "'Délivrez-nous de l'exotisme' : quelques réflexions sur des impensés de la recherche géographique sur les suds (et les nord)s." *Autrepart* 1, No. 41, 71.
- <sup>55</sup> Weill, Nicolas. 2004. "Huit intellectuels lancent un manifeste pour lutter contre le 'turco-scepticisme'." *Le Monde*, September 28, 2004. LexisNexis Academic. The journalist reports here on the arguments of eight Turkish intellectuals in favor of the opening of Turkey's accession negotiations. Weill's summary is published some 20 days after another article that reports the initiative of European political figures grouped within the "Commission indépendante sur la Turquie". (Rivais, Rafaële. 2004. "Neuf personnalités, dont Michel Rocard, plaident la cause d'Ankara." *Le Monde*, September 7, 2004. LexisNexis Academic). In both cases, these personalities develop the same arguments, proof that both the intellectual and the political world as well as the Turkish and European ones adhere to this system of thought. (Rapport de la Commission indépendante sur la Turquie. 2004. *La Turquie dans l'Europe : Plus qu'une promesse ?*. September 2004).
- <sup>56</sup> Vernet, Daniel. 2002. "M. Giscard d'Estaing a tort." *Le Monde*, November 21, 2002. LexisNexis Academic.
- <sup>57</sup> Steele, Jonathan. 2002. "Comment and Analysis: Jonathan Steele: The EU can help Turkish democracy: Nato failed to stop human rights abuses. Brussels could do better." *The Guardian*, December 12, 2002. LexisNexis Academic.
- <sup>58</sup> Editorial. 2002. "Turkey and us: If Europe is an idea, there are part of it." *The Guardian*, December 6, 2002. LexisNexis Academic.
- <sup>59</sup> See Corm, Georges. 2005 (2002). *Orient-Occident. La fracture imaginaire*. Paris: Éditions La Découverte.
- <sup>60</sup> Corm 2005 (2002), 94.
- <sup>61</sup> Gül, Abdullah. 2002. "La Turquie dans l'Union européenne, résolument, par Abdullah Gül." *Le Monde*, December 10, 2002. LexisNexis Academic.
- <sup>62</sup> Bowcott, Owen. 2002. "Turkey in EU would bridge culture." *The Guardian*, November 21, 2002. LexisNexis Academic.
- <sup>63</sup> Bilici, Faruk. 2013. "Instrumentalisation d'un concept: la politique d'Alliance des civilisations du gouvernement turc." *Anatoli*, No. 4, 119-120.
- <sup>64</sup> *Idem*, 127.
- <sup>65</sup> Monceau 2009, 9.
- <sup>66</sup> On the Turkish historical evolution, see Yilmaz, Özcan. 2017. "La Turquie républicaine, « déchirée » entre l'Orient et l'Occident ?." *Relations internationales* 4, No. 172, 15-30.
- <sup>67</sup> Commission des communautés européennes, *Communication de la Commission au conseil et au Parlement européen. Recommandation de la Commission européenne concernant les progrès réalisés par la Turquie sur la voie de l'adhésion*, COM (2004) 656 final, 06.10.2004.
- <sup>68</sup> Krieg, Alice. 2000. "Analyser le discours de presse." *Communication* 1, vol. 20, 8-9 and 11.
- <sup>69</sup> Smith, Helena. 2005. "European mission unearths torture claims in Turkey :Reports follow launch of EU membership talks: Ankara dismisses findings as 'silly stories'." *The Guardian*, October 10, 2005. LexisNexis Academic.
- <sup>70</sup> The *Turkey 2006 Progress Report*, issued by the European Commission, as well as the reports of Amnesty International (2006) and Human Rights Watch (2006), mention cases of torture against the Kurdish minority but not of the nature described by the article. See: Commission of the European Communities, *Commission Staff working document. Turkey 2006 Progress Report*, COM (2006) 649 final, November 8, 2006; Amnesty International, *Rapport 2006*, May 23, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2006. "World Report 2006." Accessed May 3, 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2006>.
- <sup>71</sup> Quoted by Bottici and Challand 2010, 31.