Turkey and the Dilemma of EU Accession: When Religion Meets Politics. Mirela Bogdani. London: I. B. Tauris, 2011. p/bk 228 pp. ISBN 978-1-84885-459-8. Price £14.99.

Mirela Bogdani's book is a timely contribution to the field of European Studies and International Relations. As Turkey's candidacy for EU membership has always been a highly debated topic in the academic and intellectual circles all around the world, any publication about this hot issue surely catches the eyes of the readers. Furthermore, as religion is a highly neglected dimension of the strained relations between Turkey and the EU, this book's courageous attempt to investigate its role in mutual political attitudes, is additionally intriguing.

To play safe, most of the analysts writing on this tricky matter do prefer to leave aside the importance of religious and cultural differences between Turkey and the EU, when analyzing their mutual relations. In doing so, they rather consider the EU as a highly ideal construct that decides on the fate of the future members solely with regards to their economic and political performances (the latter being mostly related with their democratic record). Quite contrarily, Mirela Bogdani's book draws attention to this major (and generally untold) problem in Turkey-EU relations and straightforwardly argues that Turkey's cultural and religious differences are indeed the main reasons of the EU's hesitance to include it to the club. Following the 2002 national parliamentary elections in Turkey, the country's conservative attitude has increased with the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) electoral victory and its following policy decisions. Bogdani argues that the slowdown in political relations between Turkey and the EU, and the newly emergent tensions between the two camps, are mostly a result of the Turkey's increasing conservative attitude, particularly during the last decade.

While one can agree with Bogdani's analyses in her book by considering the EU as a club that is greatly based on Christian/western values (which, for Bogdani, includes a highly secular attitude following the tone of the Reformation and Renaissance periods), the conceptualization of the EU in such terms is rather inappropriate. Similarly her view of Christian / western values as supposedly more accommodating of cultural difference, compared to other religions (e.g. Islam) is also highly debatable.

The European Union is first and foremost an economic and political institution that defines its citizens through political and social rights. While ostensibly accommodating difference, it also encourages allegiance to a supranational political model, rather like a latter-day Roman Empire. By identifying such allegiances as a predominantly Christian / western in origin, Bogdani encourages the risk of discontent - especially by those citizens who do not fit that model - and thereby jeopardizes the already fragile legitimacy of the organization as a whole. Other thinkers - notably Jürgen Habermas have argued that the EU is first and foremost a political identity, and that consensus between its peoples should be forged both in social and political terms, by acknowledging the presence of difference. A political and inclusive *demos* should replace the cultural and generally exclusive *ethnos* as the foundation of the EU's future.

Although Mirela Bogdani's book is fun to read, her identification of the EU project with Christian / western values and her attempts to justify Turkey's exclusion on religious and cultural differences is rather intimidating. After all, the Crusades were also organized with a more or less similar logic centuries ago.

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