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**UNDERSTANDING THE EU-TURKEY DEBATE IN  
ITALY: STAKEHOLDERS POSITIONS AND POLICY**

*by Emiliano Alessandri and Ebru Canan*

Paper prepared for the conference on “Talking Turkey II”, organized by IAI with the support of  
Compagnia di San Paolo  
Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB)  
German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF-US)  
Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation (OSIAF) – Turkey  
*Turin, 9-10 June 2008*

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**1. Introduction**

Italy's traditionally positive attitude towards Turkey's membership in the European Union is unlikely to reverse in the foreseeable future. The prospect of Turkey's membership has received, to date, wide bipartisan support at the political level and is favorably seen by the business community in view of the already important and fast-growing stakes that several Italian firms have in the Turkish economy. "Mamma li Turchi!" (Mum, the Turks are coming!), an old Italian saying dating back to the Saracen conquest of Sicily, hardly conserves any meaning today, except as a joke, in today's Italy.<sup>1</sup>

Widespread support for closer Turkey-EU relations, including membership, does not mean, however, that there is no need for any "Communication Strategy" that "communicates Turkey to the EU and the EU to Turkey".<sup>2</sup> The picture, is in fact far more complex than first meets the eye. Misperceptions, manipulation, if not prejudice often underlie both the message of those who resist and those who favour Turkey's membership. First, there is a problem of sheer knowledge: the Turkey debate in Italy is both scarce and ill-informed. A by-product of this is also the gap between the views of Italian elites and stakeholders in the "Turkey question", whose views are generally positive, and those of the Italian public, who holds far more negative views. Second, the development of an effective Communication Strategy should account for the views of important albeit not mainstream Italian stakeholders which oppose, sometimes resolutely, the prospect of Turkey's EU integration. Most prominent among these is the regionalist and eurosceptic Lega Nord (Northern League), which obtained a remarkable result in the 2008 general elections and now controls key ministries, including the Ministry of Interior. In analyzing the motivations underlying this resistance we delve into whether the Italian debate on Turkey has been "authentic" or whether it has to some extent acted as a proxy of other issues and debates.

This last observation introduces a further issue worth debating: Italy's "Christian public opinion". A big obstacle could, in fact, materialize and stand in the way of a constructive and focused discussion of Turkish-European relations if the debate (fairly lively in Italy) on Europe's identity, starting with the question of its religious roots, would at some point intersect, or even merge, with the nascent debate on Turkey's European future. Until now, Christian public opinion has not spawned any large-scale "no-Turkey-in-the-EU movement". Yet a "dynamic" Communication Strategy which takes into account also future developments must account for the complex, variegated and evolving position of Italian Catholics.

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<sup>1</sup> See Roberto Gargiulo, *Mamma li Turchi. Il leone e la mezzaluna* (2 ed., Pordenone: Biblioteca dell'Immagine, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> See Nathalie Tocci, *Talking Turkey II: Project Rationale and Objectives*, paper presented at the workshop on "Talking Turkey II", Turin, June 9-10, 2008.

In order to provide a succinct but broad overview of the Italian national debate on Turkey-EU relations, the paper will be organized as follows: after a brief background section, the analysis will concentrate on the position of Italy's major political and economic stakeholders and will then briefly discuss how the media have covered the issue. In this connection, some thoughts will be offered as to how Italian public opinion, and Christian public opinion in particular, have approached the "Turkey question". A specific section containing quantitative analysis (polls) will be provided to complement the otherwise qualitative nature of this survey (based mostly on interviews). The paper will conclude with a discussion of the implications that can be drawn from such survey of the Italian debate for the development of an effective Communication Strategy .

## 2. Turkey-Italian Relations

*TBC*

Italy is currently Turkey's third economic partner, but could be listed as second after Germany, because Russia's presence is concentrated mainly in one sector: energy. Bilateral investments have increased steadily in the past years.<sup>3</sup> The stock of Italian foreign direct investment has reached USD 4,4 billion in 2006. There are currently 600 Italian firms and companies operating in Turkey. Italy imports from Turkey mainly leather, wood, clothing and shoes beside an increasing volume of machines and electronic appliances. Italian firms export mainly intermediate goods (such as plastic and metal products), agricultural goods, high-tech commodities, as well as "made-in-Italy" commodities. Overall, the trade balance has traditionally been in Italy's favour, thus further strengthening the perception of Turkey being a profitable market, with exports rising from USD 3.484 million in 2001 to USD 9.967 in 2007, and imports from USD 2.342 to USD 7478 in the same period. This trade surplus, trade experts point out, is even greater if one includes the commodities that enter the Turkish market through local branches of Italian firms or local firms owned by Italian companies.<sup>4</sup>

## 3. Political Stakeholders: Might Green Light Turn Yellow?

*Solid bipartisanship*

The Italian political landscape is characterized by widespread support for Turkey's EU membership. Italy has been one of the earliest and most committed supporters of Turkey's accession both in view of specific Italian interests and of the general principles that have guided Italian foreign policy since WWII. There has been in fact bipartisan support across the centre left and centre right for Turkey's EU accession. Former Commission President Romano Prodi, Italy's former head of government and leader of Italy's Centre Left actively supported Turkey's accession arguing that this would mark a crucial step towards drawing Europe's borders and establishing its identity and status as an international actor: "Turkey's membership in the EU is a

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<sup>3</sup> These and following data are taken from the Istituto Nazionale per il Commercio Estero, *Rapporto Paese congiunto ICE/MAE*, 2<sup>nd</sup> semester 2007, <http://www.ice.gov.it/estero2/istanbul/default.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

strategic goal”, he declared in 2007 during his visit to Ankara.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Silvio Berlusconi, current prime minister and leader of Italy’s Centre Right, has repeatedly and openly declared his full support for Turkey’s membership: “[w]e are your best friend in Europe”, Berlusconi confided to Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan back in 2002: “Italy will bring you into the EU”.<sup>6</sup> Former Foreign Minister Massimo D’Alema, who in 1998 had been the target of harsh criticism from Ankara due to the decision not to extradite PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, reiterated Italy’s firm support to Turkey’s EU membership on several occasions.<sup>7</sup> In an interview dated June 2007, D’Alema identified three reasons for supporting Turkey’s membership: 1 - the common “Mediterranean” identity of Italy and Turkey and the desirability of shifting the EU’s centre of gravity from central-eastern to southern Europe, thus compensating for the impact of the Eastern enlargement; 2- Turkey’s role as a “hub” between the Balkans, Caucasus, and Central Asia, especially in the energy sector; 3 – Turkey as the successful experiment in combining Islam with secular and democratic institutions, and Turkey’s accession as representing the crucial test for the EU to decide upon whether “to define itself according to an ‘exclusive’ identity or as an open political project”.<sup>8</sup>

These key motivations, confirmed by other representatives of the Centre Left,<sup>9</sup> underpin also the positions of the Centre Right. The latter, however, tends to give more emphasis to three further issues: 1 - Turkey’s membership as a guarantee of Europe’s Atlanticism and its continued strategic partnership with the US through NATO; 2- Turkey as an attractive market and a crucial commercial partner for Italy (this business perspective is particularly strong in Forza Italia, Berlusconi’s party);<sup>10</sup> 3 - not differently from other conservative parties (e.g., the British Conservatives), many in the Italian Centre Right also look at Turkey’s accession as a way to “dilute” the European political project, or at least to keep it consistent with the ideal of a “Europe of nations”.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, the centre right tends to give relatively less importance to the argument that Turkey could act as a bridge towards the Muslim world than the Centre Left (although

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<sup>5</sup> See “EU Commission Backs Turkey Talks”, *CNN.com*, 6 October 2004, <http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/europe/10/06/eu.turkey.talks/index.html>. See also, Romano Prodi, *The Commission’s Report and Recommendation on Turkey’s application Presentation to the European Parliament*, European Parliament, Brussels, 6 October 2004, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/04/440>, and, “Strategica la Turchia in Europa”, *La Repubblica*, 23 January 2007, p. 24, <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2007/01/23/166strategica.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Quotes are drawn from Marco Ansaldo, “L’abbraccio di Berlusconi a Erdogan: «L’Italia vi porterà in Europa»”, *La Repubblica*, 14 November, 2002, p. 18, <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2002/11/14/0801.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Sergio Romano, “Il Caso Ocalan e il dilemma del governo D’Alema”, *Corriere della Sera*, 23 June 2007, p. 35, <http://www.corriere.it/solferino/romano/07-06-23/01.spm>.

<sup>8</sup> Massimo D’Alema, “L’Italia alleato critico della Turchia in Europa”, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 13 June 2007, p.1, [http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco\\_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=EOLMW](http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=EOLMW).

<sup>9</sup> See E. Alessandri, “Interview with On. Umberto Ranieri”, former President of the Chamber of Deputies Committee on Foreign Affairs, 26 March 2008. Ranieri is a member of the Democratic Party, the new and largest party of Italy’s Centre Left.

<sup>10</sup> See E. Alessandri, “Interview with Paolo Quercia”, head of the project Fare Italia nel Mondo (Make Italy in the world), Fondazione FareFuturo, 8 May 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem. See also “Interview with On. Umberto Ranieri”, cit.

Turkey's secular-Western identity is certainly emphasized as a crucial positive factor by the Centre right as well).<sup>12</sup>

### *Sources of resistance*

Political parties that resist Turkey's entry into the EU are currently few, and it is unlikely that they will cooperate in a common campaign in future. Among the sceptical, but not intransigently opposed, we find the Communist parties, which resist Turkey's accession in view of what Turkey is today, and not what it may become in future and certainly not because of its identity as a Muslim country.<sup>13</sup> Dramatically downsized after the 2008 elections and internally divided, the left-wing parties concentrate on the Kurdish question as a reason to oppose Turkey's membership, and couple this argument with the idea that Turkey's membership would consolidate a Europe of markets and capital, as opposed to a political and social Europe.<sup>14</sup> They argue also that Turkey could act as an American Trojan horse in Europe, capable of thwarting the development of an independent EU foreign policy. "We are against Turkey into the EU", MP Iacopo Venier of the Partito dei Comunisti Italiani (Party of the Italian Communists) explained, "for reasons that are eminently political": "the inclusion of Turkey into the EU .. would cause the final crisis of any idea of Europe as a political community by emphasizing instead its nature of an economic market .. we cannot not band with those, like Berlusconi, who want to accelerate the process of enlargement to Turkey .. according to a geopolitical vision which sees Europe as just the outpost of US interests in Eurasia".<sup>15</sup> Yet while critical, these parties are ready to admit that, if accession negotiations were to be accompanied by a more serious *political* discussion on these issues, they would consider an opening. Indeed the Communist parties underline that it would be extremely important for Europe to demonstrate that it is a multiethnic and multi-religious polity, a notion they fully concur with given their focus on "class struggle" over the clash of civilizations as well as their stance towards the developing world. A further reason to accept Turkey is that the majority of Kurds themselves, to whose claims Italian Communists are very sensitive, support accession as a way of gaining recognition and guarantees. Confronted with these conflicting forces, for the time being Italian Communists remain open to exploring alternative "partnerships" with Turkey in the context of a Union of the Mediterranean, that would provide an alternative to, or delay full membership.

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<sup>12</sup> See Alfredo Mantica, "L'Europa non abbandoni la Turchia", *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 20 April 2007, p. 1, [http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco\\_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=E5AFD](http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=E5AFD). On. Mantica was vice-president of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs between June 2006 and April 2008, and he is currently Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Berlusconi government. He is a leading member of Alleanza Nazionale.

<sup>13</sup> "We oppose membership", the head of the International Dept. of Rifondazione Comunista (Re-founded Communists), Fabio Amato, points out "not because Turkey is an Islamic country: this would be a racist perspective". "We oppose the entry of today's Turkey", he adds, "because the Kurdish question is far from being solved – there is still a bloody repression going on, and because on many critical issues, such as the respect of international law, Turkey is deficient". E. Alessandri, "Interview with Fabio Amato", 2 April 2008.

<sup>14</sup> In particular the leftist parties point at the deregulation of the Turkish labour market, where unions are extremely weak and labour rights not fully guaranteed.

<sup>15</sup> Iacopo Venier, *Turchia: Testa in Europa*, speech at the Conference on "Turchia, 22 luglio 2007: elezioni politiche, rappresentanza, democrazia, diritti", 8 June 2007, <http://www.iacopovenier.it/print.php?sid=391>.

A more resolute, and currently more powerful, opponent of Turkey's membership is the Lega Nord, a regionalist, often proudly xenophobic, and characteristically eurosceptic (often outright anti-EU) party. The Northern League is perhaps the only relevant political stakeholder that is intransigently against Turkey in the EU. The motivation is clearly and self-admittedly a question of religion and identity: Turkey's society and state, however "secular on paper", are deeply imbued with "Islamic culture" and thus Turkey cannot become part of Europe, because the latter is a "Christian Europe".<sup>16</sup> As MP Mario Borghezio, Head of the Northern League delegation to the European Parliament puts it: "[b]e aware of the Turks and other Muslims ("mussulmaneria varia"), that all across Padania [Italy's northern plains], the cross of St. George waves in every corner ... never in the world, let alone if it is the Turks to demand it, we will give up our sacred symbols".<sup>17</sup> The Northern League also bases its argument on the repression of the Kurds, in view of its sympathies and identification with other separatist movements. The Northern League also took formal political action to prevent Turkey's accession by asking for a referendum on Turkey's accession in 2004.<sup>18</sup> More recently, current Interior Minister Roberto Maroni has presented a resolution at the Chamber of Deputies asking the Government to call for an interruption of the negotiations and support Turkey's inclusion in the "Union of the Mediterranean" instead.<sup>19</sup> In terms of its discourse, although admittedly making of it a question of "principle" and loading its propaganda with violent rhetoric, simplification and stereotype, the Northern League has tried to link its arguments to European-wide debates. As Pamela Morassi of the League's Legislative Office points out: "the position of the Northern League on Turkey emerged in the context of the discussion on the EU constitutional treaty between 2001 and 2006"; "the reason why negotiations should end", she adds, "is that the Copenhagen criteria are simply inadequate. They amount to political and statistic criteria having no reference to cultural values and principles".<sup>20</sup>

Finally, similarly highly critical of Turkey's EU membership is La Destra ("The Right") – a tiny but vociferous party on the extreme Right. In this case, "cultural" reasons are emphasized over strictly "religious" or "ideological" ones: "[o]ur position", Alessandro Pucci explains, "is not a position based on ideology but on culture"; "Turkey may even be included into Europe from a geographical perspective, but it is not part of Europe in terms of cultural ties".<sup>21</sup> When elaborating on this position, however, the religious element surfaces again: "Atatürk's secular vision of the state was a great vision .. but there is currently more religious freedom in Europe than in Turkey .. Turkey's EU membership is premature and it can only materialize if Turkey evolves

<sup>16</sup> See Marcell Piccamej, *La Turchia in Europa: un pericolo sottovalutato*, 12 January 2000, available in the website of the Movimento dei Giovani Padani, <http://www.giovanipadani.leganord.org/articoli.asp?ID=2656>. See also, E. Alessandri, "Interview with Pamela Morassi", Legislative Office – Foreign Policy, Lega Nord, 10 May 2008.

<sup>17</sup> From the Blog of On. Mario Borghezio, December 2007, <http://leganordopera.blogspot.com/2007/12/borghezio-ai-turchi-rispondiamo-siamo.html>; see also, On. Borghezio's remarks on the 2007 European Parliament Progress Report on Turkey, 21 May 2008, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=CRE&reference=20080521&secondRef=ITEM-004&language=IT&ring=A6-2008-0168>.

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.leganordarcene.org/edicola/pdf/TurchiaNoEuropa.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> See Camera dei Deputati, *Risoluzione in Assemblea 6-00017*, 21 June 2007, [http://banchedati.camera.it/sindacatoispettivo\\_15/showXhtml.asp?highLight=0&idAtto=13479&stile=6](http://banchedati.camera.it/sindacatoispettivo_15/showXhtml.asp?highLight=0&idAtto=13479&stile=6).

<sup>20</sup> See E. Alessandri, "Interview with Pamela Morassi", cit.

<sup>21</sup> See E. Alessandri, "Interview with Alessandro Pucci", head of International Dept., La Destra, 6 May 2008.

and if Europe solves its internal problems”.<sup>22</sup> What is suggested for the present is, as in the case of the Northern League, some form of partnership along the lines of Sakozy’s Union of the Mediterranean.

Yet despite these forces of resistance, we are unlikely to see coordinated action between the Communist parties, the Northern League and The Right, which are ideologically divided not only on the left-right spectrum, but also on issues such as federalism. When in government, these parties have not waged any major campaign, let alone abandoning governing coalitions, because of the Turkey question. The Northern League in particular may think twice before pushing forward a “no-Turkey-into-the-EU” campaign given that this would expose it to criticism of an important segment of its constituency – Northern businessmen and traders, in particular - who could see their interests undermined if EU-Turkey economic relations were to stall or deteriorate.

### *Some signs of change*

The picture presented above, which speaks of a wide although imperfect bipartisan support for Turkey’s EU membership, must be mapped against a “cooling off” of some sections of the Italian political establishment. The latter seems to be the product of both external and domestic factors. Among the former is the uncertain and often contradictory signals coming from Turkey, which have been the object of media attention in Italy, such as the exacerbating political tensions between the AKP and the Turkish establishment, or the fear of an AKP “hidden (Islamic) agenda”. Among the domestic factors, one may include growing euroscepticism and a tendency, particularly strong among Italian conservatives, to interpret Italy’s and Europe’s mission in today’s globalizing world as a “defense” of threatened “identities”.<sup>23</sup> The “fundamental” role that Christianity and the Church have had in the “Italian tradition” are increasingly emphasized by both representatives of the Centre Left and Centre Right.<sup>24</sup> The political beside spiritual and moral authority of the Pope, moreover, is sometimes mentioned, although nobody questions the secular character of the Italian Republic. Political leaders, especially those of the Center Right, have made recurrent references to the centrality of Christian values in domestic and foreign policy. This strong reaffirmation of Italy’s Christian identity has not led to date any parties to significantly change, let alone reverse, their official position on Turkey. Some interviewees, however, are ready

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> See the book that Marcello Pera co-authored with Joseph Ratzinger, *Senza radici. Europa, relativismo, cristianesimo, islam* (Milano: Mondadori, 2004). See also Marcello Veneziani, *Contro i barbari. La civiltà e i suoi nemici, interni ed esterni* (Milano: Mondadori, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> The Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, On. Gianfranco Fini, just to give an example of the presence and influence of such perspective in the public debate, has recently emphasized the “fundamental role” that Christianity has played in the “defense” of Italy’s “cultural identity” when pronouncing his inaugural speech which many commentators saw as laying out the political “ideology” of the present government and, more in general, of Italy’s conservative coalition. See On. Gianfranco Fini, Inaugural Address, Chamber of Deputies, Rome, 29 April 2008, full text is available at [http://www.camera.it/resoconti/resoconto\\_seduta.asp?idSeduta=1](http://www.camera.it/resoconti/resoconto_seduta.asp?idSeduta=1). The speech was acclaimed as “historic” because allegedly “ending the post-WWII era”: Fini is the political leader who completed the transition of the Italian Right to post-fascism in the delicate phase of the end of the Cold War. See Massimiliano Lussana, “Dal ghetto a Montecitorio. La lunga marcia di Gianfranco il ‘freddo’”, *Il Giornale*, 1 May 2008, p. 6, [http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco\\_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=HYLUS](http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=HYLUS).

to admit that within both Gianfranco Fini's Alleanza Nazionale ("National Alliance") and Berlusconi's Forza Italia, sceptics are on the rise.<sup>25</sup> Within the Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e di Centro (Union of Christian and Centrist Democrats), several are skeptical or opposed to Turkish membership, including MP Luca Volonté, one of the most proud and outspoken paladins of a Christian Europe.<sup>26</sup> The Northern League in particular succeeded in expanding its political constituency to Italy's Centre-North regions in the 2008 elections by emphasizing security, immigration control and employment all debated through an anti-EU, xenophobic and religion-imbued tone.

Whether these trends will in future amount to an authentic political "movement" opposing Turkey's EU membership as part of a broader campaign focused on the foreign policy implications of Italy's "Christian renaissance" is fairly improbable. Pushing against this are several factors. First, is the position of the Vatican which, since Pope Benedict XVI's apostolic visit to Turkey in 2006, seems to have dropped its previously expressed reservations on Turkey's EU accession.<sup>27</sup> Second, is the existence of strong economic interests in favour of closer Turkey-EU relations promoted by the Centre Right, and Mr. Berlusconi in particular. Third is a certain inclination among Italian conservative intellectuals and politicians to look at the AKP as a possible Turkish equivalent of their own parties. Indeed MP Marco Zacchera a leading representative of the National Alliance and member of the Chamber of Deputies Committee on Foreign Affairs, emphasizes that there has been a constructive dialogue between Italian conservatives and the AKP, including an exchange of delegations.<sup>28</sup> Paolo Quercia, a conservative intellectual working for "FareFuturo", a foundation close to the National Alliance, points out that many in the Centre Right are attracted to the AKP's "moderate" interpretation of Islam because to some extent it mirrors Italy's own religious revival. "The AKP", Quercia notes, "displays an outlook in some ways similar to the one of Italy's Centre Right parties: a liberal approach to economic issues coupled with a rediscovery of national identity, starting with religion".<sup>29</sup> "Some Italian conservatives", Sandro Magister, a renowned journalist from L'Espresso, notes, "see the AKP attempt to challenge the Kemalist interpretation of secularity as a right struggle against a repressive and intolerant interpretation of laïcité".<sup>30</sup> After all, the AKP has expressed its interest in joining the European Peoples' Party (EPP).<sup>31</sup> Watching the AKP with interest of course does not necessarily amount to an identification with it. As put by Yasmin Taskin, Turkish correspondent in Italy for Sabah: "the fact that the AKP challenges secularism in Turkey may well give leverage to Italian Catholics wishing to do the same in Italy; but the fact that Turkish politics is witnessing a revival of identity issues, including religion, may also be welcomed by Italian conservatives as a way to

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<sup>25</sup> See "Interview with Pamela Morassi", cit., E. Alessandri, "Interview with Luca Volonté", former Head of the Union of Christian Democrats group in the Chamber of Deputies, 3 April 2008; "Interview with Sandro Magister", vaticanist from L'Espresso Group, 6 May 2008; "Interview with Andrea Tornielli", vaticanist from Il Giornale, 14 May 2008.

<sup>26</sup> See "Interview with Luca Volonté", cit.

<sup>27</sup> See "Cardinal Ratzinger: Identifier la Turquie à l'Europe serait une erreur", *Le Figaro*, 13 April 2004.

<sup>28</sup> E. Alessandri, "Interview with Marco Zacchera", Alleanza Nazionale, 6 May 2008.

<sup>29</sup> "Interview with Paolo Quercia", cit.

<sup>30</sup> "Interview with Sandro Magister", cit.

<sup>31</sup> See Breffni O'Rourke, Turkey: "AKP tries to join European Conservative Group", *RFE/RL*, 6 April 2003, <http://www.rferl.org/content/Article/1102815.html>.



mark the differences between Italian society and Europe on the one hand, and Turkey and Islam on the other”.<sup>32</sup>

In sum, the picture remains mixed. What is safe to conclude is that the situation is fairly fluid and more complex than a few years ago when the debate on Turkey’s membership first started in Italy. Certain dynamics internal to Italian politics and society might nurture growing scepticism about Turkey’s European integration, especially if domestic developments in Turkey appears to Italians as pointing to greater religious radicalization rather than political stabilization. That scepticism would translate into a reversal of Italy’s official position is difficult to imagine however in view of the strategic and economic interests tying the two countries. “Unless Berlusconi himself changes his mind on the issue”, former Minister of Foreign Trade and EU policies, MP Emma Bonino, argues, “it is highly improbable that the Italian government will change its position in the next years”.<sup>33</sup> “Rather, what is more plausible to expect is that Italy will not support Turkey’s negotiations in Brussels in the years to come as actively as many hoped it would just a few years ago, when Rome and London were perhaps Turkey’s best friends in Europe”. In short, Italy’s green lights may well turn yellow, but are unlikely to turn red in the foreseeable future.

#### 4. Economic Stakeholders: “Turkey is already part of Europe”

##### *A Strong Economic Partnership*

Luca Cordero di Montezemolo, Italy’s former president of Confindustria, the leading organization representing Italian industry, recently pointed out that, from an economic standpoint, “Turkey is already in Europe”, meaning that, although still waiting for membership, Turkey is already integrated into the EU market.<sup>34</sup> In saying this, Mr. Montezemolo was in fact repeating a widely-shared concept among Italian entrepreneurs and traders. Well before Ankara’s EU bid, Italian firms turned to Turkey as a close and attractive market to be not only explored, but also integrated into the European one. The Italian government, influenced by Italy’s business community, was among the first in Europe in the 1960s to ask for the signing of a customs agreement between Turkey and the European Communities. FIAT, Italy’s leading car company, entered the Turkish market as early as the 1920s. In 1968, FIAT established a joint-venture with the Koç Group giving birth to Tofas, in Bursa, where FIAT’s “world car”, Palio, is now produced. “At FIAT, people like to think that Turkey is a chunk of Italy that has somehow slipped towards the Middle East”, says Enrico Franceschini, a journalist of *La Repubblica AUTO*.<sup>35</sup> Some of Italy’s “strategic” companies, such as Finmeccanica, the leading aerospace and defense firm, have a long history of doing

<sup>32</sup> E. Alessandri, “Interview with Yasmin Taskin”, Rome correspondent, *Sabah*, 7 May 2008.

<sup>33</sup> E. Alessandri, “Interview with Emma Bonino”, vice President of the Italian Senate, 22 May 2008.

<sup>34</sup> “Italia-Turchia: Montezemolo, per imprese Ankara già in UE”, *AGI*, 8 November 2007, available at <http://www.aziende-oggi.it/archives/00041157.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Enrico Franceschini, *La scommessa della Turchia*, [http://www.repubblica.it/online/auto\\_prima/flat100anni/otto/otto.html](http://www.repubblica.it/online/auto_prima/flat100anni/otto/otto.html). See also A. Ferigo, “Interview with FIAT Representative, anonymous”.

business with Turkey because of Italy-Turkey cooperation in NATO.<sup>36</sup> Italy's leading energy company, ENI, has significantly increased its presence in the Turkish market over the decades. In 1999, ENI signed a contract with Gazprom for Blue Stream, a pipeline connecting Russia to Turkey through the Black Sea. In 2007, it inaugurated Samsun, a 550 km-long pipeline which ENI built in partnership with Turkish Calik Group.<sup>37</sup>

In view of these business relations, one can speak of a true “economic lobby” in Italy favoring Turkey's EU entry, whose influence on the Italian government can be taken for granted. This “economic lobby”, which includes major energy companies (ENI, ENEL and EDISON), banking firms (Unicredit), car companies (FIAT), telecommunication companies (Telecom), defense firms (Finmeccanica and Fincantieri), is supported by several other firms whose interests in Turkey are growing. Among these: Eldor in the metallurgic sector and Omron in the field of electronics; ITALFERR in the engineering sector; Benetton, Chicco and Zegna in clothing and apparel, Barilla and Perfetti in the food sector; Valtur and Costa Crociere in tourism. Striking data pointing to a deepening interpenetration between the two economies, moreover, gives Italian firms presented or interested in the Turkish market further encouragement.<sup>38</sup>

### *Digging under the surface*

Against this background, it seems fairly safe to conclude that, as far as Italian economic stakeholders are concerned, Turkey's accession is strongly supported. Yet digging deeper two questions deserve further discussion.

First, is the question of whether Turkey's EU accession may incite resistance amongst the economic losers from increased Turkish competition. Here the magic word, often repeated by interviewees, is “compatibility”.<sup>39</sup> Here many argue that Italy has nothing to lose from Turkey's integration into the EU, because the comparative advantages of the two economies dovetail rather than compete. In particular, the trend so far has seen Italy exporting to Turkey mainly intermediate goods, technology, and know-how, and importing raw materials, textiles, clothing, leather products, and plastic. The concept of compatibility, however, has to be qualified. Compatibility, indeed describes the situation at the macro level, but does not do justice to all sectors of the Italian economy. Concerns about the competitiveness of Turkish products are not uncommon among Italian agricultural firms and transport companies.<sup>40</sup> Maurizio Reale from Coldiretti, Coldiretti, the leading organization of Italian farmers, points out that “when it comes to fruits and vegetables competition is already a reality” pointing to the fact that 32% of the Turkish population is employed in agriculture and that Turkish

<sup>36</sup> See E. Alessandri, “Interview with Giovanni Soccodato”, director of Strategies, Finmeccanica, 15 May 2008. See also, Giovanni Gasparini (ed.), *Turkey and European Security*, IAI-TEPAV Report, Roma, Istituto Affari Internazionali, February 2007, [http://www.iai.it/pdf/Quaderni/Quaderni\\_E\\_8.pdf](http://www.iai.it/pdf/Quaderni/Quaderni_E_8.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> See ENI website, [http://www.eni.it/en\\_IT/eni-world/turkey/projects/blue-stream.shtml](http://www.eni.it/en_IT/eni-world/turkey/projects/blue-stream.shtml).

<sup>38</sup> See data provided in the background section.

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, *Forum: La Turchia in Europa*, Associazione Europa Cultura, Trieste, 19 November 2007; the video of the event is available at Radio Radicale, <http://www.radioradicale.it/scheda/240135/la-turchia-in-europa>. See also E. Alessandri, “Interview with Giuseppe Scognamiglio”, diplomatic advisor, Unicredit Group, 7 April 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem. See also E. Alessandri, “Interview with Lucio De Michele”, diplomatic counselor, Italian Embassy in Ankara, 24 April 2008.

farmers are more than EU farmers combined.<sup>41</sup> However, while being aware of the Turkish challenge, Coldiretti admits that it would be short-sighted to resist this development. “[w]e do not oppose such a development”, Maurizio Reale explains, “what we ask for is the maximum degree of transparency in the negotiations in Brussels and the adoption in Turkey of all regulations and standards that are respected by farmers in the EU”.<sup>42</sup> On the delicate subject of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Coldiretti does not see insurmountable obstacles, declaring itself confident that fair decisions will be made in Brussels. “By the time these decisions will be taken”, Maurizio Reale explains, “Italy would hopefully be less dependent on funds and will have a modern, fully self-sustaining, agricultural sector”.<sup>43</sup> Hence intuitive the hypothesis that Italian farmers, traditionally leaning towards Christian Democrats, could be mobilized in an anti-Turkey campaign by religion coupled with economic arguments, this eventuality looks in today’s Italy highly implausible.<sup>44</sup>

Second is the question of whether Italian economic stakeholders could settle for less than membership, in view of the EU-Turkey custom union. Italian firms have indeed already accepted to do business with Turkey in a context of less than full integration and could be satisfied with doing more of the same. Yet some key members of the Italian “Turkish lobby” have based their investment plans on reasonable expectations of Turkey’s full membership in future. These firms underline that EU membership comes with a set of norms and regulations providing Italian exporters and investors with further assurances about the openness and stability of the Turkish market.<sup>45</sup> Membership also guarantees Turkey’s political stability and the economic diligence of Turkish governments. Unicredit in particular insists on this point by stressing that its strategy of expansion to foreign markets has targeted only those countries whose prospect for membership was realistic.<sup>46</sup> “Banking companies,” Giuseppe Scognamiglio from Unicredit emphasizes, “have a clear stake in the political stability of the country in which they operate. We do not just export commodities or provide services .. we provide capitals and actively contribute to the development of a country”, he explains. “This requires that the system as a whole is healthy and the EU demands exactly this by tying membership to a wide set of political and economic standards”.<sup>47</sup> These views are interesting in so far as they suggest that, often more so than political stakeholders, Italian economic stakeholders have incorporated in their economic strategies the logic underpinning EU enlargement.

This overview of Italian economic stakeholders would not be complete without an analysis Italian trade unions. Their opinion seems generally in favour of Turkey’s accession, if this means more norms regulating the Turkish market and more rights for Turkish labour. Giorgio Cipriani, trade unionist at FIAT, stresses that what happens in Turkey is of direct concern to Italian unionists, because of the ties between the two economies. “I’m in favor of Turkey joining the EU”, he explains, “because in my long

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<sup>41</sup> E. Alessandri, “Interview with Maurizio Reale”, head of Coldiretti External Relations Dept, 17 April 2008.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> This does not amount to excluding, however, that farmers might in the future decide to organize an autonomous campaign, mobilization having proved successful (in terms of participation if not results) in other cases such as for European “milk quotas”.

<sup>45</sup> “Interview with Giuseppe Scognamiglio”, cit.; “Interview with Giovanni Soccodato”, cit.

<sup>46</sup> “Interview with Giuseppe Scognamiglio”, cit.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*

experience as a unionist I realized that what interests that society are largely the same as what interests ours, although sometimes different in scope and scale”.<sup>48</sup> “Membership”, he clarifies, “can be granted only if social beside economic standards are met ... unions will keep heading in the direction that we already chose: exchanges of delegations, education and training, joint campaigns and other expressions of solidarity”. Gianni Italia, director of Iscos (Institute for Unionist Cooperation), confirms that among Italian unionists Turkey’s future membership in the EU is generally supported, even if some fear that advocating Turkey’s membership could expose the unions to the anti-immigration campaign that is already underway in politics. “I have several connections with Turkish unions”, he stresses, “and the best way to help them is to promote the European social model – is it then possible to propose a model while at the same time closing the doors to full membership?”<sup>49</sup>.

A last element worth adding to this overview is the role of the Italian regions in promoting economic ties between Italy and Turkey.<sup>50</sup> Some regions have organized “business missions” to Istanbul, Ankara and other economic poles in the country, with the objective of socializing Italian investors and traders with the culture, beside the economic environment, of contemporary Turkey. Particularly proactive in this respect have been the regions of Lombardia, Puglia, Marche and Friuli, the latter being a self-styled “border region” with a long tradition of openness to foreign cultures.<sup>51</sup>

## 5. The Public Debate: Open but not Informed Enough

### *The need for more and better information*

If the concept of “public opinion” is highly problematic because elusive to say the least, what is safe to say is that the media plays a critical role in shaping it. A survey of the Italian stakeholders in the “Turkey question” must thus also account for the role of the media in Italy’s debate on the Turkey question.<sup>52</sup>

Most interviewees, and many Italian journalists, recognize that the “Turkey question” has been covered, but that the Italian public debate remains nonetheless rather uninformed: “Interest in what is happening in Turkey has grown in the past few years and this is very positive”, Turkish journalist Yasmin Taskin recognizes, “but not all newspapers have offered as deep and detailed an analysis as the highly complex issues covered would have deserved”.<sup>53</sup> Many interviewees worry that Italians have a vague understanding of the issues at stake in Turkey-EU relations and poor knowledge of contemporary Turkey.<sup>54</sup> Interviewees also point out that information has been insufficient both on Turkey and the accession process: “[m]edia, be it radio, television

<sup>48</sup> A. Ferigo, “Interview with Giorgio Cipriani”, trade unionist, FIAT.

<sup>49</sup> A. Ferigo, “Interview with Gianni Italia”, Director, Istituto sindacale per la cooperazione allo sviluppo ISCOS CISL.

<sup>50</sup> “Interview with Lucio De Michele”, cit.

<sup>51</sup> See Antonio Paletti, President of Trieste’s Chamber of Commerce, in *Forum: La Turchia in Europa*, cit.

<sup>52</sup> This section of the study is based both on interviews and on a screening of news regarding Turkey (major newspapers and TV channels) between 2006 and 2008.

<sup>53</sup> “Interview with Yasmin Taskin”, cit.

<sup>54</sup> See E. Alessandri, “Interview with Giampaolo Carbonetto”, *Messaggero Veneto*, and President of Associazione Europa Cultura, 21 April 2008.

or the press, has mobilized only sporadically and in connection to specific events, such as official visits, or folkloristic or tragic events”, Giampaolo Carbonetto from the *Messaggero Veneto* laments.<sup>55</sup> Finally, it is complained that news covering important and complex issues, such as the evolution of Turkey’s political system especially after the 2007 elections, have often received less attention, especially on television, than news covering tragic, but politically less relevant stories, such as the recent assassination of Pippa Bacca, an Italian artist who was raped and murdered near Istanbul on her way to Palestine.<sup>56</sup>

Beyond scarce coverage, the media debate on Turkey has been fairly open with both supporters and opponents airing their views on the Turkey question.<sup>57</sup> Openness has meant also that stereotype and prejudice have infiltrated the debate. The latter have surfaced especially in newspapers close to political opponents of Turkey’s EU bid, such as, for example, *La Padania*, the newspaper of the Northern League.<sup>58</sup> Here, the frequent and simplistic associations are made between Turkey and Islam. A case of a deliberately very violent commentary has been that of the former head of the Union of the Christian Democrats representation in parliament, MP Luca Volonté, a frequent contributor to some of Italy’s major newspapers. Volonté has blended his staunch defense of Christian values with vitriolic anti-Turkey rhetoric: “subtly introducing Turkey into a democracy or in a democratic continent like Europe, like the germs of a virus reducing human rights and favoring intolerant Islamization, looks like suicide to me that we do not deserve”, Volonté recently wrote when commenting on Turkish domestic developments.<sup>59</sup> To be fair, both in *La Padania* and in the articles of Luca Volonté, stereotypes have been more the vehicle than the content of the message, which, when fully articulated, generally contain more moderate claims. When interviewed, for instance, Volonté argued against Turkey’s membership by pointing out that the Copenhagen criteria are not fully respected in Turkey given the violation of human rights and religious freedoms (to him one a key source of human rights).<sup>60</sup>

#### *Explaining peaks: the focus on religion*

What explains when and why the sporadic debate on Turkey in Italy is activated? To some extent of course this is a general trend affecting unfortunately news in general. To a degree, however, this has also reflected a more or less conscious list of priorities on the part of Italian journalists and commentators covering Turkey and Turkey-related news. If some of these “peaks” in media coverage can be considered as “natural”, (among these: the 1998 Öcalan affair; the 2005 launch of accession negotiations; or the 2007 Turkish elections), other peaks reflect a particular “sensitivity” in Italian public opinion to issues involving religion.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>56</sup> See [http://www.corriere.it/cronache/08\\_aprile\\_12/pippa\\_strangolata\\_8d6750a0-0888-11dd-883b-00144f486ba6.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/cronache/08_aprile_12/pippa_strangolata_8d6750a0-0888-11dd-883b-00144f486ba6.shtml).

<sup>57</sup> “Interview with Fabio Amato”, cit.

<sup>58</sup> See <http://www.lapadania.com>.

<sup>59</sup> Luca Volonté, “Turchia in Europa? Sarebbe introdurre germi di intollerante Islam”, *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 20 September 2007, p.23, [http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco\\_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=MAAB](http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=MAAB).

<sup>60</sup> “Interview with Luca Volonté”, cit.

In the recent past, news coming from Turkey that have attracted media attention and aroused debate on television and in the press have generally been those highlighting Turkey's uncertain future as a secular democracy (e.g., Don Andrea Santoro's murder in Turkey in 2006, the headscarf issue in 2007 and the closure case against the AKP in 2008). What is interesting in this respect is not the coverage of the news itself, but the way the news has been dealt with. On this last aspect, the considerations that can be made, however provisional and to a large extent impressionistic, are mainly two. First, newspapers leaning towards political parties that support Turkey's EU membership, have recently hosted articles analysing with concern Turkey's domestic developments, interpreting these as instances of an ongoing religious radicalization or even "Islamization" of the country. This is particularly the case of conservative newspapers such as *Il Giornale* and *Liberio*.<sup>61</sup> Second, growing concerns about Turkey's domestic developments have not to date been systematically extended to the question of Turkey's EU membership and its future in Europe. If this were to happen, then the "Turkey question" could well become an item of broader domestic debate, where religious or religious-related issues seem to attract growing attention and where contentious questions such as immigration are often approached from a religious perspective too. A recent survey by the Ministry of Interior together with Makno & Consulting, for instance, shows that the majority of Italians considers "Muslim immigration" as posing greater risks to Italy than immigration of other groups.<sup>62</sup> An Italian out of three, according to the same survey, opposes the construction of mosques in Italy not just because of the connections that might be established between sites of worship and terrorist activities, but simply for a matter of religion and culture.

Whether this merging between the debate on Turkey and other religion-loaded debates will materialize remains highly speculative, although some signs of this tendency can be detected.<sup>63</sup> As to the possible effects of this trend, much would depend on the reaction of "Christian public opinion", a convenient phrase to identify the segment of the Italian public which is particularly sensitive to religious considerations because inspired by a Christian approach not only to ethics, but also to politics. Christian public opinion is fairly strong in Italy and includes among its most outspoken members some Catholic intellectuals and political leaders who subscribe to a Christian interpretation of Europe's political future according to which EU's borders should not extend to encompass Turkey.<sup>64</sup> A factor that could activate this sector of the Italian public and affect its position on Turkey would be the opposition of the Holy See itself to Turkey's membership. Generally, the Vatican has not expressed an official opinion

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<sup>61</sup> See, for instance, the articles by Filippo Facci on *Il Giornale* and other newspapers. See the article by Rino Camilleri, "Quell'omicidio allontana la Turchia dall'Europa," *Il Giornale*, 27 January 2007, p. 10, [http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco\\_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=D9P4W](http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=D9P4W). See also Carlo Taormina, "Sulla Turchia nella UE l'Italia dia ascolto alla lezione di Sarkozy", *Liberio*, 31 August 2007, p. 11, [http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco\\_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=F4Y6](http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=F4Y6).

<sup>62</sup> See Osservatorio sociale sulle immigrazioni, *1° rapporto sugli immigrati in Italia*, December 2007, [http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/sezioni/sala\\_stampa/notizie/immigrazione/0809\\_2\\_008\\_04\\_29\\_ricerche\\_immigrazione.html](http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/sezioni/sala_stampa/notizie/immigrazione/0809_2_008_04_29_ricerche_immigrazione.html).

<sup>63</sup> See "Interview with Sandro Magister", cit.

<sup>64</sup> See, for instance, the position of On. Rocco Buttiglione, one of the prominent leaders of the Union of Christian Democrats, and of On. Marcello Pera, former President of the Italian Senate. See, in particular, *Senza radici*, cit.

on the issue and will probably refrain from doing so in future.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, from this standpoint the situation looks safe at the moment given the Pope's recent turn on this question.<sup>66</sup> This opening was confirmed by the statements made by the Pope's Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone in 2007.<sup>67</sup> As Franca Giansoldati from *Il Messaggero* notes, "what the Pope is seeking is juridical recognition of the Christian church in Turkey .. something that is missing today and is therefore the object of bargaining between the Vatican and Turkish authorities in the context also of Turkey's negotiations with the EU".<sup>68</sup> This orientation of the Vatican seems confirmed by a growing emphasis on the part of clergy on that fact that Turkey is one of the cradles of Christianity, thus a land that cannot be excluded from Europe and the rest of "Christendom". Franca Giansoldati underlines that the decision of Benedict XVI to declare June 2008-June 2009 the year of St. Paulus is an occasion for Catholics to rediscover the mission of the saint in Asia minor, starting with Turkey.<sup>69</sup>

Hence, the attitude of the Vatican, if confirmed in the future, could even be an important factor to defuse the potential "short circuit" that the merging of different and potentially explosive debates on religion and Turkey's EU membership could create. Will this be enough to keep the debate focused on the pros and cons for Italy and Europe of Turkey's EU membership? This remains unknown now and much will depend both on Turkey's internal developments and the power of other Italian stakeholders that might be contingently or strategically interested in making a manipulative use of the "Turkey question".

## 6. Testing Public-Elite Opinion on the "Turkey Question": a Quantitative Perspective

Italian public opinion has generally supported EU enlargement. However, on cultural and religious grounds, Italians put Turkish EU membership under critical scrutiny. According to the Special Eurobarometer 255 Report on 'Attitudes towards European Union Enlargement' (2006)<sup>70</sup>, Italians are the most welcoming of the idea of enlargement considering it "a good way to reunite European continent" (68%), "a good way to communicate EU solidarity to potential candidates" (64%), a means that "will strengthen the EU" (64 %), an instrument that "ensures peace and stability in Europe" (66%), "strengthens the role of EU on the international scene" (67%), "promotes democracy in Europe" (67%), "reinforces the power of the EU to fight criminality and terrorism" (61%), "enriches Europe's cultural diversity (68%)<sup>71</sup>, "facilitates mobility of

<sup>65</sup> See E. Alessandri, "Interview with Giuseppe Fiorentino", *Osservatore Romano*, May 18 2008.

<sup>66</sup> See, *Cardinal Ratzinger: Identifier la Turquie à l'Europe serait une erreur*, cit. See also E. Alessandri, "Interview with Andrea Tornielli", cit.

<sup>67</sup> See the interview with Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone by Marco Tosatti, "Turchia in Europa? La Chiesa dice sì", *La Stampa*, 30 May 2007, p. 15, [http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco\\_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=EJEXA](http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=EJEXA).

<sup>68</sup> E. Alessandri, "Interview with Franca Giansoldati", *vaticanist* from *Il Messaggero*, 22 May 2008.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>70</sup> Available at [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_255\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_255_en.pdf).

<sup>71</sup> Italians are the third strongest opponents of the idea that the enlargement "makes cultural identities and traditions disappear" (57%).

people within Europe” (72%)<sup>72</sup>, and “ensures better integration of populations from future member states in the EU” (60%). Yet, as far as Turkey is concerned, the results are far from positive. Furthermore, Italian political elites (MPs and MEPs) hold more positive views than the public. What explains this divide?<sup>73</sup>

In light of the previous discussion, what is of particular interest is to analyse Italian public and elite attitudes towards Turkish membership with a specific focus on the question of religion and Islam: “how do Italian people and political elites answer the question of whether Muslim Turkey is compatible with EU membership and democracy?” This implies also a set of related questions such as ‘would a Muslim country like Turkey fit into the EU?’, ‘does Turkish Islam have characteristics that stand in the way of the country’s accession?’, ‘does the fact that the majority of Turkey’s population is Muslim constitute a reason for Italians to develop negative/positive attitudes towards Turkey’s EU membership?’

Available data shows that between 2004 and 2007 both public and elite support for Turkey’s membership decreased.<sup>74</sup> Erosion of support was larger among elites between 2004 and 2007 than among the general public.<sup>75</sup> This trend, however, did not change the overall picture which sees the public being less supportive than elites. With respect to Italian MPs who were strongly positive (74%) on Turkish membership in 2004, the Italian MEPs in Brussels approached to the issue less optimistically (58%) in recent years (2006 and 2007) (Figure 1). Interestingly the Italian public approached the issue of Turkey’s EU membership in a seemingly more indifferent way in 2007.

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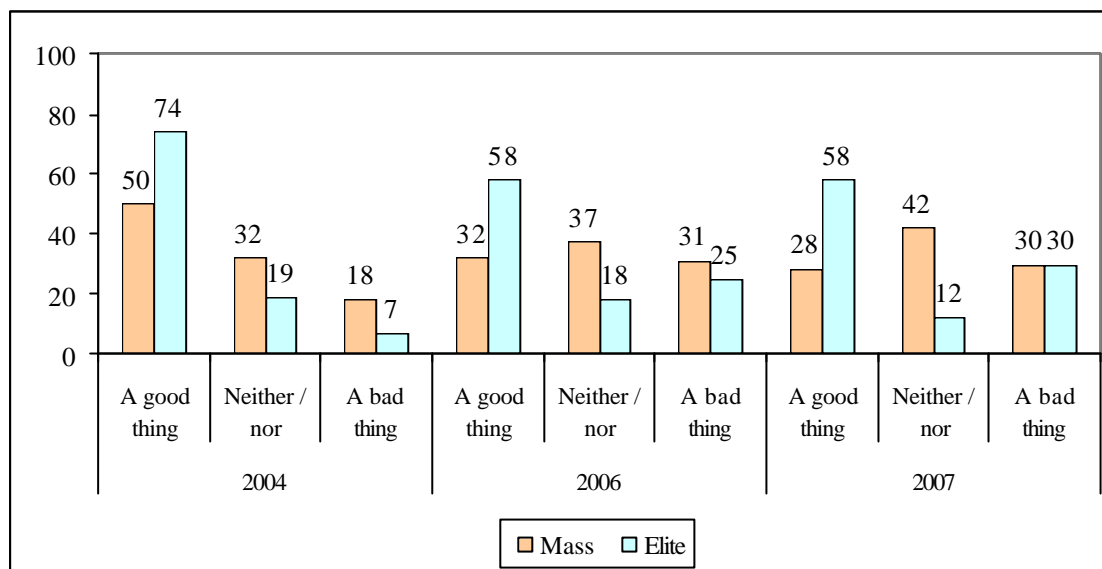
<sup>72</sup> Thirty-nine percent of Italians disagree with the assumption that enlargement increases illegal immigration in Europe.

<sup>73</sup> This section relies on the *Italian Elite Survey* (2004) and *European Elite Surveys* (2006 and 2007) on Italian elites which provide a comprehensive tool to carry out comparative analyses of elite (MEPs and MPs) and mass attitudes in Italy on the question of Turkey, Islam and the EU membership ([http://www.gips.unisi.it/circa/ees\\_overview](http://www.gips.unisi.it/circa/ees_overview)). It is noteworthy to point out that these selected surveys contain the identical questions asked in the *Transatlantic Trends Surveys* (<http://www.transatlantictrends.org>).

<sup>74</sup> All surveys studied here, include the same thermometer question that reads as: “Next I’d like to rate your feelings toward some countries, institutions, and people, with 100 meaning a very warm, favourable feeling, 0 meaning a very cold, unfavourable feeling, and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold. You can use any number from 0 to 100. If you have no opinion or have never heard of that country or institution, please say so: - Turkey”. The question measures “feelings about Turkey” and tells us how warm public and elite feels on a scale from 0 to 100 degrees towards Turkey – regardless of its EU candidacy or other aspects.

<sup>75</sup> The feelings thermometer on Turkey results are: Mass: 2004 – 43°, 2006 – 39°, 2007 – 38°; Elites: 2004 – 66°, 2006 – 50°, 2007 – 52°.



**Figure 1.** - Turkish membership of the EU “good”, “neither/nor” or “bad”

Source: TTS (2004, 2006, 2007), IES (2004), EES (2006, 2007)

See ANNEX II for question wording.

Note: 2004:  $N_{mass} = 903$ ,  $N_{MPs} = 54$ ; 2006:  $N_{mass} = 932$ ,  $N_{MEPs} = 40$ ; 2007:  $N_{mass} = 1009$ ,  $N_{MEPs} = 40$

What can explain the public-elite opinion cleavage on Turkish membership? The TTS (2004) and IES (2004) surveys contained two filter questions: “What is the main reason why you think Turkey’s membership of the EU would be a (a) good thing? (b) bad thing?” The main reason why Italian public opinion favored Turkish membership was that “it would help the EU promote peace and stability in the Middle East” (38%). However, elites declared themselves more confident (49%) that Turkish membership would “strengthen moderate Islam as a model in the Muslim world” (Table 1). For those instead that viewed Turkey’s membership as a ‘bad’ thing, responses included “Turkey’s ‘problematic’ democracy” (34%) and “Turkey’s predominantly Muslim population” (32%) (Table 1).<sup>76</sup> These reasons identified two main areas of concern: ‘Islam’ and ‘Turkey’s record with democracy’, and the perceived link between the two.

**Table 1.** - Why is Turkey’s membership a “good” and “bad” thing?

	Mass	Elite
<i>Turkish membership is</i>		
<i>“a good thing”</i>		
<i>because...<sup>a</sup></i>		
It would help the EU promote peace and stability in the Middle East	38	41
It would have a positive effect on Muslim communities in other European countries	25	10
Turkey’s membership would be good in economic terms for the EU	11	--

<sup>76</sup> The IES study found no valid result on this question; Italian elite gave “Don’t know” answer to this question.

Turkey's membership will strengthen moderate Islam as a model in the Muslim world	26	49
Total	100	100
<hr/>		
<i>"a bad thing" because</i>		
<i>...<sup>b</sup></i>		
As a predominantly Muslim country, Turkey does not belong in the EU	32	--
It would drag the EU in the Middle East conflict	16	--
Turkey is [too poor or too populous] to be digested in a growing EU	5	--
It would make the running of the European institutions more complicated	13	--
Turkey's democracy is still problematic	34	--

Source: TTS 2004 and IES 2004.

<sup>a</sup> Question: "What is the main reason why you think Turkey's membership of the EU would be a good thing?"

<sup>b</sup> Question: "What is the main reason why you think Turkey's membership to the EU would be a bad thing?"

### *The Islamic 'threat' and 'Muslim' Turkey in the EU?*

In 2004, Islamic fundamentalism for Italian MPs surpassed the importance of issues such as illegal immigration, terrorist attacks with weapons of mass destruction, or an economic crisis. The Italian public perceived it a bigger threat (54%) than elites did. By 2006, the threat of Islamic fundamentalism was viewed as a more serious threat for the masses, while elite perception of Islamic fundamentalism as an "extremely important" threat shrunk by 2% since 2004.

The threat hypothesis analysed here is, therefore, "if Islamic fundamentalism were perceived as an important threat to Europe, then this would cause negative feelings towards Turkey accession to the European Union". As shown in Table 2, in 2004 a vast majority of Italian MPs who perceived Islamic fundamentalism as an "extremely important threat" favoured Turkish membership even more strongly (86%). Between 2004 and 2006 Italian public opinion became more agnostic towards Turkish membership as much as they perceived Islamic fundamentalism as an important threat. By 2006, Italian public opinion was significantly driven by the idea that (1) Islamic fundamentalism was a global threat; and (2) it fashioned Turkish membership as a contentious topic.<sup>77</sup> However, Italian MEPs, even if they perceived Islamic fundamentalism as an important threat to Europe (72%), believed that Turkish membership would be "a good thing". In sum, ordinary Italians were more negative towards Turkish membership as they felt more threatened by Islamic fundamentalism.

<sup>77</sup> Note that there was no significant correlation between threat perception and opinion on Turkish membership in terms of public attitudes. Yet, as regards Italian elite, those who found Islamic fundamentalism as an important threat (74%) and not an important threat (74%) were both in concordance with the idea that Turkish membership was a "good thing".

**Table 2.** - Cross-tabulation of “Turkish membership” by “Islamic fundamentalism a threat” (%)

		<i>“Islamic fundamentalism a threat”</i>			
		<i>Mass</i>		<i>Elite</i>	
		Yes <sup>b</sup>	No	Extremely important <sup>c</sup>	Important
<b>2004</b>	<b><i>Turkish membership is...</i></b> <i>a</i>				
	A good thing	74	74	86	95
	A bad thing	26	26	14	5
	Total (N)	571	42	21	21
	Chi-square (? <sup>2</sup> )		,001		1,105
	Df		1		1
<b>2006</b>	<b><i>Turkish membership is...</i></b> <i>a</i>	Yes <sup>b</sup>	No	Yes <sup>d</sup>	No
	A good thing	49	78	72	50
	A bad thing	51	22	28	50
	Total (N)	532	40	29	4
	Chi-square (? <sup>2</sup> )		12,200 *		0, 836
	Df		1		1
<b>2007</b>	<b><i>Turkish membership is...</i></b> <i>a</i>	Likely <sup>e</sup>	Not likely	Likely <sup>e</sup>	Not likely
	A good thing	42	63	58	73
	A bad thing	58	37	42	27
	Total (N)	378	202	19	15
	Chi-square (? <sup>2</sup> )		23,390 *		,875
	Df		1		1

Source: TTS (2004, 2006, 2007), IES (2004), EES (2006, 2007)

<sup>a</sup> “Neither good nor bad” response category is excluded from the analysis. See Annex II for question wording.

<sup>b</sup> The question of “Islamic fundamentalism as a threat” is recoded into two response categories as (1) [Yes = extremely important threat + important threat] and (0) [No = not an important threat]. DK’s are not included into the analysis (missing values).

<sup>c</sup> The frequency of response category ‘not important at all’ is 0. Therefore, it is not presented in the table. DK’s are not included into the analysis (missing values).

<sup>d</sup> The question of “Islamic fundamentalism as a threat” is recoded into two response categories as (1) [Yes = very important threat + somewhat important threat] and (0) [No = not very important threat + not an important threat at all]. DK’s are not included into the analysis (missing values).

<sup>e</sup> The question of “Islamic fundamentalism as a threat” is recoded into two categories as (1) [very likely threat + somewhat likely threat] and (0) [not too likely threat + not likely threat at all]. DK’s are not included into the analysis (missing values).

\* p < 0.05

### *The dialectic of ‘Islam and Western democracy’*

In 2006, asking “Do you feel that the values of Islam are compatible with the values of [country]’s democracy?” delivered an interesting gap of belief structures

between elite and public. Italian elites believed twice more strongly than the public that Islamic values and democracy were compatible (68% and 32%, respectively). As for the line of reasoning followed by both public and elites, those who saw these two values as incompatible linked their argument to a problem of 'Islam in general' (51% public versus 33% elites). On the other hand, Italian elites were more concerned about the problem of particular Islamic groups (67% versus 49% public) that generated a problem with Islam and democracy.

The question of Islam-democracy compatibility was correlated with an assessment of Turkey's membership of the EU. Most Italians - elite and public - support the idea that Turkish membership is "a good thing" in so far as they believe that Islam is compatible with democracy (Table 3). Yet the Italian elite (82%) was much more ( $p < 0.05$ ) in favour of this view (Table 3).

**Table 3.** - Cross-tabulation of "Turkish membership" by "Islam-democracy compatibility" (%)

	<i>"Islam compatible with democracy"</i>			
	<i>Mass</i>		<i>Elite</i>	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
<i>Turkish membership is...<sup>a</sup></i>				
A good thing	71	40	82	38
A bad thing	29	60	18	63
Total (N)	170	369	22	8
Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ )	44,154 **		5,487*	
Df	1		1	

Source: TTS and EES (2006) Surveys

<sup>a</sup> See footnote to Table 2.

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$

To conclude, *Islamofobia* subsists in the severe form of 'Islamic fundamentalist threat' in the minds of 'ordinary Italians' who link the political issue of Turkish membership to a cultural religious dynamic. If religious fundamentalism becomes more of a serious threat, it is mostly likely to hear ascendant blasts of "*Mamma li Turchi!*". This analysis also highlights that while popular attention to radical Islamic terrorism creates a polarisation over Turkey's membership of the EU, elite awareness on the independence of these two shows potential and good prospects for Turkish membership. The democratic credentials of Islam provoke a cultural vicinity between Italians and Turks, hence feeds a positive Italian approach of 'bridging the cultural gap' with Turkish membership of the EU. A majority of Italian public and elite considers Turkey's membership "a good thing" thanks to the awareness that 'Islam and democracy' are congruent and that Turkey's Muslim democracy may provide a bridge between civilizations.

## 7. Implications for an Effective Communication Strategy

An effective Communication Strategy is not necessarily one that aims to promote Turkey's accession process, but rather one that "communicates Turkey to the

EU and the EU to Turkey” without simplifications, deformations and manipulations so that all relevant stakeholders can come up with an informed opinion based on a balanced assessment of the pros and cons. When applied to the case of Italy, this line of reasoning means that the “right” Communication Strategy should not be one aimed at building support for Turkey’s membership into the EU, a support that is already fairly widespread among key stakeholders, although average Italians are much more tepid on the issue. The goal, rather, should be to make both supporters and opponents more informed, so that they can base their arguments on more solid grounds, or may even reverse their original opinions if recognized as mistaken. The key word, therefore, seems to be information.

It has been pointed out that some sources of opposition exist among Italian stakeholders. At the political level, concerns range from Turkey’s unsolved Kurdish question to its restricted rights and freedoms, all serious objections that call for an open and in-depth debate on EU conditionality and Turkey’s transformation. The complaint of some that the Kurdish question does not find adequate coverage in the media is a further reason to open at the national level a discussion on these crucial aspects of the “Turkey question”. Other stakeholders instead raise the specter of massive and uncontrollable immigration from Turkey. Sometimes, this concern is coupled with a prejudice that Turkish immigrants, indiscriminately, would perturb domestic order just because they are “Muslims” and therefore not just different but intolerant, if not “evil”. In this case, data regarding existing immigration flows from Turkey to Italy should be made available as well as more general data regarding trends in emigration from Turkey. Another important piece of information would be data regarding the increase, if any, of migration flows from accession countries after EU membership was granted. This data would be of interest not only to those stakeholders which have played up the immigration card, but to Italian workers, and especially low-skilled ones, who could be concerned about the impact of entry on the Italian job market. Other relevant data would be that regarding the Turkish community already living in Italy which is rather small and well-educated and almost all regularly employed, as stressed by Deniz Erdogan, First Secretary at the Turkish Embassy in Rome.<sup>78</sup>

At the economic level, two seem to be the priorities: 1 - providing information as to how the Turkish labour market will be reformed before membership. Some, especially among Italian unionists, fear that the Italian “Turkish lobby”’s interest in Turkey has to do not only with the availability of work force that that market offers but also with its present deregulation; 2- articulating further both the concepts of “compatibility” and “competitiveness” in order to know what the comparative advantages of the two economies will be after Turkey was included in the EU. A debate, moreover, should be opened regarding how CAP would be reformed as a consequence of Turkey’s inclusion in the EU.

In general, the most urgent task seems to be to provide more information, and better one, on contemporary Turkey, including its more recent developments at the social, cultural, and political levels. Turkey has been going through a very delicate transformation in the past few years whose final outcome is still unknown to Turks and other Europeans alike. The unpredictability of future scenarios calls for a more informed debate, unburdening the discussion of deceiving and misleading misperceptions. These, be noted, seem to be present, although not equally, both in the

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<sup>78</sup> E. Alessandri, “Interview with Deniz Erdogan”.

viewpoint of those who favour and those who oppose membership. Just to point out some of the former, it is worth noting that political stakeholders supporting membership often emphasize the common “Mediterranean identity” of both Italy and Turkey. The concept of “Mediterraneity”, however, is much more appealing in Italy for obvious historical and geographical reasons than it is in Turkey, a country that is used to think of its national interests as encompassing a much broader region.<sup>79</sup> References to Turkey’s “Mediterranean identity”, moreover, might be interpreted in Ankara (and sometimes has been) as meaning that membership in the EU could be downscaled to membership in a Mediterranean Union.<sup>80</sup> A second example of misperceptions affecting supporters of Turkey’s membership is that little attention is paid in Italy to the “integration capacity” debate in Brussels despite the fact that everybody recognizes, starting with the opponents of membership, that it deals with crucial and critical aspects of the accession process. Supporters of membership, lastly, seem to engage with opponents on their own ground. The equation of Turkey with Islam is a case in point. Suggesting that the inclusion of Turkey would mean that Europe is interesting in laying a bridge towards Islam and the Middle East may be a legitimate opinion, but as an argument, it should be clarified and qualified, if anything because it avails itself of notions, such as “Islam” itself, that are very broad and complex. The risk is not introducing the issue of religion in the “Turkey question” – first of all, because it already is part of it, and second, because it is a legitimate topic of discussion –but to have the “Turkey question” reduced, in a sense, to a issue of religion with all the simplifications and manipulations that this would likely imply.

On this last point, religion, the paper has attempted to highlight the potential problems and dangers by discussing, among other things, the role that “Christian public opinion” could have (and to some extent, already has) in this debate. The situation emerging from this paper may be described as both “safe” and fluid. It is safe not because religion has not prevented to date from looking at Turkey as both a Muslim and a European society, but because it has not created so far a “short circuit” with other contentious debates that have following in Italy, such as the one on immigration, where biases and prejudices often underpin the religion-loaded arguments that surround the main bones of contention. The situation is also fluid, however, because it has been noted that some stakeholders have attempted to merge the debate on Turkey with other domestic debates with the more or less conscious purpose of using the “Turkey question” as proxy of other campaigns. Fluidity, lastly, has to do with the simple fact that Italian Catholics seem to be divided on the issue of “Turkey’s EU membership”, with many voicing an opposition that could spread to “Christian public opinion” at large.

Even here, the solution does not come from removing religious considerations from the debate, but to provide as much information as possible both on the internal situation of Turkey, starting with the current state of its secular institutions and of its democratic system, and on the position of other Christians in Italy but in rest of Europe too. What seems lacking, in fact, is an open debate on the issue where institutional and private positions are both acknowledged and known, and where opinions are not formed

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<sup>79</sup> See “Interview with Lucio De Michele”, cit.

<sup>80</sup> See “Interview with Deniz Erdogan”, cit. In this respect, it is worthwhile pointing out that at a meeting in Rome in December 2007, the Spanish and Italian governments came on board on condition that the recent French proposal of a “Union of the Mediterranean”, if adopted, would not jeopardize Turkey’s accession process

in advance, presuming a certain situation in Turkey and a certain orientation among Italian Catholics, but in the discussion itself, where principles and information can be constructively brought to meet so to give birth to informed views.

## Annex I

**Technical note – 1:** The IES was conducted with participation of 93 Italian parliamentarians from the Chamber of Deputies and Senate (MP). The EES was carried out with participation of Italian Members of European Parliament (MEP) in 2006 (N=43) and 2007 (N=41). The TTS (2004-2007) included questions asked at the public opinion level (each year around 1000 people).

## Annex II – Operationalisation of variables (Survey question wordings)

*Dependent variable: ‘Opinion on Turkey’s membership of the EU’*

Question: “Do you think Turkey’s membership is good or bad?”

- A good thing
- Neither good nor bad
- A bad thing

(Source: TTS 2004, 2006, 2007; IES 2004; EES 2006, 2007)

*Independent variable I: “Threat of Islamic fundamentalism”*

Question: “I am going to read you a list of possible international threats to Europe in the next 10 years. Please tell me if you think each one on the list is an extremely important threat, an important threat, or not an important threat at all - Islamic fundamentalism (the more radical stream of Islam).”

- Extremely important threat
- Important threat
- Not important threat

(Source: IES2004, TTS 2004 and 2006)

Question: I am going to read you a list of possible international threats to Europe in the next 10 years. Please tell me if you think each one on the list is a very important, somewhat important, not very important or not an important threat at all - Islamic fundamentalism (the more radical stream of Islam)

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not very important
- Not an important threat at all

(Source: EES 2006)

Question: “In the next 10 years, please tell me how likely you are to be personally affected by each of the following threats - Islamic fundamentalism

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not too likely
- Not likely at all

(Source: TTS 2007; EES 2007)

*Independent variable II: “Islam’s compatibility with democracy”*



Question: “Do you feel that the values of Islam are compatible with the values of [country]’s democracy?”

Yes

No

(Source: TTS 2006; EES 2006)