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**To cite this article:** Senem Aydın-Düzgit (2016) De-Europeanisation through Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of AKP's Election Speeches, South European Society and Politics, 21:1, 45-58, DOI: [10.1080/13608746.2016.1147717](https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2016.1147717)

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2016.1147717>



Published online: 23 Mar 2016.



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## De-Europeanisation through Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of AKP's Election Speeches

Senem Aydın-Düzgit

### ABSTRACT

This article takes issue with the question of whether Turkey has been turning away from Europe in recent years, by adopting a critical constructivist lens to understand *how*, rather than *why*, Turkey's presumed distance from the European Union (EU) is taking place. In doing that, it seeks to analyse the ways in which the political–societal transformation of the country as distanced from the EU is enabled by certain discursive practices which in turn contribute to the growing rift between Turkey and the EU. This is mainly conducted through a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of texts produced by former Prime Minister and now President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Europe and the EU during key election periods starting with the 12 June 2011 general election.

### KEYWORDS

Turkish foreign policy; EU–Turkey relations; discourse analysis; identity; foreign policy discourse

There has been a burgeoning literature on Turkish foreign policy in recent years. Some of this literature, particularly since the year 2008, has dealt with the question of whether Turkey has been turning away from Europe in particular and the West in general (see, among others, Cornell 2012; Mufti 2014). Developments such as the 2008–09 Gaza War, the Iranian swap deal that was brokered with Brazil in 2009 and the flotilla incident in 2010 moved these debates towards an increasing consensus that Turkish foreign policy is becoming more engrained in the Middle East and its wider southern neighbourhood at the expense of its relations with the European Union (EU) and the United States (US).

Some of these works have focused exclusively on Turkey's relations with the EU, arguing that, for reasons stemming both from the EU (such as the euro crisis, public perceptions of Turkey in the EU and the rise of Turkey-sceptic right-wing political parties in the EU) as well as from Turkey itself (such as its democratic troubles, the ideology of the governing AKP [Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – Justice and Development Party], its regional foreign policy activism and its refusal to apply the EU–Turkey Customs Union Additional Protocol to the Republic of Cyprus, which has ended up in the de facto freezing of accession negotiations), these relations have come to a standstill, leading to a further distancing of Turkey from the EU (Narbone & Tocci 2007; Redmond 2007). These works have mainly used a realist-inspired lens in analysing the relations, focusing mainly on the causes behind the stalled relationship between the two sides.

This article takes a different approach whereby a critical constructivist (henceforth 'poststructuralist') stance is adopted to provide theoretically driven insight into *how*, rather than *why*, Turkey's distancing from the EU is taking place. In doing that, it seeks to analyse the ways in which the political–societal transformation of the country as distanced from the EU is enabled by certain discursive practices which in turn contribute to the growing rift between Turkey and the EU. This is mainly conducted through a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of texts produced by former Prime Minister and now President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Europe and the EU during key election periods starting with the 12 June 2011 general election. The article first outlines the main theoretical framework and the method of the study, followed by an analysis of the pre- and post-election speeches of Erdoğan. It will conclude with a discussion of the ramifications of his public discourses for both the country's domestic trajectory and its foreign policy orientations.

### Discourse, foreign policy and (de-)Europeanisation

From a poststructuralist standpoint, social reality is 'discursively' constructed through the ways in which we 'talk' about the world. Thus, language is not viewed as a simple mirror of reality whereby it basically reflects what takes place in the social world. Rather, language is treated as constitutive of social reality such that no social reality exists outside language, rendering the process of interpretation crucial. Discourse is hereby theorised as 'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic' (Hall 1992, p. 291). Once constructed, discourse as the 'representation and constitution of the "real"' provides a 'managed space in which some statements and depictions come to have greater value than others' (Campbell 1992, p. 6). Hence, while discourses do not 'cause', they can 'enable' certain actions by 'set(ting) limits to what is possible to be articulated' (Diez 1999, p. 611). Their power to 'enable' can be particularly strong when they are located in institutions with power. This is especially the case for discourses that are located in the state apparatus, such as those of state officials who 'speak for us' with their access to information from the state, their constitutional legitimacy and their privileged access to the media (Weldes et al. 1999, pp. 17–18).

In line with this conceptualisation of 'discourse', the poststructuralist worldview posits 'foreign policy' as a discursive practice that serves as a 'specific sort of boundary-producing political performance' through which a state constructs its own identity and hence its own being in relation to its various Others (Ashley 1987, p. 51). This is because the state lacks an ontological status, and thus requires a constant discursive articulation of its identity (which can only be discursively constructed in relation to various Others), which it realises through foreign policy discourses. From this viewpoint, as with any state's discourses on foreign policy, those that pertain to Turkey also construct a certain identity for the country. While the discursive construction of this identity can be discerned through its foreign policy discourses in relation to a variety of countries or collectivities, the specific focus will herein be on Europe and the EU. In line with the theoretical stipulations above, this is expected to deliver insight into the ways in which Turkish national identity is constructed through discourses on Europe and the EU in a given period in time. In turn, this will shed light on how Turkey's policies towards and/or in relation to Europe and the EU are enabled/disabled through the discursive relationship constructed between Turkey and Europe/the EU.

This approach broadly dovetails with the understanding of the concept of Europeanisation and de-Europeanisation adopted in this volume (see Aydın-Düzgıt & Kaliber 2016). A poststructuralist reading of the concept of Europeanisation would define it as a discursive practice in which the concepts of Europe and the EU are treated as discursive constructs (see also Stanivukovic 2014). Hence Europe and the EU are treated not as fixed entities, but as contingent concepts with contested meanings across different agents in the process of accession. Europeanisation, read as such, points to a constant discursive (re)production of concepts such as Europe and the EU, hence to different discursive articulations of identities in the accession process of candidate countries. In this perspective, domestic actors cannot merely be defined as mediators of the effects of European integration, but rather co-constitute and contest its discursively established meanings in relation to EU-level actors (see Aydın-Düzgıt & Kaliber 2016). In other words, they contribute to the making of Europe and the EU through their discussions and articulations of the accession process and the required technical/political/legal changes put forward by the EU. The contested and contingent nature of this construction implies that a discursive convergence (hence a convergence or association of constructed identities) is not inevitable. Hence, alternative constructions that discursively dissociate the country from Europe/the EU and in turn enable policies that are less conducive towards EU accession and compliance with EU demands are also possible. Understood in this way, Europeanisation in the Turkish case necessitates a closer look at the discursive articulations of Europe and the EU in the Turkish domestic scene to understand the ways in which the Turkish Self is constructed vis-à-vis the European/EU Other.

Situated on poststructuralist grounds, unlike most of the other articles in this volume, this study does not concern itself with the question of whether Turkey has recently been turning away from Europe and the EU in policy terms and/or, if that is indeed the case, what the drivers are behind this process. Instead, it focuses on *how* the European/EU Other is discursively constructed in relation to the Turkish Self in ways whereby certain policies implying conflict and cooperation between Turkey and the EU are enabled or disabled within this discursive context at a given point in time. In doing that, the study focuses mainly on the discourses of former Prime Minister (2002–14) and current President (since 2014) Erdoğan on Europe and the EU. The reason for this choice is twofold. The first reason is the widespread view that Erdoğan has been the sole and certainly the most dominant authority figure within the governing AKP as well as the most powerful political figure in the country, especially since the latter part of his second term in government (2007–11). He established this position in the aftermath of two consecutive electoral victories, one constitutional referendum (in 2010) – largely perceived as a major step in obtaining governmental control over the judiciary – and some major court cases against military officials which were in turn interpreted as the weakening of military power vis-à-vis civilian authority in the country. The second reason behind this choice is Erdoğan's overwhelming presence in the Turkish public sphere, primarily through the media, where his speeches and statements (henceforth his 'discursive articulations') are widely attended to by the Turkish public as well as by international observers.

## Method and data

This study employs CDA, in particular the discourse-historical approach (DHA) of the Vienna School, in the analysis of the discursive articulations of Europe and the EU in Erdoğan's

discourse. CDA is a theory and method of discourse analysis that focuses on the study of the relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in different social domains. It views discourse as an important form of social practice which contributes to the constitution of the social world, including social identities and social relations. Its theoretical premises go back to Althusser's theory of ideology, Bakhtin's game theory and, in particular, the philosophical traditions of Gramsci and the Frankfurt School (Titscher et al. 2000, p. 144). CDA's employment of the term 'critical', as in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, assumes that research should produce knowledge that will help in the emancipation of people from various modes of domination (Wodak & Meyer 2009, p. 7). Hence the word 'critical' in CDA does not mean *negative* as understood in the common sense, but implies the need to challenge *common knowledge* that is taken for granted. Such a theoretical standing leads to a focus on the role of language in power relations, processes of exclusion, racism, inequality and identity-building in works that place themselves under the CDA umbrella. The main unit of analysis in CDA is texts. Texts can take different forms, also known as 'genres', including written documents, speeches and spoken interactions as well as multimodal visual, electronic and gestural forms. Texts are viewed as 'sites of struggle' which 'show traces of differing discourses and ideologies ... contending and struggling for dominance' (Wodak 2011, p. 35).

The reason for the choice of the DHA strand of CDA in this study is twofold. One is the specific emphasis of this approach on identity construction whereby the discursive construction of 'in' and 'out' groups is viewed as the basic pillar of discourses of identity and difference (Wodak 2001, p. 73). DHA has been widely used in the past in analysing the construction of both national (Wodak et al. 2009) and European (Aydın-Düzgıt 2012; Krzyzanowski & Oberhuber 2007; Wodak 2011; Wodak & Boukala 2015) identities. The second reason behind the choice of DHA for this analysis is that, through multiple studies on identity construction, DHA has developed a refined analytical toolkit for the analysis of texts which carefully traces the processes of inclusion and exclusion in the discursive construction of identities. DHA also incorporates the central concepts of *intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity* in the analysis. 'Intertextuality' is used to refer to the ways in which a text draws explicitly or implicitly from other texts in the past or present 'through continued reference to a topic or main actors; through reference to the same events; or by the transfer of main arguments from one text into the next', while 'interdiscursivity' accounts for the ways in which discourses are connected to and draw from one another (Wodak 2007, p. 206).

The analytical apparatus in DHA consists of three main steps used in the empirical analysis of texts (Wodak 2001, p. 73). The first step involves outlining the main content of the themes and discourses, namely the *discourse topics*, which in the case of this study and in its broadest sense refers to the relationship between Turkey and Europe/the EU.

The second step involves the exploration of *discursive strategies* deployed in the construction of identities in the narrative. In this paper, these discursive strategies are identified through responding to the following empirical questions directed at the texts (Reisigl & Wodak 2001, p. 44): How are the chosen subjects (Turkey, Europe and the EU) named and referred to linguistically? What traits, characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to them? By means of what arguments and argumentation schemes are certain representations of the subjects justified, legitimised and naturalised in discourse? Are the respective utterances intensified or mitigated? Discursive strategies often include argumentation strategies

that are used in justifying attributions and that can take various forms. Among the most common is the employment of *topos*, defined as 'parts of argumentation which belong to the obligatory, either explicit or inferable premises in the shape of content-related warrants that connect the arguments with the conclusion' (Reisigl & Wodak 2001, p. 74). For example in the discursive construction of national identities, one often encounters the *topos* of culture and history.

The third step of analysis then explores the *linguistic means* that are used to realise these discursive strategies. In the analysis of texts, the concept of the 'West' will also be scrutinised alongside Europe/the EU, as the discourse on the 'West' in the Turkish context has historically been associated with 'Europe' whereby 'Westernisation' has also largely equalled 'Europeanisation' (see, among others, Kaya 2013). In a similar vein, references to specific EU member states and EU institutions will also be taken into consideration. The analysis is organised around the main discourse topic discerned (namely relations between Turkey and Europe/the EU), where the discursive strategies and the linguistic means utilised in this given discursive topic will be demonstrated via selected translated excerpts from the text.

The data that are subject to analysis cover a total number of 169 public speeches delivered by Erdoğan in the run up to and the immediate aftermath of the 12 June 2011 general election (76 speeches), the 30 March 2014 local elections (60 speeches) and the 10 August 2014 presidential election (28 speeches) as well as the speeches that Erdoğan delivered at public rallies across the country following the June 2013 Gezi uprisings, officially referred to as the 'national will speeches' (five speeches).<sup>1</sup>

The choice of public speeches, in particular at election rallies, rests on the significance of this genre of political speech in the 'clear articulation of identities and policies' due to its persuasive functions, as well as on the fact that it is 'widely attended to' (particularly in the Turkish case, where almost all of Erdoğan's public speeches are also televised live and covered prominently in the press media) and holds 'the formal authority to define a political position' (Hansen 2006, p. 85). The timing of the analysis, which covers the period between April 2011 and mid-August 2014, is particularly chosen as corresponding to a period in which the AKP reportedly governed Turkey single-handedly with firmly established control over the judiciary and the military following the 2010 constitutional referendum and the court cases against military officials (namely *Balyoz* and *Ergenekon*) (Keyman & Gümüüşcü 2014, p. 45, 158). This is also a period when views on the deterioration of relations between Turkey and the EU, and also on Turkey's turn towards the East, became rampant with the de facto freezing of accession negotiations in June 2010, since which only one chapter had been opened in this period. The analysis is organised around the discourse topics in such a way that the discursive strategies and the linguistic means utilised in a given discursive topic are demonstrated via selected excerpts from the text. The excerpts that are displayed and analysed at greater depth are chosen particularly on the basis of their usage of the wide array of discursive strategies and the related linguistic means that have been utilised in other parts of the main body of speeches, also referred to in the notes, in formulating the same discourse topic.<sup>2</sup> The excerpts that are used in the article should thus be viewed as 'typical discourse fragments' (Jäger & Maier 2009, p. 54) that have been observed in the discursive construction of Turkish/European identities throughout the data.

## The analysis

In works of CDA, what is not said – hence the absences in the text – can be as important as the actual utterances themselves. In the case of Erdoğan’s discourse analysed in the given period, explicit references to Europe, the EU and the West (including specific EU member states) are in fact relatively rare. This is more striking considering the fact that foreign policy defined in the classical sense of relations between Turkey and other states and collectivities takes up a substantial portion of these public speeches, including those that are undertaken during local election rallies. For instance, while less than a fifth (30) of the public speeches analysed make explicit references to Europe, the EU and the West, almost all of the speeches in the given period, with very few exceptions, refer to Turkish foreign policy, primarily in the Middle East and North Africa.

This absence is in line with quantitative and qualitative analyses of the AKP’s election manifestos for this period, which have, for instance, shown that Europe and the EU were indeed rarely visible in the election programmes (Yanık 2012; Hatipoğlu, Aslan & Luetgert 2015) or in the election debates in the media (Toker 2015). Instead, they were surpassed mainly by a focus on the Middle East. Some have also highlighted the absence of any references to ‘Europeanisation’ and/or ‘European’ values in these documents (Yanık 2012; Hatipoğlu, Aslan & Luetgert 2015). This stands in stark contrast to accounts that have highlighted the heavier presence of Europe and the EU in the party’s general election manifestos in 2002 and 2007 (Hatipoğlu, Aslan & Luetgert 2015), as well as in Erdoğan’s speeches in the aftermath of the 2002 and 2007 general elections (Zarakol 2011), or even during the 2009 local elections (Kilinç 2009).

What is perhaps more notable than the relatively minimal presence of these concepts in these public speeches, which may reasonably be expected given the findings of previous research, are the ways in which they are constructed when they are indeed mentioned at all. The analysis suggests that only in three instances – one during the 2011 general election rallies and two in the 2014 presidential election rallies – does Erdoğan make a relatively positive representation of the ‘EU’ Other (as an institution, not with reference to Europe/West) in three western provinces of the country where there is relatively a more pro-European electorate. In the first instance, he briefly states that his party ‘displays full determination for EU membership’,<sup>3</sup> while in the other two he predicates the EU through the metaphors of ‘process’ and ‘road’ on which Turkey will follow (‘There will be no changes in the EU accession process’<sup>4</sup> and ‘The EU road will speed up’<sup>5</sup>), with no remarks about the content of the process or the final destination to be reached. Furthermore, in two isolated instances in the follow-up of the Gezi protests, he refers to the EU to justify the use of tear gas against protestors (‘Look at the EU *acquis*, the police has the right to use tear gas’), hence presenting the EU as a ‘partner in crime’ (see also Alpan 2016).<sup>6</sup>

Other cases in which these selected concepts are mentioned involve, without exception, negative representations of the European/the EU vis-à-vis the Turkish Self, on which more follows below.

### *Europe/the EU as an unwanted intruder in Turkish politics*

A very prevalent construction of Europe/the EU in Erdoğan’s discourse is its representation as an unwanted intruder in the domestic affairs of the country<sup>7</sup>:

Turkey is now a country whose agenda is not determined, but who determines her own agenda, this is the difference we have. For years they have bowed down in front of the West, this is what they did. What did the West do? It gave orders, and they obeyed those orders. But now there is no such situation. We sit down, we talk, we take our decisions, but we make the decisions, this is the Turkey that there is now. (Elaziğ, 6 March 2014)

In the excerpt above, first of all a binary construction is established between 'Turkey' and the 'West'. Binary oppositions do not just over-simplify the world; they also serve key functions of inclusion/exclusion and establish relations of power between the poles of the binary opposition. Hence, applied to the case at hand, the use of binary oppositions of 'Turkey' and the 'West' not only leads to a clear demarcation of Turkey from the West, but also establishes a power relationship temporally first in favour of the West, then (post-AKP rule) in favour of Turkey itself. A chain of equivalence is formulated between the pre-AKP governments, denoted by the distancing pronoun of 'they' (referring to the previous governments), and the 'West', where both are negatively represented. The previous governments are negatively represented for being too submissive vis-à-vis the 'West', whereas the 'West' is represented as an active intruder that wants to impose 'orders' on Turkey. Turkey, under the previous governments, is thus predicated as a passive entity ('country whose agenda is determined'), whereas it is represented as an active agent ('who determined her own agenda') under the AKP governments now possessing the necessary power to deny 'Western' impositions. Thus, a clear-cut demarcation is established between the power status of Turkey vis-à-vis the West before and after AKP rule. This is translated into a positive self-representation of both Turkey (under the AKP) as well as the AKP itself (referred to through the use of the inclusive pronoun 'we').

In other cases, Erdoğan makes more explicit references to specific EU member states in pointing at their unwanted intrusion into Turkish politics:

A magazine in Germany published a special issue, in Turkish and in German. It praises this imposed candidate. Why is it doing this? Why this effort to mess this country up all the way from Germany? Because there is more than what meets the eye. A German magazine would not all of a sudden meddle in the elections in Turkey. They have friends inside the Turkish media, they would not engage in anything that does not serve their interests. Their problem is not about electing a president for Turkey, they have a different issue at stake. They want somebody who will do their business, who will listen to them, who will walk in the path that they show as the President. Because they know that Tayyip Erdoğan would not walk in the direction that they wish. Tayyip Erdoğan would walk only in the direction that the people wish. (Muğla, 6 August 2014)

The excerpt above is taken from a presidential election rally in 2014, in the aftermath of the publication of a special issue of the German magazine *Der Spiegel* on the upcoming Turkish presidential elections with a critical report on Erdoğan and his policies. It displays a typical case of right-wing populist rhetoric (Wodak 2015), where those who are predicated as the 'internal enemies' of the 'people' – certain Turkish media (with an implicit reference to the oppositional Doğan media group) – cooperate with 'external opponents' – certain German media – to pursue their agenda by supporting the presidential candidate of the two main opposition parties. The 'they' pronoun is used to identify this vague group of internal and external opponents that are negatively represented, and that Erdoğan ignores, as opposed to an imagined community of the 'people' – an ambiguous synecdoche<sup>8</sup> used as a claim to representation by Erdoğan in realising the argumentation strategy of the vox populi (voice of the people) (Reisigl 2008, p. 103). This is a populist discursive strategy well known to students of right-wing populist discourse, which serves the main function of discursively discrediting

domestic political opposition through the construction of external enemies, through the 'subdivision of the world of social actors into friends and enemies by Manichean division and the rhetorical construction of internal and external scapegoats' (Reisigl 2008, p. 114). Furthermore, it can be argued that this discursive construction has a particular resonance in the Turkish context due to the interdiscursivity that exists with the Kemalist nationalist discourse with its focus on 'external forces' allying with 'domestic enemies' at the expense of the Turkish nation-state (White 2013, p. 158) – ironically in this case, since the AKP claims to refute Kemalism.

Finally, in Erdoğan's discourse specific EU institutions themselves – most particularly the European Parliament (EP) with its critical views on Turkish democracy – can become the subject of criticism on the grounds of their 'unwanted intrusion':

Turkey is not a country that can be incriminated by the decisions of parliaments that are not even capable of knowing Turkey. The European Parliament took a decision about us: know your place, know your place! Are you entitled to take decisions about Turkey? What did I say on the first day? I said we do not recognise the decision that you took and I returned their decision to them. Turkey is not currently a member of the EU, it is a negotiator. If you were honest, if you were sincere, then there were all these uprisings in Greece, everywhere was burnt down, was demolished, people were killed. You helped them with hundreds of billions of Euros. It is an EU member, what did you do? (Istanbul, 17 June 2013)

The excerpt above was delivered immediately after the Gezi protests, which attracted a lot of criticism from the international community regarding the way in which the government handled the uprisings across the country. The EP expressed its criticisms of the use of large-scale violence by the Turkish police in a resolution it adopted on 13 June 2013, four days after the speech above was made. Both the EP and (implicitly) the EU are negatively represented in the extract above, predicated as 'uninformed about Turkey', 'powerless/having no authority on Turkey', 'dishonest' and 'insincere'. The binary use of the 'we' and the 'you' pronouns in referring to Turkey and the EP/EU, respectively, once again places the two entities in oppositional categories vis-à-vis one another. This binary construction, together with the negative representations above, also help in the realisation of the referential strategy of anthropomorphication (or personification), hence the attribution of human qualities to both parties, contributing to their homogenised oppositional existence. A discursive equivalence is formed between the hyperbolic representations of the domestic reactions in Greece to the financial debt crisis and the Gezi protests in Turkey through the *topos* of comparison to demonstrate the indiscriminate EU/EP actions towards the two states and thus to justify the EU/EP's 'dishonest' and 'insincere' character. One needs to turn to other speeches to discover further elaborations of these frequently constructed attributes of the European/the EU Other as a discriminatory entity.

### ***Europe/the EU as an essentially discriminatory entity***

A key element of Erdoğan's discourse on Europe/the EU is the latter's 'inherently discriminatory nature'. While the object of discrimination can be Turkey, as seen in the final extract of the above section, it can also take the form of migrants in the EU<sup>9</sup>:

I would like to remind you once again that all European countries should adopt a common approach against increasing racism, intolerance, discrimination and attacks in Europe. Discrimination never exists in the European Union, European Union legislation, but what did

France do to the Romas? They threw them out of France. Why did you do that if there was no discrimination? Discrimination is in their genes. (Bursa, 23 May 2011)

Erdoğan here makes a stark distinction between the EU as a formal/legalistic institution and the EU composed of member states. While the former is positively represented as non-discriminatory, the latter, with reference to France, is negatively represented as discriminatory by essence, through reference to France's treatment of the Roma minority. This is realised first through the argumentation strategy of 'hasty generalisation' (Reisigl & Wodak 2001, p. 73), in which a general state of affairs is mentioned, independent of the parts that form it, to present a hyperbolic representation of reality. Secondly, it is realised through the essentialisation of discrimination as such, via the use of the biological metaphor 'gene'. Metaphors are not hereby treated as merely 'objective mediators' between two pre-established subjects with pre-established similarities (Drulak 2006, p. 503). Within the theoretical confines of this study, metaphors are taken to play a crucial role in constructing our knowledge of the world by becoming sedimented in discourse as common sense and hence in structuring the way we think and act by allowing us to focus more specifically on certain aspects of what is being referred to and excluding alternative ways of thinking and acting beyond the metaphorical constraints (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). The 'gene' metaphor, which belongs to the conceptual metaphor of *states as persons*, not only hides the policies and the political dynamics behind France's treatments of its minorities, but also constructs the country as a whole with a homogeneous body and a given 'nature' of discrimination which is unchangeable.

More often, however, the object of essential European/EU discrimination is the Muslims in general:

The Westerners could not say that Islamophobia is a crime against humanity. Why? Why? Because for them, killing a Muslim is legitimate, but it is illegitimate when it comes to Jews, is that the case? We are saying that anti-Semitism is a crime against humanity, Islamophobia is also a crime against humanity. (Van, 31 July 2014)

We are faced with a new Crusader alliance, this is a wrong direction. I am calling out to the West, this is not an honest approach ... Silence would not suit us. Osman Gazi<sup>10</sup> established a state here, that state brought justice in Palestine, for centuries it maintained justice in all of the Middle East, North Africa, the Balkans ... Small states get frightened, they turn silent, we are not a small state, we will not be silent, we will continue to shout for the Palestinian cause. I am asking from here: European Union, why are you being silent? (Bursa, 18 July 2014)

Both of the excerpts above discursively construct an essential, bounded and homogeneous 'West' (which the EU is explicitly mentioned as a part of, in the second excerpt) as diametrically opposed to 'Turkey' (through the binary use of the deictic pronoun 'we' which helps usurp all difference in the collectivity) and the 'Muslim world' in sections of Erdoğan's domestic speeches concerning the Israel–Palestine conflict, delivered after Israel's strike towards Gaza in the summer of 2014. This is realised in the first excerpt via a rhetorical question posed to the crowd in the audience (where the crowd tends to affirm) – what we can also refer to as the argumentation strategy of 'question begging for an answer'. This is a very common trait of Erdoğan's public speeches (Küçükali 2013, pp. 109–110). The 'question' here serves the main discursive function of reducing a complex set of events relating to the conflict, and international reactions to it, to a religious/civilisational conflict between the 'West' (involving also the 'Jews') and the 'Muslims' where the 'West' is negatively predicated as favouring the killing of one religious group over another on the basis of implicitly presumed religious/civilisational differences. As a face-keeping strategy presumably to counter accusations of

anti-Semitism in his speech, Erdoğan refers to 'anti-Semitism' as a 'crime against humanity', alongside 'Islamophobia'.

In a similar vein, the second excerpt utilises the historical metaphor of a 'Crusader alliance' (*haçlı ittifakı*) in referring to the attitude of the 'West' towards the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Here once again the reactions of the 'West' are reduced to no more than a cultural/civilisational issue. Hence, both of the excerpts above constitute an act of interdiscursivity with Huntington's (1993) 'clash of civilisations' thesis in which the 'West' and 'Islam' and/or the 'Muslim world' are juxtaposed against one another. As put forward by the 'clash of civilisations' thesis, the 'West' and the 'Muslim world' are construed as monolithic and homogeneous and '[assume] an unchanging character of duality between us and them' (Said 2003, p. 69). Within the very same framework, these excerpts construct Islam and the West as two disparate monolithic and homogeneous units.

The reactions of the EU and the West to the conflict are opposed in the second excerpt to those of Turkey. Turkey is essentially construed as a 'just' and 'active' actor in the conflict, through reference to its Ottoman past. Hence, as the *topos* of history is typically used to construct 'traditional, heroic and self-complacent constructions of past events' as a founding myth for nation-states (Forchtner 2015, p. 21), Ottoman history and its 'grandeur' serve as the founding myth for Turkish foreign policy in its wider neighbourhood as opposed to the 'silence' and 'smallness' of the EU and the West over which it enjoys normative superiority. The 'silence' of the 'EU' and the 'West' is presumed, thanks to the argumentative strategy of *petitio principii*, also known as 'begging the question' or 'circular argument'. This strategy refers to a situation where 'what is controversial and in question, and has to be proved, is presupposed as the starting point of the argumentation' (Reisigl & Wodak 2001, p. 73). When one focuses on the EU, treating the 'silence' of the EU as a given discursively excludes accounts that highlight that the EU is the largest donor of aid to Palestine or that it adopted a binding directive in 2013 according to which the Israeli government would be required to state in any future agreements with the EU that settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, were outside the state of Israel. This is not to suggest that one set of accounts is more 'truthful' than others, but to point out how accounts can be systematically excluded to establish a certain narrative for the EU/Europe.

### **Europe/the EU as democratically/economically inferior to Turkey**

A final albeit less observed way in which Europe/the EU is negatively represented in Erdoğan's discourse concerns the ways in which it is constructed as an inferior entity to Turkey in both political and economic terms<sup>11</sup>:

We have the democracy that the West aspires to have; it is us who have it. (İstanbul, 31 March 2014)

Right now Turkey stands strong on its feet, we are strong. While all of Europe have experienced below zero growth in the first quarter, we have grown by 4.3 per cent. Turkey is growing. (Samsun, 5 July 2014)

Spain is going bankrupt, the situation of Greece is obvious, the situation of Italy is obvious ... Thank God, look at Turkey. We have to know how to be thankful. (Nevşehir, 25 May 2011)

In each of the three excerpts above, the binary dichotomy of the 'West'/'Europe'/'EU countries' vs. 'Turkey' (also referred to via the deictic 'we') is constructed upon democratic and economic standards. This serves to show that Turkey's superior identity in relation to Europe/the EU is not solely articulated through inherent normative attributions but also through acquired

characteristics such as domestic governance and economic standards. This is done through the *topos* of facticity whereby Turkey's 'superior' democratic and economic performance and Europe/EU's inferiority are presented as 'facts' rather than 'evaluations', hence signalling truth and precision, competence and credibility (Van Dijk 2005). In the case of the second excerpt above, the *topos* of numbers is used to further lend credibility to Turkey's economic strength in comparison with Europe. In the final excerpt, Erdoğan alludes to the euro crisis and its impact on Southern Europe to construe Turkey's economic superiority. As can be expected, such narratives persistently exclude accounts of the problems with Turkish democracy or the fragility of its economy.

However, a paradoxical situation emerges when Erdoğan discusses welfare/governance standards in Turkey, especially during the election speeches of 2011<sup>12</sup>:

Why should George, Hans, Helga experience welfare and my citizens, my people should not? (Yalova, 12 May 2011)

We will give every student an electronic book. It will have the entire curriculum in it. We will give all these for free ... Do you know what I am thinking now? Edward, George in America; Hans and Helga in Germany, they all benefit from these opportunities, why should my Ahmet, Mehmet, Hasan ... not benefit from it, why? (Van, 20 May 2011)

The two excerpts above, almost in identical wording, are repeated throughout the election speeches in 2011, in which considerable focus is given to the economic achievements of the AKP government. People names and city names are metonymically<sup>13</sup> used to refer to Europe, the EU and the West (inclusive of the US), which possess the governance standards that Erdoğan, through the AKP, claims to bring to Turkey. The European/Western standards are predicated as those that the Turkish people have a right to and deserve to have. Thus amidst a strong critique and negative representation of Europe/the EU, the latter can still be taken as a reference point for economic/social reform in the country.

## Conclusion

Proceeding from a critical constructivist standpoint, this article aimed to shed light on *how* Turkey's increasing distancing from the EU has been enabled through specific discursive articulations of Europe and the EU by former Prime Minister and now President Erdoğan in the Turkish domestic context in the 2011–14 period when debates on Turkey's worsening relations with the EU became rampant. This was achieved through a CDA of texts produced by Erdoğan on 'Europe' and 'the EU' (as well as the 'West' and EU member states and institutions) during key election periods starting with the 12 June 2011 local elections. The article first outlined the main theoretical framework and the method of the study, followed by an analysis of the pre- and post-election speeches of Erdoğan.

The study found that compared with the overwhelming presence of foreign policy issues in Erdoğan's political rhetoric, references to Europe and the EU have remained minimal. In cases where these concepts were the subjects of debate, they were found to be largely negatively represented as 'an unwanted intruder in Turkish politics', 'an essentially discriminatory entity' and 'inferior' to Turkey on political and economic (and sometimes normative) grounds. In all these instances where the European/EU Other was negatively represented (and where the Turkish Self was often positively represented), the Turkish Self was also discursively dissociated from the European/EU Other, indicating a distanced relationship with no hint of cooperation between the two sides.

It needs to be said that this negative representation of Europe/the EU does not exist in a vacuum. Earlier studies have pointed to the prevalence of eurosceptic sentiments across the Turkish population and political parties. These have involved – but not been limited to – discourses on the fear of territorial partition by European states with hidden agendas (the so-called Sèvres Syndrome<sup>14</sup>); on European/EU intrusion into national sovereignty; or on Europe/the EU constituting a ‘Christian club’ that by its nature excludes Turkey (Yılmaz 2011). Hence it can be argued that there is strong interdiscursivity between Erdoğan’s discourse and some of the widely established discourses on Europe/the EU across Turkish society, which makes Erdoğan’s discourse resonate across the broader public.

Concerning the discourse–policy linkage, such dominant discursive articulations of identity have the power to domestically enable the actual policies that are taken to distance Turkey from the EU. They enable – and thus constrain – the policy options that the country undertakes vis-à-vis the EU. Therefore it can be argued that these findings are also of relevance to the current debates on the Europeanisation of Turkey. Most importantly, it demonstrates the need to look at Europeanisation not merely as a change in actual policies, but also in discourses, where the discursive contestations over ‘Europe’ and the ‘EU’ can help to enable or disable compliance. Constructing Europe/the EU as an ‘unwanted intruder’, as ‘inherently discriminatory’ or as having an ‘inferior democracy’ can be argued to dismantle the discursive legitimacy of the EU’s democratic demands on Turkey, and create a more difficult climate for the adoption of democratic reforms in the country. In a similar vein, such constructions can increase the difficulty of taking additional steps on the Cyprus issue, such as the extension of the Customs Union additional protocol to Cyprus. Such steps are much needed to formally revitalise the accession negotiations by making it possible for Turkey to close negotiation chapters.

## Notes

1. The majority of the speeches (117) were accessed in a transcribed form from the party archives accessible at: <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/arsiv/basin-odasi>. The rest (52) were transcribed from videos accessed at <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/videogaleriler/mitingler/145>. The translations are the author’s own.
2. For a similar approach, see Van Dijk (1993).
3. İzmir, 4 June 2011.
4. Denizli, 8 July 2014.
5. Antalya, 12 July 2014.
6. Ankara, 16 June 2013; İstanbul, 17 June 2013.
7. See, for instance, İstanbul, 29 May 2011; İstanbul, 17 June 2013; Samsun, 23 June 2013; Elazığ, 6 March 2014; Erzurum, 24 June 2013; Adana, 23 July 2014; Muğla, 6 August 2014.
8. A synecdoche is a term for a part of something that is used to refer to the whole of the same thing or vice versa.
9. See, for instance, İstanbul, 17 June 2013; Erzurum, 10 June 2011; Bursa, 23 May 2011; Kocaeli, 23 March 2014; Urfa, 13 July 2014; Ordu, 19 July 2014; Bursa, 18 July 2014; Hatay, 20 July 2014; Van, 31 July 2014; İstanbul, 3 August 2014; Adana, 23 July 2014; Mardin, 31 July 2014.
10. Osman Gazi was the founder of the Ottoman Empire.
11. See, for instance, Ankara, 16 May 2011; Nevşehir, 25 May 2011; Mersin, 2 June 2011; İstanbul, 31 March 2014; Samsun, 5 July 2014; Denizli, 8 July 2014.
12. See, for instance, Balıkesir, 12 May 2011; Yalova, 12 May 2011; Van, 20 May 2011; Hakkari, 21 May 2011; Bursa, 22 May 2011; Gaziantep, 9 June 2011.

13. Metonymies 'replace(s) the name of a referent by the name of an entity which is closely associated with it in either concrete or abstract terms' (Wodak et al. 2009, p. 43).
14. The Sèvres Syndrome is named after the Sèvres Treaty which partitioned the Ottoman Empire among the European powers after the First World War.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Ayhan Aktar, Gencer Özcan, Soli Özel and Bahar Rumelili for their helpful comments on the previous versions of this article. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Science Academy Young Scientists Programme (BAGEP) in making this study possible.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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