



**ST ANTONY'S COLLEGE OXFORD**

**South East European Studies Programme (SEESP)**  
European Studies Centre

**Occasional Paper No. 2/04**

**Britain: An Ally of Turkey in Europe?**

**Othon Anastasakis**

November 2004

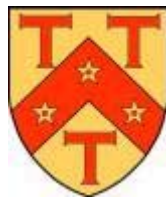
**Dr. Othon Anastasakis** is the Director of the South East European Studies Programme, St Antony's College, Oxford. He has written on the extreme right in Europe, EU enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe and the EU and the Balkans, democratization in South East Europe, EU conditionality and Turkish-EU relations.

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The European debate on Turkey has been ambivalent, difficult to read and hard to predict. At times, the discussion is “technical” based on political and economic considerations and conditions; at times, it is cultural and identity-driven. Often, it is both. While in its latest report on Turkey the European Commission is advocating for the first time the start of accession talks with Turkey<sup>1</sup>, there are still reservations, which reflect the ambivalent nature of this enterprise. The European Union is not fully convinced that Turkey deserves a place in the EU and doubts the ability of Turkey to implement radical political and economic reforms. The Turkish debate in Europe is one of negative predictions, limited hope and prejudices. There are only very few EU-member states where public opinion favours Turkish accession. European populations are by and large negative, ignorant or, at best, passive and indifferent towards the prospect.<sup>2</sup> Among the political elites, there are variations of scepticism, ranging from the largely unwelcoming French<sup>3</sup> to the reluctant, Dutch or Austrians; there are those who are internally divided i.e. German Christian Democrats vs. Social Democrats, and those who are more favourable like the Italians or currently the Greeks. Even in the more positive cases, support for Turkey’s membership tends to be more circumstantial and strategic rather than based on the conviction that Turkey is part of Europe. In each case, the issue of Turkish accession to the European Union is a highly emotional matter which touches upon sensitive issues such as democratic reform and human rights, migration, the culture of Islam and its compatibility with Judeo-Christian

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\* This article would not have been possible without the input, help and comments of Kerem Oktem and Ioannis Grigoriadis. It is based on our common research work on the “UK approach towards Turkish accession into the EU” and is part of a larger project entitled “European Integration and Cultural Patterns of Thinking and Perception. Cultural Aspects of the EU Enlargement Process on the Basis of the Relations between the EU and Turkey” which is coordinated by Konstanz University and supported by the Volkswagen Foundation. More information on the project can be found at <http://www.uni-konstanz.de/FuF/SozWiss/fg-soz/ag-wis/JSVersion/mitarbeit/giannakopoulos/EU/>

Finally, I would also like to thank Nora Fisher for her comments on the final draft of the paper.

A version of the paper has been published in October-December 2004 issue of *Insight Turkey*.

<sup>1</sup> See for more details Commission of the European Communities, *2004 Regular Report on Turkey's Progress Towards Accession [SEC(2004) 1201]* (Brussels: European Union, 6/10/2004) and Commission of the European Communities, *Recommendation of the European Commission on Turkey's Progress toward Accession [COM(2004) 656]* (Brussels: European Union, 6/10/2004)

<sup>2</sup> One should, however, not exaggerate the significance of low-level support to Turkey’s membership prospects in European publics. Dismissive attitudes toward prospective EU-candidates have been widespread during the latest round of eastern enlargement. This conservative and non-committal stance of EU-publics towards potential members is a general pattern and not limited to the case of Turkey.

Western European civilisation, or even historical sensitivities that go back to the years of the Ottoman Empire.

Within this European climate of scepticism and emotive ambiguity, the UK appears to be different in that it is significantly more relaxed and cool-headed in its approach towards Turkey. Although Britain shares some of the concerns and reservations of its EU partners, it has come forth as an encouraging member state when it comes to the prospect of Turkish accession to the European Union. In contrast with French repudiation and German ambivalence, Britain is more solidly behind Turkish candidacy and EU membership. Weighed against continental cultural essentialism, Britain also appears to be less susceptible to religious arguments and more technical in its understanding of the Turkish realities.

The following assessment of the British point of view is based on examination of official discourse and a selective reading of newspaper articles and academic analyses. It does not purport to represent the British people's attitudes due to the quantitative methodology which such a survey of public opinion would entail. One major British qualification is that the topic of Turkish accession to the European Union has never been a sensitive political or electoral issue in Britain, as it is in Germany, France or Austria. Britain is a country with a limited Turkish population, albeit with a large Muslim community of over three million. The Turkish population in the UK is barely 2.2 percent of the total foreign population compared with figures for Germany of 27.4 percent, Austria 17.7 percent, the Netherlands 13.6 percent and Denmark 13.6 percent.<sup>4</sup> The relative absence of anti-Turkish pressure groups, such as a proactive Armenian Diaspora community and strong Kurdish nationalist movements limit the presence of Armenian or Kurdish points of view in the public discourse in Britain<sup>5</sup> and allow for more flexibility in addressing the Turkish question. Any public interest in Turkey in Britain arises when the European Council discusses the issue of Turkish EU candidacy and accession talks, when there are terrorist incidents like the

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<sup>3</sup> French opposition to Turkey's EU accession is epitomized in the following website: <http://www.nonalaturquie.com>

<sup>4</sup> OECD – 2000 figures

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted, though, that one of the most influential Kurdish activist organizations in Europe, the Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) is based in London. The KHRP has been very successful in initiating a public debate on the GAP-project and the Ilisu-Dam, which was to be built with British

November 2004 blasts in Istanbul, or when British citizens are subjected to acts of violence in Turkey.<sup>6</sup> The governmental change in Turkey and the zeal with which the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has been pursuing the goal of EU accession has generally attracted positive feedback from the British elites and the media. The British government has been one of the most positive and encouraging governments in Europe when it comes to the prospect of accession talks with Turkey. Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, has expressed strong support for Turkish membership stating that “Britain wants to see Turkey in the European Union...and on the basis of Turkey’s compliance there should be no obstacles to Turkey’s membership of the EU.”<sup>7</sup> In his visit in Turkey in May 2004,<sup>8</sup> Tony Blair reaffirmed his conviction that the accession of Turkey “would be something good for all”, and hoped for a positive decision from the European Council in December 2004.<sup>9</sup> The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Commons in one of its reports on Turkey of 30/04/02 recognised that “it would benefit the EU to have Turkey as a member; it would expand its horizons, open up new markets and show its inclusiveness to the Muslim world.” In contrast to the views expressed by Valéry Giscard d’Estaing that the accession of Turkey would mean “the end of Europe”<sup>10</sup>, some in Britain argue that, “Europe cannot be defined solely by geography, income, religion or strategic calculation. Europe is an idea. And Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is what we make it, freed from the chains of history and united by a common future vision. There is no good reason why Turkey should not share in that.”<sup>11</sup> It is also appreciated that “slamming the gates of Brussels would leave Turkey isolated and growling on the borders of Europe, its pro-western consensus in tatters and the darker forces of the Turkish right unleashed.”<sup>12</sup> According to the mainstream British point of view, Turkish membership into the European Union should be supported as this would send a positive signal to the Islamic world,

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involvement. As a result of the Ilisu-Campaign, the British construction company Balfour-Beatty had to withdraw from the Ilisu-consortium.

<sup>6</sup> Three major stories in this context triggered massive interest in the British public, and received massive media coverage, including the yellow sheets. This were the stabbing of two Leeds Unites fans in Istanbul in April 2000 and the subsequent trial (“Murder accused appeal adjourned” *BBC News*, 08/04/2004); the trial of a waiter for underage sex with a British citizen in 2003 (“Waiter jailed for underage sex” *BBC News*, 18/02/2003); and the fatal shooting of the toddler Alistair Grimason in Izmir (“Toddler shooting suspect held” *BBC News*, 02/09/2003).

<sup>7</sup> “Blair backing for Turkey’s attempt to join the EU” by Toby Helm, *The Daily Telegraph*, 18/05/2004

<sup>8</sup> Blair’s visit on May 17<sup>th</sup> 2004 has been of great symbolic significance for the relations of the two countries, having been the first visit by a British Prime Minister after 14 years.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with *Hurriyet*, May 17, 2004

<sup>10</sup> Speaking to an interviewer from *Le Monde* on 8 November 2002

<sup>11</sup> “Turkey and us: If Europe is an idea, they are part of it”, *The Guardian*, December 6, 2002

preventing a clash of civilisations,<sup>13</sup> it would signal that the European Union is not an exclusively “Christian club” and would boost the success prospects of the experiment with a Muslim Democratic party in Turkey. Geographical, religious or cultural arguments against accession have little resonance with the British official, journalistic or academic view, as such arguments are hardly compatible with the multi-cultural conceptualizations of the United Kingdom that are now widely accepted in public discourse. Moreover, the policies and priorities of Prime Minister Erdoğan and his AKP government are viewed in Britain as an experiment that might lead to the successful consolidation of democracy in a country with an Islamic majority. This generally sympathetic view is conditional upon Turkey’s ability to reform<sup>14</sup> in the direction of democratisation and economic development.<sup>15</sup>

But what makes the debate on Turkey in Britain less culturally driven? Why aren’t Britons so obsessed with defining the European identity and whether Turkey is part of it or not? Why isn’t Turkey’s accession into the European Union a sensitive political issue like in other parts of Europe? Why is Britain different in its positive stance towards Turkish accession? Part of the answer lies in the way in which Britain perceives (a) the future of the European Union (and the position of Turkey within this); (b) its strategic interests in the region of the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East (and Turkey’s compatibility with those interests) and (c) the British approach to “Other” identities and cultures. In the following part of the paper we will discuss three tentative theses. First, Britain’s vision of a market-oriented, intergovernmental and looser European Union is thought to be better accommodated with Turkey as an EU member. Second, British interests in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean and its transatlantic preferences could be better served if Turkey, a strategic ally of the West, is member of the European Union. Third, Britain’s integrationist approach to different cultures explains the limited significance of culturalist arguments in the public debate. Hence, the existence of a Muslim country

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<sup>12</sup> *The Financial Times*, May 18, 2004

<sup>13</sup> On the clash of civilizations thesis, see Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, no. 3 (1993) and Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Touchstone Books, 1998)

<sup>14</sup> David Rudnick “Turkey must reform to win EU entry” *The Times*, November 17, 1999

<sup>15</sup> One sees a subtle division in the press’s approach with newspapers from the Center-Left being more critical towards democratic deficits and human rights abuses in Turkey and the newspapers of the traditional right more supportive of Turkish membership into the EU.

within the European Union is seen as an extension of the multi-cultural diversity of Britain.

### **The intergovernmental thesis**

It is often assumed that Britain is different from the rest of its EU partners with an idiosyncratic and “patriotic” outlook.<sup>16</sup> There are historical, strategic and developmental reasons for that. Historically, Britain developed competing interests with the other major European powers i.e., France, Germany, Spain or Russia. There has always been certain scepticism, embedded in the British psyche, towards things continental. This scepticism lingered on even when interests began to converge, in particular during the Cold War period and Britain’s early membership to the European Communities. The fact that Britain was not one of the founding members of the European Communities - and that its application for membership was rebuffed twice by France in the 1960s - allowed Britain to preserve its distinctive position vis-à-vis the other member states of the EU regarding many domestic, European and wider international issues. British ‘exceptionalism’ in Europe runs through a number of matters such as EU integration, external relations with third countries and the organisation of the capitalist and market economies in monetary, fiscal or labour matters (i.e., Britain exhibits a more liberal market oriented outlook compared with the social democratic, social market continental economies). Since its beginnings as an EC member state, Britain was branded the ‘reluctant’, the ‘awkward’ and certainly the euro-sceptic partner, whose commitment to Europe was always questionable.<sup>17</sup> Britain often challenged the motives of the EU and acted against the prospect of a supra-national entity, fearing that it could dominate British national interests. As a result, British speed in the European Union has been slower than that of the other member states, opting out of the euro-zone and of the Schengen area while only belatedly signing the Social Protocol. On these and other issues British governments and politicians frequently have been at odds with their EU counterparts. This is reinforced by a euro-sceptic public opinion and a particularly euro-phobic press at home. It

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Risse, "A European Identity? Europeanization and the Evolution of Nation-State Interests" in Maria Green Cowles, James Caporaso and Thomas Risse, eds., *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change* (Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 204-06

<sup>17</sup> Stephen George, *An Awkward Partner: Britain in the European Community*, Oxford University Press 1991

comes as no surprise then that in the debate on the future of the European Union, Britain is the leader of the intergovernmental camp, opposes vehemently a federal Europe, advocates the preservation of veto on a number of nationally sensitive questions and supports widening rather than deepening of the European Union. In fact, widening for the UK is a very effective way of avoiding deepening. In Britain, the dominant mode of thinking about the EU is through use of its historical name: the “Common Market”; the EU is to be perceived as an economic entity without too much political significance.

On those grounds, Britain has been a consistent advocate of the eastern enlargement and, additionally, a positive champion of Turkish candidacy. Since the times of Margaret Thatcher, Britain developed close economic ties and ideological affinities with Turkey’s Prime Minister - and later President - Turgut Ozal. Later, the UK became an advocate of treating Turkey the same as the other candidate countries from Central and Eastern Europe. In comparison with continental views which sometimes consider Turkey to be a huge economic liability, British elites counter-argue that Turkey can in the long-term become an economic bulwark of the European Union<sup>18</sup> and emphasise more and more the positive impact of the inclusion of a young and large labour force in Europe. Yet, the economic argument is not always particularly strong in the British debate, due to the vulnerability of the Turkish economy. Overall, according to the British view, the anticipated benefit from Turkish accession is mostly strategic.

It could be argued that the anti-federalist vision of Britain may be served better with the inclusion of Turkey given that Turkey shares a similar intergovernmental approach regarding the future of the EU and as a member is expected to strengthen the intergovernmental camp. Although this may be a premature statement at this stage in EU-Turkish relations, the idea that Turkey will put an end to further EU deepening is “music to many British ears”, and some voices in Britain are already quite frank about it. As the conservative Daily Telegraph put it in one of its recent articles, the accession of Turkey “would alter the course of European integration: few nations [like Turkey]

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<sup>18</sup> Lord of Guildford Howell, “Question on EU-Turkey relations”, Hansard 2002

in Europe are so patriotic, so sensitive about sovereignty. We can see why the prospect makes EU-zealots nervous. All the more reason, though for the rest of us to cheer.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Strategic considerations**

The strategic role of Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle Eastern region is recognised by all the countries of the European Union. Turkey’s alliance with the West is also deemed necessary in this turbulent zone of the Caucasus and the Middle East. For its part, Turkey has frequently stressed the strategic and geopolitical advantages for the European Union once Turkey becomes a member.<sup>20</sup> Yet the expansion of EU borders to the dangerous and unstable countries in the Middle East is a prospect which is viewed controversially by the different EU member states. Some voices argue that expanding the borders of the EU to the Middle East will increase the incentives of the EU to act effectively in the area and will add to the military capacity of the European defence mechanisms. By including a Muslim democratic country, the European Union will have better access and more clout in its dealings with Middle Eastern countries. Moreover, Turkey will contribute substantially to the military capabilities of European defence mechanisms. Other voices, mostly on the continent, fear the prospect of bordering unstable and dangerous countries, as this will affect the internal stability of the European Union. The European Union has yet to recover from the impact of the conflict in the Balkans and still searches the most appropriate ways to deal with the Western Balkans. Furthermore, it is argued, if Turkey is to become a member where do the borders of the European Union stop?

Britain, a large EU member state, part of the “Big Three” – along with France and Germany – which has a significant voice in matters of common foreign and security policy and makes a substantial contribution to the military and defence mechanisms of the EU, has a special interest in that eastern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern area. It also has a historical involvement in the region, a remnant of the country’s imperial past: Britain is still a guarantor power in Cyprus and preserves

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<sup>19</sup> “Our friends in Turkey should be allowed in EU” *Daily Telegraph*, May 18, 2004

<sup>20</sup> Meltem Müftüler-Bac, "Turkey's Role in the EU's Security and Foreign Policies", *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 31, no. 4 (2000), pp. 495-99

military bases on the island. In addition, Britain has been intensely involved in the occupation of Iraq with military forces present on the ground. Britain needs a reliable ally like Turkey in that part of the world and is therefore interested in a stable, democratic and prosperous Turkey, a consistent ally for western and British interests.

The Istanbul attacks in November 2003, which targeted the British Consulate and a British Bank and resulted in heavy loss of life, brought a wave of British sympathy for the Turkish vulnerability to extremists and strengthened those voices in Britain arguing for Turkey's EU accession and the stability of Turkish democracy.<sup>21</sup> This was surprisingly different from other voices in Europe, which took the bombings as proof for the prevalence of Muslim extremism in Turkey and of Turkey's non-European vocation. Turkish democracy is regarded by Britain as the most successful experiment of secular democracy in the Muslim world. Moreover, Britain feels that the present situation of an Islamic political leadership with a westernising and democratising orientation might have beneficial consequences in many forms and thus is worth supporting. First, it can lead to further consolidation of democracy in Turkey where Islamic parties can compete alongside secular parties in the electoral arena. There is an overall consensus in Britain that EU accession will strengthen this process of democratic consolidation in Turkey.<sup>22</sup> Second, it is argued that Turkey can be a model of a successful Islamic democracy to the other Muslim countries. The UK is eager to prove this particular point, as it pursues a policy of democratisation by external design in Iraq.

The strategic interest of Britain in Turkey is closely associated with the UK's transatlantic predilection and its closeness with the United States. Britain's special relationship with the United States has to do with historical and cultural similarities and with common strategic interests. During the cold war era, Churchill made the special relationship one of the basic pillars of British foreign policy in order to keep American involvement against the Soviet danger and in order to secure US economic aid to Europe. Since then, political personalities from both sides of the Atlantic have contributed to the reinforcement of this relationship as epitomized by Thatcher and

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<sup>21</sup> Leading Article, "Victimised Man of Europe", *Daily Telegraph*, 22/11/2004, p. 25

<sup>22</sup> Donald Macintyre, "Europe Must Not Turn Its Back on Turkey at Such a Pivotal Moment", *Independent*, 5/12/2002

Reagan in the 1980s as well as Blair and Clinton in the 1990s. The special relationship has survived the neo-conservative turn in the United States with Blair and Bush being strategically as close as ever despite their ideological differences. Britain is eager to preserve its special relationship with the United States and pursues the policy - sometimes at a high price. This policy is also based on the conviction that Britain is better placed than any other country to act as a bridge between European and American interests.

Britain's special relationship with the United States can be interestingly compared with the special relationship between Turkey and the United States. Republican Turkey opted not only to adopt for the westernisation and modernisation of the country but after the Second World War also to bind its external policies with those of the West.<sup>23</sup> During the cold war period, Turkey became a special place in the western alliance, as a frontline state against the Soviet threat and a unique partner for the United States. The special relationship between Turkey and the United States survived the end of the Cold War; once again the geography of Turkey proved crucial for US interests situated between the unstable Caucasus and the Middle East. Turkey's "frontline" status can and has led to at times excessive demands from the United States. A case in point was US pressure on Turkey to participate in the war against Iraq, Turkey's refusal, and the tension between the two countries to which this gave rise.<sup>24</sup> But Washington could not afford to sacrifice its special partner in the Middle East. It did not let Turkey's refusal hamper its cooperation with the AKP and continued to advocate Turkish membership into the European Union<sup>25</sup> - sometimes, however, causing more damage to Turkey-EU relations than effectively facilitating them. Washington's advocacy of Turkish membership into the EU is aimed at strengthening the atlanticist nature of the EU contrary to French objectives for a more European common foreign and security policy and a reduced role for NATO.<sup>26</sup> Especially, in this period of divergence between Europe and the US, many countries in

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<sup>23</sup> William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774-2000* (London, Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002), pp. 109-21

<sup>24</sup> Meltem Müftüler-Bac, "The New Face of Turkey: The Domestic and Foreign Policy Implications of November 2002 Elections", *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 37, no. 4 (2003), p. 436

<sup>25</sup> Graham E. Fuller, "Turkey's Strategic Model: Myths and Realities" in *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2004, pp. 51-64

<sup>26</sup> For a balanced account of the impact of Turkey's prospective EU accession on US-Turkey relations, see Morton I. Abramowitz et al., *Turkey on the Threshold: Europe's Decision and U.S. Interests* (Washington DC: Atlantic Council of the United States, 8/2004), pp. 22-25

Europe are concerned about possible US efforts to sabotage the EU project and prevent it from becoming the rival hegemonic power. Britain does not share the French or Belgian view that the US, by advocating Turkish accession, is aiming at the dilution of the European Union. It believes instead in a stronger NATO, which acts in cooperation with European defence mechanisms.

From a British point of view, Turkey's transatlantic orientation is compatible with British preferences. The UK has been one of the biggest EU champions of greater Turkish participation in the new European Security and Defence architecture thus guaranteeing an important role for NATO in the European defence architecture. The accession of Turkey into the European Union would strengthen the transatlantic dimension and would reinforce the British vision of European security. On the negative side, however, Turkey like Britain might have to face a similar dilemma in the future when it is asked to choose between Washington and Brussels. How crucial this dilemma will be for Turkey will depend on the state of relations between Europe and the United States. It is highly probable that a move towards Europe will lead to a re-configuration of the special partnership between the US and Turkey, which will be less one-sided.<sup>27</sup>

### **The liberal approach**

Apart from the visionary and the strategic arguments, the internal discourse on Turkish accession has to be understood within the generally more welcoming and liberal approach towards other cultures in Britain. Some of the arguments employed in French and German debates on immigrants or Turkey's EU perspective would be simply unthinkable in the British context.<sup>28</sup> Public discourse on the role of religion, minorities and citizenship diverges considerably from those current in most continental European polities and preclude a highly essentialist reading of Turkey's EU accession.

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<sup>27</sup> Abramowitz et al., *Turkey on the Threshold: Europe's Decision and U.S. Interests*, pp. 22-25

<sup>28</sup> A case to the point is the recurring relapse of the German Christian Democrats into overtly racist patterns of political argumentation. Examples include the infamous CDU slogan 'Children instead of Indians' which was used in order to mobilize against the invitation of computer scientists from India to Germany, the campaign against double citizenship in 1999 ("Spiel mit der Ausgrenzung" *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 27/11/2002), and the now forestalled initiative to collect signatures against Turkey's EU-membership. Such campaigns would find little sympathy in the United Kingdom.

There are historical as well as rational arguments, which justify British exceptionalism. Historically, the UK did not experience a revolutionary break, such as the French Revolution, in the course of its political evolution. Nor did Britain undergo an ideological and ideational revolution comparable to the French Enlightenment. Britain never experienced the Jacobin secular state adopted by France (and Turkey itself for that matter) and thus adopted a more liberal and tolerant paradigm towards religious and cultural differences. Britain believes more in a Europe of cultures and nationalities where differences are expressed freely with minimum interference from the state. The UK itself is a compilation of English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish nations with the recognized right for the use of different languages and customs. Britain never tried to culturally assimilate its Muslim or other immigrant population and allowed for the free expression of religious or other cultural expression. Moreover, the existence of approximately 12,5 million Muslims in the European Union<sup>29</sup> and the fact that countries such as Bosnia Herzegovina and Albania are in line for future accession makes the case of Turkish accession, in British eyes, a very logical step.<sup>30</sup> That said, even British discourse, with its open-minded and market-oriented approach, cannot give an adequate explanation as to where Europe will end once it includes Turkey within its ranks.

## **Conclusion**

The above analysis has embraced the “exceptionalist thesis” and has highlighted the different attitude of Britain towards Turkey when compared with its continental partners. Indeed, the political elites across the party spectrum (Conservatives, Liberals and Labour) have all been supportive of the launching of accession talks and view positively the prospect of Turkish membership. Similarly, the British mainstream press presents a favourable argument on the issue and tries to calm fears over a Muslim country becoming part of the Europe Union. Turkish accession is not a sensitive political or social issue and is viewed for the most part within the prism of the benefit it will bring to bear on the European market and multiculturalism.

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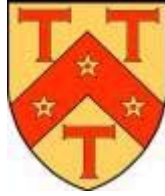
<sup>29</sup> “How restive are Europe’s Muslims?”, *The Economist*, 18/10/2001. The total number of Muslims is estimated at 12,5 million, based on national statistics of France, Germany, Britain, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Denmark, Norway and Sweden,

<sup>30</sup> Denis MacShane, "Europe Must Embrace Islam Too: A Muslim Turkey Should Be Welcomed into the EU to Allow Faith and Democracy to Grow Together", *Observer*, 24/11/2002

By and large, the above three explanations are what guides and defines British thinking on this issue. Britain has certainly come a long way since the times of William Gladstone who regarded the Turks as “the one great anti-human specimen of humanity” and argued that “no government ever has so sinned, none has proved itself so incorrigible in sin, or is so impotent in reformation.” Britain harbours fewer prejudices from the past and certainly views Turkish accession from its own market-oriented, liberal approach. However, as a multicultural society, it also shares many common trends with its European neighbours and is inclined, from time to time, to adopt protectionist positions similar to those in France or in Germany. So the prospective arrival of Turkish migrants in Britain has the potential to disrupt the discussion on Turkey, as has been the case with the latest enlargement caused by fears that Britain might be inundated by Central and East European migrants or Roma from Slovakia and the Czech Republic. These are issues that are manipulated very effectively by the euro-phobic press or the UK Independence party in their effort to debase the idea of a common European future. But in the British context these do not appear to be insurmountable obstacles

In the current Union, some fear that Turkey as a member state may be rather like Britain: an awkward partner, defensive, sensitive of sovereignty issues and strongly leaning towards intergovernmental and transatlantic, pro-NATO approaches. Such a comparison shows that there are common points between the two countries, which bring them closer and explain the more positive British position. While this may be partly true, it should be pointed out that following the recent enlargement, Britain will cease to be the only awkward, patriotic and suspicious member in the European Union. Countries in Central and Eastern Europe appear similarly patriotic and sensitive to issues of national sovereignty and Brussels’ supra-nationalism. In the end, although Britain by and large may appear as an ally of Turkey for the variety of reasons discussed in this paper, the issue goes beyond British strategy and interests. Turkish accession as viewed in Britain is about a European spirit that transcends the historically contingent cultural fears of continental Europe. In the latter, a large portion of the elites seem to be overwhelmed by the challenges of the globalising world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and hope to find consolation in a small and well-protected Europe. In this

context, British influence may be able to bring some rationality to this strand of continental protectionist thinking and alleviate the anxieties of Christian Europe.



**SOUTH EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES PROGRAMME (SEESP)**  
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**The South East European Studies Programme** was launched in 2002 as part of the European Studies Centre, St Antony's College, University of Oxford. It focuses on contemporary politics and society in the post-communist Balkans, Greece, Turkey and Cyprus. Drawing on the academic excellence of the College, the University and an international network of associates, this Programme seeks to foster academic and policy relevant research and discussions on the dynamics of post-conflict reconstruction, transition emphasising the role of, and relations with the European Union. In investigating each of these poles as well as their interrelationship, its ambition is to be provocative and constructive.

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  - To promote a multi-disciplinary study of the region's developments within Oxford University (e.g. politics, law, sociology, economics, international relations) working in collaboration with students' groups, academics, Centres and Programmes within the University;
  - To spearhead exchanges and debates among networks of individuals and institutions beyond Oxford on these issues;
  - To foster cooperation between the academic and the policy making community.
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- **The Balkan Pillar:** Organisation of brainstorming sessions - between academics, experts and policy makers involved in the region - supported by background research and followed by action papers.
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Telephone: + 44 (0) 1865 284761 & +44 (0) 1865 274537

Fax: + 44 (0) 1865 284478

Email: [othon.anastasakis@sant.ox.ac.uk](mailto:othon.anastasakis@sant.ox.ac.uk) & [seesp@sant.ox.ac.uk](mailto:seesp@sant.ox.ac.uk)

Web: <http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/areastudies/southeasteur.shtml>