

## EUROPE IN MIND: SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF TURKEY-EUROPE RELATIONS IN CASE OF TURKISH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### Abstract

In this article, social representations of Europe are studied in case of Turkish university students. The sample consists of 382 students from various departments of Faculty of Letters at Ege University. The students were asked to write a short text on what they think on Europe-Turkey relations and to order the first five things that the word “Europe” reminds them of. Additionally, participants fulfilled a questionnaire containing several socio-demographic questions and specified whether they have been to Europe or not. The texts written by students were subjected to content analysis, connotations were classified and the results were compared as to departments. The results indicate that Turkey’s relations with Europe for university students are independent from the historical development that it followed in the western context and objectivity of Turkey-EU relations and social representations of Europe have developed on ideological background more than geographical basis.

**Keywords:** Turkey-Europe relationship, Europe as a cultural region, social representation

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Spatial or geographical “imaginaries” are representations of place and space that play a role in structuring people’s understanding of the world and which, in complex ways, influence people’s actions. As an extensive literature in cultural geography has demonstrated, these representations or constructions of the world are also closely intertwined with the material world and play a role in the ordering and bordering of space and the construction of normative visions of how space “should be” (Sellar *et. al.* 2009:253). As a cultural, institutional and geographical entity Europe has multidimensional representations and can be imagined and defined in various means. However Europe would be defined as a continent, it can be seen as a human entity and represents “a cultural area” with its overall way of life in common, including ideology, technology, social institutions and material possessions (Murphy *et al.* 2009). Many definitions and perspectives have been developed on “Europe”; Lee (1985), for example, suggests a distinction between different geographical perspectives

of Europe that have both expressed and modified the understanding of what Europe is. Europe may be understood as *a structural body, an experience or an institution* (Paasi 2001). When considered as a geographical region with its human and physical characteristics, Europe can be seen as a *physical structure* which ignores the geopolitical realities of the states. On the other hand, the dominant image of Europe is mostly based on the European Union, which is the *institutional Europe* and which is defined through institutional structures that are constitutive of European economic and cultural integration. As a political construction, European Union can be accepted as “*the emergence of the first truly postmodern international political form*” (Ruggie (1993:140) however Mazower (1998) argues that the “Europe” of the EU is not a reality; it is rather a *promise or delusion*. The established geography and existing spatial scales of the institutional Europe are increasingly challenged when new candidates are knocking at the gate (Paasi 2001).

As a candidate country for the EU since 1999, Turkey has deep relations with Europe and it has a long history of *Europeanization*. Europe, both as a region and an element of social representation, has been one of the most significant actors in the modernization of Turkey. Understanding the dynamics of the discussions that are carried out in Turkey in the process of EU membership and analyzing the perspectives from different groups of Turkish society on this process is important not only in the aspect of social sciences but also in order to factually examine the relation of Turkey with the West and Europe. Because Europe has been one of the milestones in the modernization process of Turkey; analyzing social representations on Europe can provide a detailed framework on both the EU membership process of Turkey and the different modernization views of Turkish society.

World history, in modern terms, is the grand narrative of understanding civilisation on the basis of the western notions of nation-state/capitalism/rationality. History of the modern world, as Said (1978; 1993) insistently emphasises, is the attempt to construct the discourse of opposition between the western modernity and the non-western. This grand narrative is a cultural construct which represents the understanding of the ‘other’ that should be controlled and constructed as the ‘cultural object’ which needs to be transformed into the modern. Said (1978) calls this discursive formulation of the ‘other’ as *Orientalism*. In this sense, Orientalism can be considered as a discourse that constructs and represents the ‘other’ or the ‘different’ as a non-western object/subject. Orientalism in the Turkish context manifests itself as the identification of the west with the Enlightenment. Just from the beginning of the modernisation process, even in the Ottoman Era, *the West* that the Ottoman intellectuals intended to attain was the Enlightenment ideals. Enlightenment is, indeed, a cosmopolitan tradition beyond the traditions of the national idea (Yavuz, 1998). Namely, Enlightenment as a notion does not refer to a ‘national tradition’. Hence the identification of Europeanization with the Enlightenment was unavoidable for the Ottoman intellectuals. For them, to become westernised also meant to be the advocate of Enlightenment ideals. The intellectuals of the Republican Era, in this sense, are much the same with those of the Ottoman Era. The westernization project transposed from the 1890’s to the Republican Era by the Turkish intellectuals has been undoubtedly an Enlightenment project. In other words, westernization and Europeanization became synonymous with the materialisation of Enlightenment ideals in daily life.

In this context of discussion, Turkish modernity is taken to mean the process of embracing and internalizing all the social and cultural dimensions that made Europe/the West ‘modern’ in an effort to participate in the west. As a result, the history of Turkish modernisation becomes a continuous effort to imitate, to Westernise/Europeanize, and to reposition the Turkish society in relation to presumed western superiority. It is important to present how Europeanization is understood in Turkish society hence today Europeanization has different meanings as Clark and Jones (2008:301) categorizes basing on various works:

For some, its significance lies in its *diffusing state-based power and competencies, facilitating the transition from government to governance*. From this perspective, state sovereignty is challenged by the emergent EU polity. For others, Europeanization has opposite effects, *strengthening state-based orders and buttressing national government*. Between these two positions, Europeanization can be accepted as much a response to global social transformation as it is of change in European institutions and governance. How is the Westernization-Europeanization process of Turkey socially represented in the minds of Turkish young population today? In this study, Europe, both as a geographical region and an element of social representations and the perception of Europe-Turkey relations are investigated in case of university students.

## 2. SOCIAL REPRESENTATION THEORY

One of the most important recent developments in European social psychology has been the emergence of the concept of “social representation”. For many years Serge Moscovici has been one of the leading critics of orthodoxies in social psychological thinking. Moscovici (1984) stresses the social creation of mental states and he has investigated how intellectual ideas become incorporated into common-sense thinking (Billig, 1991:57). The term “social representation” refers to the manner in which values, ideas, and practices are structured in and by ordinary communication, allowing people both to communicate and to order their world (Manstead and Hewstone, 1999). Daily discourse is to be understood in the broadest possible manner, ranging from immediate conversation to mediated conversation (*i.e.* mass media). The particular focus of social representations is on the content of such discourses and, more precisely, what happens to this content in the process of daily discourse: representation is regarded as a special category of knowledge and beliefs. It is essentially the knowledge that is to be found in ordinary communication. Furthermore, the structure of this knowledge is assumed to correspond to that found in ordinary communication. Moscovici (1984) defines social representations as “*systems of values, ideas, and practices with a two-fold function: first to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in and master their material world, and second, to facilitate communication among members of a community by providing them with a code for naming and classifying the various aspect of their world and their individual and group history*”. Thus, social representations provide a position or perspective from which an individual or a group can observe and interpret events and situations. As reference points, social representations enable orientation by furnishing specific interpretative views of the social and the physical world.

The theory of social representations postulates a process of the familiarisation of the unfamiliar, or how the “unknown” from the “outside” becomes transferred into the “inside”, that is, that the purpose of all representations is to make something unfamiliar, or unfamiliarity itself, familiar (Moscovici, 1984). Two processes are assumed to be centrally involved in the familiarising the unfamiliar or the conversion of new knowledge into the habitual. The first mechanism strives to *anchor strange ideas*, to reduce them to ordinary categories and images, to set them in a familiar context. The anchoring process refers to the integration of new knowledge into categories, images and symbols that are already known and shared and that present readily identifiable reference point. To anchor is thus to classify and to name something. Things that are unclassified and unnamed are alien, non-existent and at the same time threatening. By classifying what is unclassifiable, *naming* what is unnameable, we are able to imagine it, to represent it. Indeed, social representation is, basically, a system of classification and denotation, of allotting categories and names (Moscovici, 1984). To categorize someone or something amounts to choosing a paradigm from those stored in our memory and established a positive or a negative relation with it. In

short, classifying and naming are two aspects of the anchoring of social representations (Moscovici 1984).

The second general process that is postulated by Moscovici (1984) is *objectification*. Like anchoring, objectification is presumed to turn the unfamiliar into the familiar. By the process of objectification the “invisible” becomes “perceptible” (Farr, 1984:386). This refers to how the unusual becomes a part of general discourse, not so much as an object of discourse, but as an integral element in discourses that shared by members of the different groups.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is therefore to explain how and why social representations are produced and examine to what extent “Europe” is accepted as a physical geographical entity and which aspects of Europe other than physical ones, come to forefront in the representations of a Turkish sample which is expected to be objective in relation to their relatively high educational level.

### 3. METHOD: THE SAMPLE, INSTRUMENTS AND ANALYSIS

In this article, “social representations of Europe” is studied in case of Turkish university students. The students were asked to order the first five things that the word “Europe” reminds them of and write a short text on what they think on Europe-Turkey relations. Additionally, participants fulfilled a questionnaire containing several socio-demographic questions and the department that they study. Participants specified whether they have been to Europe.

The sample consists of 382 students from various departments of Faculty of Letters at Ege University: Department of Geography (19,1%), Department of Psychology (21,7%), Department of History (26,2%) and departments of Western Literatures (English and German, 33,0%). The sample consists of 236 female (61,8%) and 143 male (37,4%) participants. 3 participants did not specify the gender (0,8%). The mean age of the sample is 21,42.

The open-ended questions were analyzed using the thematic content analysis method in order to describe the attributes of participants about Europe and Turkey-Europe relations. The answers of participants for open-ended questions were reviewed and recoded by two researchers to capture the subtlety of concepts and contextual meanings. Categories were created and emerging themes were identified.

#### 3.1. Findings

Findings of the research will be presented in two parts. Firstly, the connotations of Europe will be presented as the categories of social representations. Secondly, the results of the thematic content analysis of texts written by the participants about Turkey-Europe relations will be given.

##### 3.1.1. *Social representations of Europe.*

Connotations from participants were classified and summarized in **Table 1**.

Twelve main connotation groups were distinguished in the total answers of participants. The thematic units indicated that participants expressed the **positive political-institutional connotations** (PPIC) as involving the most prevailing connotations of Europe, with a share of 40.2%. Most of the participants indicated connotations such as *developed countries, development, employment opportunities, rules, social state or welfare* which refer to the political structure of Europe in a positive manner. 16.0% of the connotations are the **negative political-institutional connotations** (NPIC) including words such as *colonialism, conflicts, imperialists or oppressive superiority*. Being the third thematic unit, **geographical connotations** (10.1%) includes mostly the *city and country names* which refer to the

topographical knowledge and, in less numbers, other physical geographical features such as a *continent*, a *volcano* or a *region*.

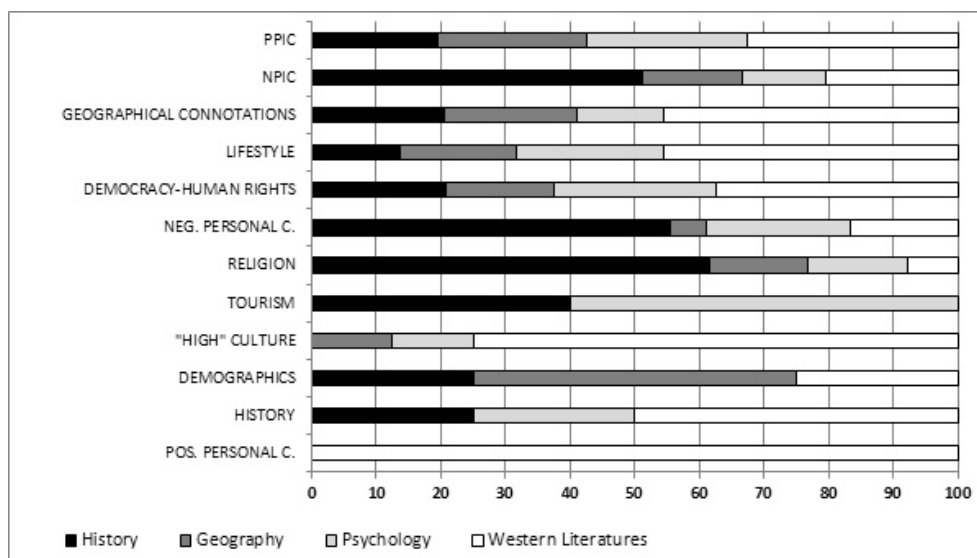
**Table 1.** Social representations of Europe

	FR.	%	EXAMPLES OF CONNOTATIONS
<b>Positive Political-institutional connotations</b>	735	40,2	<b>Capitalism</b> , civilization, <b>co-operation</b> , criteria, <b>developed countries</b> , developed economy, <b>development</b> , discipline, <b>diplomacy</b> , economic opportunities, <b>economic sources</b> , educational facilities, <b>employment opportunities</b> , Erasmus program, <b>Euro</b> , European Union, <b>flag of EU</b> , free market economy, <b>free movement</b> , globalism, <b>Helsinki Summit</b> , high environmental responsibility, <b>high standard of life</b> , importation, <b>independence</b> , industrial society, <b>innovations</b> , international power, <b>knowledge</b> , liberalism, <b>machines</b> , medical facilities, modern life, <b>modernism</b> , money, <b>opportunities</b> , organization, <b>policies</b> , production, <b>quality</b> , regular traffic, <b>regularity</b> , rules, <b>science</b> , <b>security</b> , social state, <b>standards</b> , state of law, <b>strategies</b> , technology, <b>terminology of progress</b> , transportation, <b>union</b> , United Nations, <b>unity</b> , well urban planning, <b>welfare</b> , westernization
<b>Negative Political -institutional connotations</b>	293	16,0	<b>Barbarism</b> , colonialism, <b>conflicts</b> , crime, <b>double standard</b> , enemy of the East, <b>enemy of the Turks</b> , false democracy, <b>fascism</b> , governing the world, <b>Israel-Palestinian war</b> , imperialists, <b>imposing</b> , irreligiosity, <b>lonely people</b> , Nazis, <b>oppressive superiority</b> , patronizing, <b>racism</b> , religion selective human rights, <b>requiring</b> , savagery, <b>social decadence</b> , terror supporters, <b>injustice</b> , violence, <b>war</b>
<b>Geographical attributions</b>	186	10,1	<b>Amsterdam</b> , Atlantic, <b>Balkans</b> , Barcelona, <b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b> , Brussels, <b>continent of Europe</b> , Cyprus, <b>Czech Republic</b> , England, <b>Etna volcano</b> , Finland, <b>France</b> , geography course, <b>Germany</b> , Greece, <b>half of Istanbul</b> , Italy, <b>Izmir</b> , London, maps, <b>Norway</b> , Paris, <b>Poland</b> , Portugal, <b>Russia</b> , Scotland, <b>Spain</b> , Stuttgart, <b>sun</b> , Switzerland, <b>the Netherlands</b> , western part of Turkey
<b>Individualistic attributions</b>	166	9,0	<b>Adventure</b> , beautiful women, <b>beer</b> , comfort, <b>disappointment</b> , dreams, <b>fashion</b> , friends, <b>fun</b> , gardening, leisure, <b>life style</b> , love, <b>my relatives</b> , my future, <b>night life</b> , peace, <b>pleasure</b> , romance, <b>sexuality</b> , shopping, <b>wine</b>
<b>Attributions related to democracy &amp; human rights</b>	130	7,1	Copenhagen criteria, <b>Democracy</b> , equality, <b>European Court of Human Rights</b> , freedom of religion belief, <b>freedom of thought and expression justice</b> , French Revolution, <b>gender equality</b> , human rights, <b>personal freedom</b> , right to legal remedies
<b>Negative personal characteristics</b>	106	5,8	<b>Acting on the sly</b> , ambition, <b>arrogance</b> , conspiracy, <b>discrimination</b> , egoism, <b>greed</b> , grimness, <b>immorality</b> , insincerity, <b>liar</b> , "othering", <b>pragmatism</b> , prejudice, <b>selfishness</b> , slanderer, <b>unhappiness</b> , venomous
<b>Attributions related to religion</b>	55	3,0	A unity based on religion, <b>Bible and sword</b> , Cathedrals, <b>Christianity</b> , Churches, <b>non-Muslim people</b> , Pope, <b>the Crusaders</b>
<b>Tourism attributions</b>	43	2,4	<b>Arenas</b> , city squares, <b>chateaus</b> , Disneyland, <b>Eiffel Tower</b> , gondolas, <b>historical sites</b> , holiday, <b>natural attractions</b> , Pisa Tower, "places i would like to see", places to visit, <b>the sentence "when I was in Europe..."</b> , travel, <b>tourism</b>
<b>Attributions related to "high culture"</b>	43	2,4	<b>Arts</b> , books, <b>Cannes Film Festival</b> , classical music, <b>culture</b> , films, <b>languages</b> , literature, <b>music</b> , piano, <b>Shakespeare</b> , theatre
<b>Demographic attributions</b>	31	1,7	<b>Blonde people</b> , family planning, <b>human diversity</b> , immigrant, <b>immigration</b> , minorities, <b>the elderly</b> , Turkish immigrants in Europe
<b>Historical attributions</b>	27	1,4	<b>Ancient Greece</b> , Ancient Civilizations, <b>geographical discoveries</b> , grandsons of Byzantium, <b>Kings and Queens</b> , Medieval Ages, <b>Ottoman Empire</b> , Renascence, Reform and Enlightens, <b>Second World War</b> , Siege of Vienna
<b>Positive personal characteristics</b>	13	0,7	Decency, <b>diligence</b> , cleverness, <b>enlightened people</b> , good manners, <b>honesty</b> , open minded people, <b>personal qualifications</b> , respect, <b>smart people</b> , success

Other important thematic units can be counted as the *individualistic attributions* (9.0%), attributions related to *democracy and human rights* (7.1%) and those related to *negative personal characteristics* (5.8%). On the other hand, *religious attributions* (3.0%), *tourism attributions* (2.4%), *"high" cultural attributions* (2.4%), *demographic attributions* (1.7%), *historical attributions* (1.4%) and the attributions related to *positive personal characteristics* (0.7%) have relatively low shares.

PPIC present a balanced distribution among the departments as shown in **Graphic 1**. There is not much difference observed between departments in case of *connotations on democracy and human rights* as well. The shares of the NPIC and attributions related to the personal characteristics are the highest in the sample of history students while *"high" cultural*

attributions, connotations on positive personal characteristics and historical connotations have the highest share in the sample from the departments of Western Literature (Departments of English Language & Literature and German Language & Literature).



**Graphic 1.** Distribution of connotation groups according to departments (%)

Interestingly, geography students do not give the highest percentages in *geographical connotations* neither the history students give the highest percentages in *historical connotations* of Europe. However the *demographic connotations*, as human geographical elements, seem to have the highest share in geography students' sample. It is observed that negative connotations, both social and personal, come from history students while the positive personal characteristics come from the students who study Western literatures.

### 3.1.2. Connotations of Europe.

The first connotations of the total sample and connotations according to departments are presented through a constellation of connotations.

#### *The First Connotations*

**Figure 1** was derived from the analysis of the *first words* in the list of connotations of each participant. PPIC are predominant in the total sample. There is a striking difference between PPIC and the rest of the connotation groups. Even the share of the second most common connotation group (*geographical connotations*) remains less than one fourth of PPIC. The third group includes the negative political-institutional connotations (NPIC) which counted for 39 times. Hence, Europe is perceived mostly positive in aspect of its political-institutional structure (mostly positive) and geographical features. The frequency of all the other connotation groups falls far behind these three groups.

#### *Connotations according to Departments*

PPICs are dominant in all departments as well but the shares differ as to departments as seen in **Figure 2**. Students studying Western literatures consider "Europe" most positively while students from history department give the most negative results. This negative perspective of history students is observed also for the connotations on personal characteristics. Geographical connotations are common in the samples of both geography and western literature departments while individual connotations are common only for those who study western literatures.

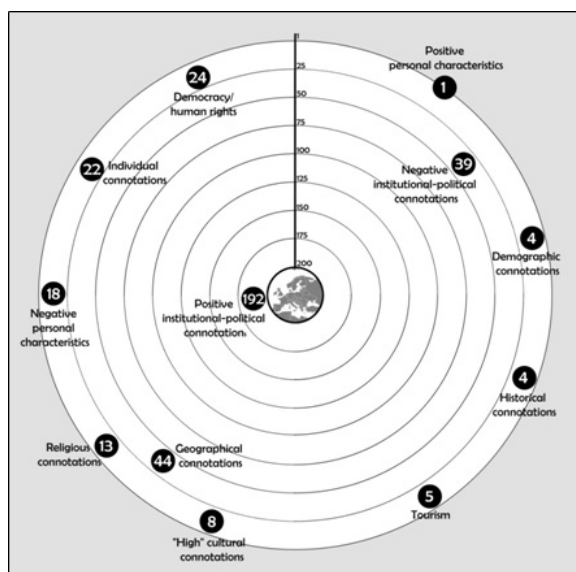


Figure 1. First connotations of total sample

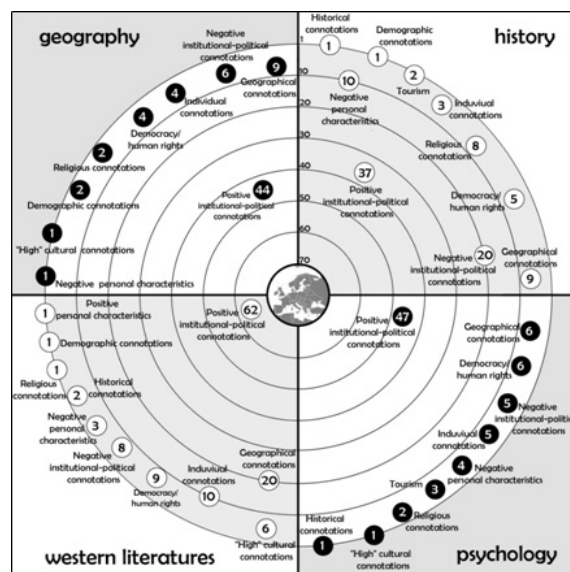


Figure 2. First connotations as to departments

### 3.1.3. Perspectives on Turkey-Europe Relations.

The students were asked to write their ideas on Turkey-Europe relations and the texts written were subjected to content analysis in order to classify the main perspectives on Europe-Turkey relations.

When considering the perspectives of the participants on Turkey-Europe relations, five main categories are seen. With two examples from each category, these perspectives are presented in the **Table 2**, with two examples from each category. According to the results of the content analysis, one of the perspectives reflect “an insincere relation” between Turkey and Europe which is only based on economic interests and it is the most common in the total sample with a share of 40,4%.

The second perspective is “a positive perspective” supporting the relations –with a specific focus on the *European Union* (18,3%). Another perspective is based on the “dependency of Turkey” in mutual relations with Europe (13,5%). The fourth perspective underlines the “impositions of Europe”, referring to the unacceptable demands of Europe(an Union) from Turkey (10,3%) while another perspective can be called “a cautious perspective” which attracts attention to the importance and necessity of relations with Europe given Turkey does not lose its own cultural values (8,0%).

**Graphic 2**, on the other hand, presents the distribution of these different perspectives according to the academic departments of the participants. Nearly half of the respondents studying Western literatures perceive Turkey-Europe relations in terms of the mutual economic interests while in the samples from the other three departments, History, Geography and Psychology, shares of this perspective are also quite high: 42,7%, 33,3% and 34,7% respectively. However, there were noticeable differences in the other perspectives of the respondents from different academic departments. The positive perspective is mostly common among geography students while history students have a negative perspective, giving the highest percentages in the perspectives such as “dependency of Turkey” and “impositions of Europe”.The “cautious perspective” which suggests “to be careful about not losing the Turkish culture” has a discursive strategy focused on the difference between “Turkish” and “European” cultures and has the highest percentage among students from psychology department (17,3%).

**Table 2.** Perspectives on Turkey-Europe relations

<p><b>An insincere relation based on only economic interests:</b></p> <p><i>Europe relates with Turkey in accordance with its benefits. Turkey, on the other hand, strives for acceptance and selling itself. However it is seen that Europe seems to get along with well Turkey, but the underlying truth is different (Female, 19, History).</i></p> <p><i>There is a kind of relationship between Turkey and Europe which is compulsory for the Turkish side. Europe, on the other hand, enriches more and more through relationships with Turkey which is a country serves for Europe's best interests (Female, 19, Psychology).</i></p>
<p><b>Positive Perspective</b></p> <p><i>Turkey should become a member of the European Union and get wealth as a European country (Male, 19, Geography).</i></p> <p><i>Turkey worked on adaptation process for the EU but these efforts have slowed down recently. Some demands of EU from Turkey are quite difficult to fulfil but EU is the symbol of development and wealth thus it is of great importance for Turkey to become a member of European Union (Male, 19, Geography).</i></p>
<p><b>Dependency of Turkey</b></p> <p><i>Relationship between Turkey and Europe should be in a positive manner but it seems like we (Turkey) are dependent to them (European countries). European countries interfere even in the domestic policies of Turkey. We are in such a situation that we need to get permission from them. It shouldn't be like this, Turkey should be respected. (Female, 19, Geography)</i></p> <p><i>Unfortunately, Turkey is dependent to Europe; it is like a toy of Europe! We are persistently making effort to become a member of EU so "we" arrange everything according to "them" but I believe nothing will change in a positive way even we become a member! (Female, 20, History)</i></p>
<p><b>Impositions of Europe</b></p> <p><i>The aim of European Union is clear: Dominating over Turkey through unacceptable impositions (Male, 20, History).</i></p> <p><i>Especially during seven years, Turkey is experiencing a process full of impositions about "being European" (Male, 20, History).</i></p>
<p><b>Cautious perspective</b></p> <p><i>Turkey should build more relations with Europe in order to develop more but while doing this; it should not lose its own values and culture (Female, 19, Psychology).</i></p> <p><i>I believe Turkey has its own sufficient sources for anything! Instead of imitating Europeans, Turkey should transfer only the technologic and scientific development. We shouldn't forget our own cultural inheritance (Female, 22, Western Literatures).</i></p>

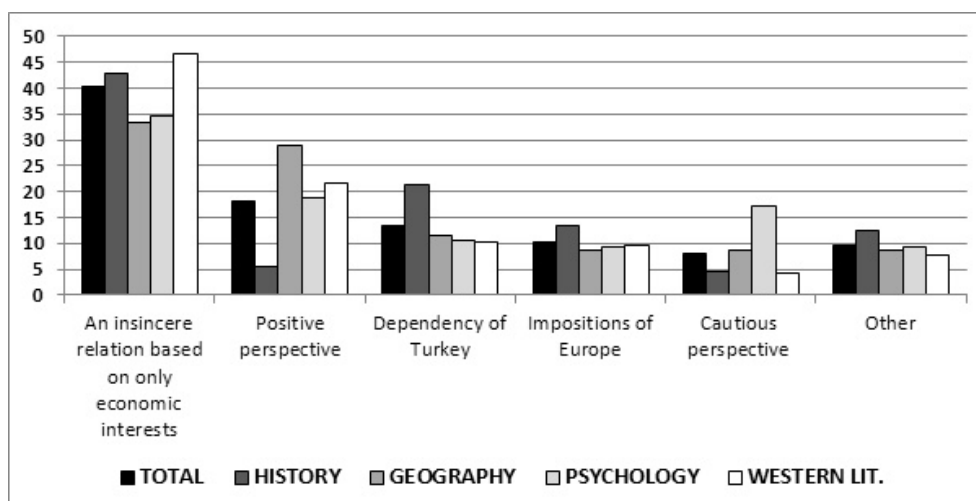
Whatever the type of the perspective that the respondents have is, it is observed that there is a common discourse of "us" vs. "them" in the texts as in the examples below:

*"Turkey wants to become a member of the European Union. She tries to fulfil the requirements of adaptation process. In the years ahead, either this relation will develop in a positive way and Turkey will become a member of the EU, or in the end of the negotiation process Turkey will give up, or there will be a privileged partnership. I do not believe that **they** will accept Turkey in the Union (Female, 28, Geography).*

*Europe is like a hungry monster which demolishes what is not serving for its benefit. **We** must be aware of this. **We** must be contented, be happy with small mercies and love each other (Male, 23, History).*

*"...**We** must take Europe as an example according to the guidance of our Great Leader [Kemal Atatürk] but while doing so, **we** must be elective according to our own lifestyle and traditions. After all, **we** are Turks. ..."(Male, 19, Geography)*





**Graphic 2.** Main perspectives on Europe-Turkey relations (%)

Because 80.1% of the participants have never been to a European country; it is not possible to compare whether having been to Europe effects the opinion on Europe – Turkey relations or not. However, it is a striking finding that those who have been to Europe evaluate the Europe-Turkey relations based on *only economic benefits* (47.4% vs. 34.3%) instead of *dependency of Turkey* to Europe (6.6% vs. 13.7%), compared with the other part of sample.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Attitudes towards Europe and Turkey's entry to the European Union is a complicated issue in contemporary Turkish society and differs according to social identity categories (ethnicity, gender etc.) as some studies indicate (Göregenli and Karakuş 2011, Göregenli 2012). The aim of this study was to explore the social representations on the relation between Europe and Turkey and also understand the representation of Europe in case of Turkish university students which is a group with a relatively high educational level in the Turkish society. According to the connotation categories generated from the research, "Europe" is represented mostly in aspect of its political and institutional characteristics that is to say Europe is a concept which is more than only a physical continent or a geographical entity. It is seen that these political-institutional connotations are divided into two sub categories, being *positive* and *negative*. The dominance of positive political institutional connotations such as *civilization, modernism, development, European Union, strong economy and wealth* refers to an understanding of Europe as a source of modernization and a better life. Such an understanding of Europe does not differ among the participants from different academic disciplines. A previous research on the image of Europe among Turkish university students (Südaş and Gökten 2012) also indicated that the idea of Europe is linked relatively to economic development. Concurrent to this perspective, the understanding of modernisation as an extension of westernisation is also prevalent as a common social consent. According to this viewpoint, modernisation is interpreted as the reflection at various levels of the transformations that are indispensable to the act of importing the western system (Kahraman 2001:9-10).

Regarding the perspectives on Europe-Turkey relation, five main categories were determined namely, "an insincere relation based on economic interests", "a positive perspective", "dependency of Turkey", "cautious perspective" and "impositions of Europe". Most of the participants accept the relation between Turkey and Europe as an "insincere

relation” which is based on “only economic interests”. The perspective putting the dependency of Turkey forward refers to a one sided relation which is compulsive for Turkey. The perspective based on the impositions of Europe, on the other hand, depicts a “patronizing Europe” over Turkey. The positive perspective supports the relation between two sides, focusing on the insufficiency of the relations and that Turkey changes in a positive way as a result of its ties to Europe.

It is possible to say that on one hand *Europe itself* is considered mainly in aspect of its positive sides but on the other hand *its relation with Turkey* is perceived negatively: The perspectives are mainly based on an unequal relation which is insincere and sometimes threatening and dominating Turkey. Respondents mention the difficulty or even the impossibility of the full membership of Turkey to the “European Union” which is the primary representation of “Europe”. Arguments such as “Turkey will never be accepted as a member of the Union” or “European Union always detains Turkey” are postulated by the participants. These arguments are parallel to the findings of a previous study (Sandal-Önal 2007) on the social representations of European Union. Sandal-Önal’s findings indicate that interviewees do not have the belief of Turkey’s EU membership and there is a negative attribution to the EU membership of Turkey through arguments like “EU will not accept Turkey as a member” and “EU will continue to detain Turkey’s membership”.

Connotations related to religion with reference to Christianity and the focus on cultural and religious differences that find an expression especially in the “cautious perspective” give clue about how respondents construct the Turkey-Europe relations. Relation with Europe is desirable as long as it is limited to the transfer of science and technology but when it comes to a possible cultural change in Turkey, Europe is perceived as a threat. Sandal-Önal (2007:124) also states in her work, *a referral to religious affiliations is also present in terms of disadvantages premising that “EU membership would cause religious conflicts” and in terms of Turkey’s membership to EU stating that “Cultural or religious differences and make Turkey’s membership impossible”.* Therefore religious differences are attributed as an important dimension in terms of the conceptualization of EU.

Europe may also be understood as a specific idea or socio-spatial experience, something that the idea of a “structure of feeling” coined by Williams (1961), partly captures. Williams understood the “structure of feeling” as a culture of a period that structures the understanding of what takes place. What this in principle means is, of course, a deeply contextual matter in both space and time, and it is shaped by such elements as *national media, education systems and identity narratives* (Paasi 2001:9). In our research, it is also possible to see the impact of the *national media* on how Europe is understood in relation to previous studies on the representation of Europe in the Turkish mainstream newspapers. According to a research looking at the representation of the Turkey’s EU membership process (Aslan 2008), the necessity of the full membership of Turkey in the European Union was underlined in the newspapers especially after 2004 which was the year when the membership negotiations started with Turkey started however the membership expectation was much related to cultural references such as “dialogue between civilizations”, “the necessity of the membership to prove that the European Union is not a Christianity club” and “Turkey is a bridge between the East and the West”. Another study (Sandal-Önal 2007) indicated the media representation of EU within the newspapers having three different political views, namely “EU as a must”, “EU as a threat” and “EU as difficult”. EU as a threat, again, refers mostly to cultural differences.

It can be concluded that university students develop an idea of “Europe” based on and similar to the mainstream image of Europe in the Turkish society too, rather than an image which is objective and shaped by their own academic specialization. In the formation of this “mainstream image” of Europe, both Turkish media and political discourse play a decisive

role. The representation of Europe is very much related to the European Union, which refers to the *institutional Europe* of Paasi (2001). “European Union is the present day representation of “Europe” which has meant modernisation and attaining the West for nearly two centuries. In Yavuz’s terms the failure experienced in Turkey during the process of getting “Europeanised” stems from perceiving ‘Europe’ as a considerably narrow and restricted enlightenment project. According to Yavuz, the adventure of Europeanization for two hundred years resulted in Orientalism; that is, “we were not able to get *Westernised*, but we became *orientalised*” - *Orientalism* in the sense of perceiving ourselves through the eyes of the ‘European’ (Yavuz, 1998:115) and it is still considered as a modernist project.

It is a question, for both EU and Turkey, which is to what extent Turkey belongs to Europe and what are the pliability limitations of Europe are. As Light and Young (2009:298) express “the arrival of 10 new EU member states from the countries of the former Eastern Europe has produced a new round of questions about the idea of “Europe”. Thus it is no doubt that the possible membership of Turkey as a candidate country would bring a new dimension to those questions on the idea of Europe. Paasi (2005:582) also comments that eastward expansion (of the European Union has brought into play a key territorial element in the construction of a new territorial identity for the EU (Kuus 2005). Both for the European Union and for Turkey, questioning the territorial identity is of great importance because Turkey seems to be the easternmost limit of EU.

In the given context, social representations of Europe have developed on ideological background more than geographical basis or objectivity. “Mismatches between the political map and the social and cultural realities of Europe can be explained by what is hidden by conventional political borders. An examination of European maps through time helps to clarify the changing nature of borders and confirms that concepts such as nationality, identity, ethnicity and citizenship inevitably arise when considering European places and people (Keane and Villanueva 2009:2)”. Thus in Turkey, as a country in the pursuit of integration to the European map, it is of great importance to make mutual efforts to change the social representations of Europe as to include also other various aspects of Europe as well as Turkey-EU relations.

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