Compatibility of “Islam” and “Europe”: Turkey’s EU Accession

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ABSTRACT
Turkey’s membership in the European Union (EU) is contingent on economic, political, and cultural factors. Rather than a geographic area with a particular cultural and religious history, the EU defines “Europe” as a political project that espouses values such as human rights, pluralist democracy, and a liberal economy. However, Turkey’s EU accession process highlights the cultural and religious dimension through which “Islam” and “Europe” may be mutually redefined. This article examines how Turkish Muslim immigrants in Europe have become an example of the compatibility of “Islam” and “Europe.” It is concluded that opposing Turkey’s EU membership based on essentializing arguments of cultural and religious difference is misleading and counterproductive, as it fails to address the shifting boundaries of Europe and of Islam.

Despite objections from Austria, in October 2004, the EU commission issued an encouraging report on Turkey’s EU eligibility. Nevertheless, at this crucial turning point in Turkey’s bid for EU membership, Frits Bolkestein, the EU’s internal market commissioner, expressed his concern that Europe would be Islamic by the end of this century, quoting remarks by historian Bernard Lewis. He said: “I don’t know if it will take this course but, if he’s right, the liberation of Vienna [from the Ottoman Turks] in 1683 would have been in vain.”1 While the commissioner had a range of economic, political, and strategic reasons at his disposal with which to disapprove of Turkey’s EU membership, he chose instead to use an essentialist approach, referring to an historical event that happened more than three centuries ago in order to reify “Europe” and “Islam” as incompatible and inherently antagonistic entities.

There are pro and con arguments concern-

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Critics argue that Europe’s Muslim immigrants cannot integrate because Islam is inassimilable and therefore a threat to a “European identity” which they view as historically based on Christianity. For evidence, they point to the alleged failure of Muslim immigrants in Europe to integrate culturally.

I argue that Turkish Muslims in Europe construct Islam not in a monolithic or homogenous form, as the term “European Islam” suggests, but in multiple ways, such as political Islamism, Sufism, civil Islam, and radical fundamentalism, among others. Transnational Turkish Islamic movements have institutionalized these competing forms of Islam in European public spheres. They do not simply transplant religious extremism from their countries of origin, and neither do they necessarily conform to Europe’s liberal values. Rather, they play an intermediary role, negotiating between the social and religious needs of Muslims on the one hand, and host countries’ governmental policies regarding immigrants and Muslims, on the other. Turkish Islamic movements localize their interpretations of Islam in order to fulfill the demands of their young, second-generation constituency, a demographic group with higher social, economic, and educational standards than first generation labor migrants. For instance, eighty percent of all Dutch-Turkish civil society organizations, including Islamic ones, regard the EU as an economic and political rather than a cultural or religious union, and ninety percent support Turkey’s membership. The inner diversity and incremental localization of “Turkish Islam” suggests that Islam is not inherently antithetical to the “European” values that define EU membership.

The article began by questioning the “given” meanings of Europe and Islam by showing how they are constructed differently by powerful actors such as Bolkestein and Huntington in specific social contexts, and by noting that the EU has emerged as the major power in defining what Europe means. I will continue by giving an overview of the issues generally associated with immigrant Islam in Europe and by discussing two Turkish Islamic movements, Milli Görüş and the
Nur Movements in terms of the differences in their religious interpretations, to illustrate Islam’s inner diversity and flexibility within Europe. The following analysis is based on the ethnographic research I have conducted in Germany and the Netherlands since 2003. I suggest that opposing Turkey’s EU membership based on essentializing arguments of cultural and religious difference is misleading and counterproductive, as it fails to address the shifting boundaries of Europe and of Islam.

**Essentializing Europe versus Islam**

In an interview with the German daily Frankfurter *Algemeine Zeitung*, Samuel Huntington compared Latino immigration in the United States with Muslim immigration in Europe. In response to questions about his book *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, Huntington argued that unassimilated Hispanic immigrants threaten White-Protestant-Anglo-Saxon American cultural mores such as punctuality. When asked to comment as to how Europeans should respond to their immigrants, Huntington pursues the same line of thought with one important difference. He argues that whereas Latino culture and language threaten American identity, Muslim culture and religion threaten European identity.

Huntington’s interview reflects an essentialist approach to identity and culture, figuring ‘European’ and ‘Muslim’ identities as fixed and mutually exclusive. As a theory, essentialism posits and advocates the existence of unchanging, objectively identifiable, inner characteristics of cultures, i.e. that there is an ‘essence’ inherent to being “American” or “European.” As an essentialist, Huntington believes that there is a “European” identity, built upon a distinct and unchanging core of history and culture. For him, “the joint Christian heir is obviously essential for the European identity.” The heritage Huntington cites is then used to explain why “Europeans have today some difficulties with Muslims.”

Huntington recognizes that public religion is not as vibrant in Europe as it is in the United States. However, he still calls secularism in Europe “Christian secularism.” In regard to Muslim immigrants to Europe he concludes that “…Muslim immigrants in European countries maintain their characteristic partnerships and their religion very self-confidently. That naturally creates problems.” It should be pointed out here, contra Huntington, that it is when European identity is essentialized as Christian, and immigrants from Muslim-majority countries are defined exclusively in terms of their religion, that Islam becomes “naturally” problematic.
Huntington agrees that Europe’s need for labor in the coming decades necessitates migration. His solution to the migration of ‘problematic’ Muslims immigrants, however, is to control their access to Europe through the building of walls. In his view, the perceived threat to ‘European identity’ comes from the inclusion of Turkey in the EU as well as from immigration. Huntington believes that granting EU membership to the secular Turkish Republic with its Muslim majority population would threaten ‘European identity.’ For his part, Huntington believes that inclusion would be possible if Europeans were to redefine their identity in a social and political manner. However, he vaguely warns, this would mean that “Europe will no longer mean what it historically meant.”

The purpose of this analysis is not merely to critique Huntington but also to expose the drawbacks of the essentialist way of thinking often aired in public debates on Islam in Europe. The essentialist position appeals to stability, security, and continuity rather than change, ambiguity, and uncertainty. Political and social conditions around the world after September 11, 2001 are vulnerable to essentialist rationales because they appear to provide protection and consolidation of “self.” Increasing security concerns have consolidated discourses that essentialize the difference of Islam in order to maintain the cultural borders of European identity.11

Politicians and policy-makers favor essentialist views in their policies as well as their rhetoric. For instance, Francis Fukuyama warns that Muslim immigrants to Europe could spawn a hotbed of terrorist networks. According to Fukuyama, the failure of European countries to assimilate their large and growing Muslim populations has caused alienation among the young and a “hard core for terrorism.”12 Fukuyama’s solution is to assimilate Muslims. He claims that Europe’s multicultural policies have failed to produce the desired level of immigrant conformity. As part of the assimilation process, he suggests including Muslims in Europe in the “War on Terror.” “Fixing the Middle East is only part of the problem. It is a West European problem, too,” says Fukuyama. He points out that the leaders of the September 11 attacks came out of a cell in Hamburg and that most of the extremists participating in the bombings in Spain in 2004 and England in 2005 were born in those countries, respectively.

The ideas touted by Huntington and Fukuyama can be summarized as follows. The accession of Turkey to the EU poses threats to European identity because of the
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former's predominately Muslim population. Muslim immigrants in Europe are alienated because of their Islamic identity, which is essentially in conflict with a Christian-based European identity. This makes Muslims in Europe more likely to join terrorist networks. The solution is therefore to force assimilation and build walls to control immigration.

This article challenges the essentialist ‘incompatibility between Islam and liberal democracy’ argument by examining how Muslim minorities actually practice Islam in Western Europe. As an alternative to essentialist arguments, a contextual approach to religion suggests that Islam as a social phenomenon becomes what its adherents make of it in each social context. This approach emphasizes the inner diversity and adaptability of Islam and its relationship to modernity, liberalism, and democracy. It does not suggest a total relativism, but rather a negotiation between the universal principles of Islam and the particular circumstances of Muslims.

Dale Eickelman, a prominent anthropologist of Islam, argues that contemporary approaches to the study of Islam in local contexts can be divided into two extremes. One extreme represents Islam as a “seamless essence” and the other “as a plastic congeries of beliefs and practices.” Both of these approaches need to be avoided in order to unearth the complex relationships that form between Islam and new social contexts. Islam is not simply a set of religious doctrines replicated in cookie-cutter fashion in new settings, nor is it a haphazard set of practices produced anew by people in each locale who call themselves “Muslims.”

The vast diversity of contemporary Islamic movements indicates that contextualization is necessary for an adequate examination of how Islam unfolds in various locations. Following this line of argumentation, I first contextualize the idea of Europe and then Islam by offering examples from Turkish Islamic movements in Europe.

**Contextualizing the Idea of Europe**

The essentialist argument that precludes Islam from being European can be analyzed by examining the construction of “Europe” from an anthropological perspective. The first question to ask is thus, can Europe be treated as a “culture
Franz Boas first developed the concept of “culture area,” which is defined as “a heuristic concept, providing a geographic ordering of societies on the basis of shared environmental and cultural features.” For heuristic purposes, this concept is applicable for Europe because societies on the continent do share many similarities, such as a common religion and a long history of interaction characterized by social, economic, and political cooperation as well as conflict. The idea of Europe as a cultural area emphasizes its cultural, historical, and political boundaries.

However, critics of this approach argue that the choice of traits used for commonality is always arbitrary. Firstly, the geographic boundaries of “Europe” are amorphous. The inclusion of Russia and Turkey, for example, has been debated. Turkey does not directly qualify for European identity because its territories lie to the east of the straits. However, the edited volume based on the IX International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences and entitled *Europe as a Culture Area* includes an article by Mübeccel Kiray on the Aegean port city of Turkey, Izmir. Such examples reflect the ambivalent position Turkey has to “Europe,” even in anthropological discussions.

Secondly, the cultural historical argument points to key values that Europeans cherish, such as free market economy, individual rights and liberties, and democracy. However, this raises the question of where to place “European” countries such as Spain under Franco, Italy under Mussolini, or Greece under Junta regimes. These ideals may be the markers of European cultures at specific times, but they do not create effective boundaries of Europe. Moreover, the assumption of boundedness itself presumes a unity, or at least a cohesion of cultural differences among three very different religio-linguistic groupings in Europe: Orthodox-Slav, Protestant-Germanic, and Catholic-Anglo-Saxon.

Thirdly, Europe is increasingly a political term rather than an analytical one. The economic benefits tied to joining the EU have made it rewarding to call oneself “European.” However, any self-designation must be accompanied by recognition from those who have the power to define “Europe.” This is largely the EU. In this sense, it functions as a Foucaultian disciplining power. While the EU remains in the background, the standards of becoming “European” are set, monitored, and
evaluated not only by its bureaucrats but also by the media, non-governmental organizations such as human rights groups, and scholarly analyses.

The case of Turkey exemplifies this ‘disciplining’ process. The Turkish Republic has committed itself to joining “Western Civilization” since its foundation. This has always been the goal of the Turkish state’s ideology, namely Kemalism, and has led to the equation of modernization with westernization. After the 1960s, Turkey became fully committed to joining the EU. In Foucaultian terms, the economic prosperity and political power of “the West” has led Turkey to willingly submit itself to the disciplining power of the “European” discourse. Turkey has agreed to increase its standards of human rights in legal and practical terms. It has allowed, for instance, European politicians and journalists to observe and assess its “scale of democratic governance” and the “fairness” of its trials.

Thus, rather than a geographic designation, cultural-historical distinction, or a religious affiliation, “Europe” is a political symbol produced and maintained by main centers of power, most notably EU institutions that define ‘European’ identity, knowledge, and discipline. Still, these centers of power are not immune to challenge. The EU has its own flag and anthem, but these symbolic elements have not replaced national symbols. Debates over “deepening” the EU (lessening national autonomy) or “widening” it (inter-governmentalism with more members) exemplify the tension of defining both the boundaries and the core elements of ‘Europe.’ The rejection of the EU constitution in France and the Netherlands in 2005 indicates how local politics regarding Muslim immigrants and EU-level politics are intertwined: the negative votes in these countries were largely the result of poor economies, a perception of the EU expansion as a threat to national identity, and concerns about immigration. More specifically, the murder of Theo Van Gogh by a Dutch-Moroccan for his film critical of Islam and of Muslims’ treatment of women only seven months before the referendum, fueled fears of radical Islamism. The various tendencies within the EU for deepening or widening, and the local politics of Muslim migration both indicate that “Europe” is defined through a politically charged navigation of geography, history, culture, and political development.

**Contextualizing Turkish Islam in Europe**

Since September 11, 2001, the accession of Turkey into the EU has become symbolic of the tensions between global cooperation, and the conflict between Islam and the West. The current Turkish government under Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan argues that Turkey’s accession to the EU would promote an “alliance of
Opposing Turkey’s EU membership based on essentializing arguments of cultural and religious difference is misleading and counterproductive, as it fails to address the shifting boundaries of Europe and of Islam civilizations” rather than a clash.22 However, opponents point to the isolating role of Islamic movements in Western Europe as evidence for the incompatibility of Islam and Europe.

Scholars such as Bassam Tibi propose the emergence of “Euro-Islam” or European Islam, a form of Islam assimilated into the secular European public sphere.23 European Islam would limit itself to the private sphere and be pursued as an individual form of spirituality, thus assuring peaceful Muslim participation in Europe’s cultural pluralism. This proposal is a normative projection, a “model for” Muslims to adopt, rather than a descriptive or analytical “model of” how Islam unfolds in Europe as a social phenomenon. There is limited empirical evidence to support the case for secularized “European Islam.” Nevertheless, European political authorities support this model and call for the development of “French, German, or Dutch Islam” in their respective countries.

The normative and optimistic projection of a monolithic “European Islam” has been defied by the persistence of plural Islamic voices ranging from moderate to radical. The source of this plurality is the organized religious life of Muslims. There are numerous associations, foundations, institutes, informal study circles, media outlets, and educational institutions through which each interpretation of Islam is institutionalized. This allows Islam to persist in a variety of contexts and allows for a diversity of Islamic interpretations in Europe.

I now present the cases of two Turkish Islamic movements, Milli Görüş and the Nur Movement, to demonstrate the inner diversity of Islam and its incorporation in Europe.24 Milli Görüş emerged as a political Islamist movement active in the European public sphere and in European politics in the 1970s. The Nur movement is a faith-based movement focusing on educational activities and inter-religious dialogue, which began organizing in Europe in the early 1980s. Although there are more Turkish Islamic organizations, these two movements give a sample of Islamic diversity among Sunni Turkish Muslims and illustrate the potential for the adaptation of Islam in Europe.25

Turkish Islamic Movements in Western Europe

The literature on the development of Islam in Western Europe emphasizes three issues.26 First of all, Islamic groups vary in ethnicity, nationality, language,
sect, and religious interpretation. Turkish Sunni Muslims comprise one of the three largest ethnic Muslim communities in Europe, with nearly three million North Africans in France and one million South Asian Muslims in Great Britain. There are 4.5 million Turks living in EU countries, 2.6 million of whom live in Germany. They comprise approximately eighty percent of all Muslims in Germany. Three hundred fifty-eight thousand Turkish Muslims comprise 40.5% of the one million Muslims in the Netherlands. In spite of these large numbers, the Turkish Muslim experience in Europe is not receiving the scholarly attention proportionate to its population size and level of religious organization.

Secondly, host states have specific political cultures and organizational expectations regarding religious groups and immigrant integration. The democratic political system in Europe guarantees religious expression. Moreover, their welfare state systems provide better economic standards than Muslim-majority countries. Economic deprivation and political oppression, which promote uncivil forms of Islam, are relatively contained in Europe. For instance, in the Dutch case, the welfare system, multicultural policies for dual citizenship, and state-funded religious schools create favorable conditions for the local institutionalization of Islam, despite the policy shifts of recent governments. Nevertheless, the strict application of laïcité, coupled with economic deprivation within the Muslim immigrant community in France has resulted in civil unrest, including riots in 2005.

Lastly, as Muslims immigrants switch from guest workers to permanent residents and citizens, differences between first and subsequent generations emerge. A generational shift in social class has occurred between the first and second generations as the labor migrants of the first wave of migration in the 1960s gave way to an educated middle-class second generation that knows that it is in Europe for good. This also means that younger generations’ expectations for their religious organizations have shifted; many are turning to Islamic groups for solutions to the quandary of how to live as faithful Muslims in a liberal, secular, non-Muslim majority society. Muslims need to respond to new questions in their everyday lives, such as attitudes toward non-Islamic host states, inter-religious relations, religious education, gender relations, and ritualistic practice in a secular public sphere. Each religious group develops its own response to this challenge, as vari-

As an alternative to essentialist arguments, a contextual approach to religion suggests that Islam as a social phenomenon becomes what its adherents make of it in each social context.
The vast diversity of contemporary Islamic movements indicates that contextualization is necessary for an adequate examination of how Islam unfolds in various locations in Europe since the mid-1990s. Civil Islam presents religion as a source of personal moral behavior and spiritual motivation that contributes to social and public issues without challenging democratic secular regimes. The Nur movement and the religious community (*cemaat*) of Fethullah Gülen, in particular, represent this form of Islam. Close analysis of these Islamic movements and their interpretations reveals the inner diversity of Islam and the variety of opinions regarding the role of Islam in Europe.

**The Nur Movement: Embodiment of Civil Islam?**

The Nur movement is a global Islamic phenomenon that aims to spread a liberal Islamic message and combine science and religion based on the Quranic exegesis of Said Nursi (1876-1960) and his magnum opus, the *Risale-i Nur* (*Epistles of Light*). There are nearly a dozen *cemaats* that take Nursi’s writings and their interpretative framework as their basis. However, I will focus on the community under the leadership of Fethullah Gülen because it has emerged as the largest institutional network. The Gülen community has established a global network in media, business, and especially education. Its members have engaged in interreligious dialogue, particularly after the 1998 meeting of Gülen with Pope John Paul in Rome.

Gülen has used Nursi’s writings as a reference point for his activism in education. In his writings, Nursi emphasizes how the book of nature has to be studied through the natural sciences because they also prove the existence and works of God in the universe. There cannot be any contradiction between science, which explains the book of nature, and revelation, i.e. the word of God, the Quran. In composing the *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi was responding to positivist and materialist philosophy’s challenge to Muslim believers’ faith in a transcendental reality and the hereafter. Fethullah Gülen turned this vision into action and called his followers to found student dorms, high schools and later universities, beginning in Turkey.
in the 1980s. By the 1990s, these schools had spread to Central Asia. Currently Gülen’s followers have schools in ninety-one countries that serve more than a hundred thousand students.\(^{33}\) From the onset, the goal has been to educate young Muslims in the natural sciences while still encouraging a strong faith in God and the ethical code of Islam.

Followers of Gülen’s ideas have founded approximately ten student dorms in the Netherlands, located primarily in the big cities. They run more than seventy educational centers in Germany.\(^{34}\) The followers are usually well-educated, young, and focused primarily on two types of activism: education and inter-religious dialogue. The engagement of the Nur movement, including the Gülen community, in these two fields has produced new religious authorities for Muslims in Europe and promoted a universalistic interpretation of Islam.

First of all, the emphasis on formal education enables academics to speak in the name of Islam. One such example is the Islamic University of Rotterdam, which was founded in 1997 and has 34 faculty members from nine different nations.\(^{35}\) The ambitions of the university are reflected in the words of its rector, Prof. Ahmet Akgündüz. In his speech at the opening reception of their new building, Akgündüz stated, “I hope to build bridges between Western and Muslim culture. My aim is to let good win over evil. In my opinion, this can only be accomplished through education.”\(^{36}\) Although the Islamic University of Rotterdam was not founded by Gülen or any other Nur community member, its prominent faculty members are known to be influenced by Nursi’s line of Islamic interpretation.

Secondly, the Gülen community and other Nur communities are active in inter-religious dialogue. They meet with Christians and Jews to reflect on each others’ traditions, sacred texts, and experiences living as devout believers in a secular world; and to discuss social issues, including religious violence, peace, and the environment. These meetings have a variety of outcomes, some expected and others not. For instance, a middle-aged Gülen community activist explained to me how his perception of the Dutch people changed through his experience in inter-religious dialogue.\(^{37}\) His initial motivation in inter-religious dialogue activism was to reach out to non-Muslims. However, he began to appreciate other religious and humanist traditions when he learned that followers of other religions also seek the

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European Islam would limit itself to the private sphere and be pursued as an individual form of spirituality, thus assuring peaceful Muslim participation in Europe’s cultural pluralism.
common ideals of justice and peace, albeit in different ways. In addition, he realized that bearing witness to the truth of Islam effectively means embodying its message in the universal language of good works in everyday life, rather than through preaching. Thus, he has reformulated his mission, and now promotes neighborly relations among Muslims and non-Muslims. This example can be considered typical; it indicates the emergence of pluralist and tolerant dispositions toward religious diversity in Europe from an Islamic perspective.

Fethullah Gülen himself supports the entrance of Turkey into EU because he believes that Turkish Muslims can contribute to European societies while keeping their moral and spiritual life based on Islam. He promotes Turkey’s EU accession by supporting Atatürk’s goal for the Republic, namely to reach the level of “developed civilizations” (muasır medeniyetler). The Gülen community’s activities have largely focused on the field of education by serving young Muslim generations and promoting inter-religious relations, activities which in turn promote civil Islam as part of the European spiritual landscape.

**Milli Görüş: Towards European Islam?**

Milli Görüş is the largest non-governmental Turkish-Islamic organization in Europe with more than eighty thousand members and five hundred associated mosques. It originated from the political Islamist movement led by Necmettin Erbakan in Turkey in 1969. It advocates that Muslims change the public sphere, bringing it into accordance with Islamic principles. Milli Görüş in Europe began concentrating its efforts more toward its European constituency after the Erbakan-led Welfare Party’ rise and fall from power between 1996 and 1998. They are still in the process of formulating their political agenda for the Muslim minority in Europe, a process reflected in the difference between Milli Görüş headquarters, formally Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş, in Germany and their branches in the Netherlands.

Milli Görüş runs 34 mosques and claims to have 8,200 followers represented by two regional federations in the Netherlands, which are split between north and south. The northern federation has taken a different path than the southern, which remains traditional. The northerners hired Hacı Karacaer in 1999 as their public relations director to improve the public image of Milli Görüş Ned-
erlang, hereafter referred to as Dutch Milli Görüş. Karacaer emerged as a new authority, speaking in the name of Milli Görüş and its interpretation of Islam; his position included liberal views on the rights of women, homosexuality, and reform in Islam. Karacaer endorsed an open, reflective view of Muslims in general and Milli Görüş followers in particular, rather than promoting a defensive or apologetic discourse. He called for his followers to become pious Dutch Muslims rather than Turkish Muslims in the Netherlands. Mosques affiliated with Dutch Milli Görüş delivered a 
\textit{hutbe} (Friday sermon), and encouraged gender equality in housework. But Karacaer and his supporters became isolated from first generation Milli Görüş followers and continue to have tense relations with the German headquarters.

In 2006, Milli Görüş’s German headquarters decided to change the administration of the Dutch Milli Görüş, including Hacı Karacaer. The Dutch media presented this top-down change as a hardliner German Milli Görüş’s elimination of liberal-minded and Europeanizing Dutch Milli Görüş. It is still unclear whether the newly appointed Dutch Milli Görüş leaders will follow the path of their predecessors.

While Milli Görüş in Germany has distrustful and confrontational interactions with state authorities, Dutch Milli Görüş has developed areas of cooperation and channels of communication. This is due to the different impact of state policies concerning Muslims and immigrants in Germany and the Netherlands, which are exclusivist and multiculturalist respectively. Mustafa Yeneroğlu, German Milli Görüş’s chief legal officer, explains that his organization sues any unsupported claims against their organization, and cites a case which they have already won concerning allegations in a government pamphlet that they are associated with Osama Bin Laden. Although German Milli Görüş has been successful in some cases, such as this one, the tensions created by the legal procedures seem to work against a favorable public opinion, and reports from the Office for the Protection of German Constitution still list Milli Görüş as an extremist Muslim organization.

The comparison of the German and Dutch branches of Milli Görüş on their approach to the idea of “European Islam” indicates that Dutch Milli Görüş is more open to discussing Islamic interpretations that fit the European environment, in
State policies toward Islamic organizations influence their respective interpretations of Islam and their relations with governmental authorities in contrast to the leaders at the German headquarters who remain more skeptical. I asked Yeneroğlu what he thinks of the term “European Islam.” He does not feel comfortable using the term because of its secular and liberal connotations. However, Karacaer is more willing to use the term and supports the emergence of European Islam. He notes that the differences of Islam in Europe will appear in nuances, like the colors of the dress you wear, and adds that Islam adapts itself wherever it goes.

When I asked the leaders of Dutch Milli Görüş about the difference between themselves and Milli Görüş in Germany, they told me that “Germany gets the Milli Görüş they deserve.” They push harder and they get more resistance. As another Dutch Milli Görüş leader puts it, the “Dutch treat us mildly and get a mild response; the Germans treat us harshly and get a harsh Milli Görüş.” In other words, state policies toward Islamic organizations influence their respective interpretations of Islam and their relations with governmental authorities.

**Conclusion**

Essentialist definitions that position Europe and Islam as opposite and opposing entities are used in political discourses invested in preventing Turkey’s accession to EU membership. However, “Europe” and “Islam” are only meaningful terms within a particular context, where they are used for a particular purpose. For politicians opposing Turkey’s EU membership, there is a clash between Islam and Europe. However, the different definitions of ‘Europe’ show that this opposition is constructed by privileging a historical and cultural Europe based on Christian tradition. The long debates and eventual failure to refer to a “Judeo-Christian” heritage during the formulation of the EU constitution reflects doubts within the community about the commonality of this heritage.

Analyzing half a century of Turkish Muslim immigrant experience in Europe reveals a variety of interactions between Europe and Islam. Islamic groups such as the Nur movement aim to contribute to the moral and spiritual life of Europe through their interpretation of civil Islam, and political Islamic groups such as Milli Görüş influence the European public sphere, and consequently reformulate their own Islamic interpretation. Milli Görüş is in a process of redefining political Islam in response to different state policies. Young leaders demand greater adaptation to Europe, which has become their home. In addition to the Nur movement
and Milli Görüş, radical and isolationist Islamic interpretations exist, though they remain marginal. The majority seek a way of being Muslim while remaining at peace with European society at large. Their demands for a Euro-Muslim identity challenge the political assertions of an inherent opposition between Europe and Islam.

**Endnotes**


5. These two movements illustrate the adaptive potential of Islamic interpretations in Europe more strongly than other major Turkish Islamic organizations such as the Diyanet and Süleymanlı. The Diyanet, or Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, is the largest Turkish Islamic organization in Europe, running 740 mosques in Germany alone. It promotes an "official Islam," presenting Islam as a moral code for personal behavior that runs parallel to Turkish patriotism and mutual solidarity among Turks. The Süleymanlı community is an off-shoot of the Naqshibandiyia Sufi order founded by Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan (1888-1959). They control 290 mosques in Germany where they hold mystical rituals and offer Quran courses. The numbers are from Andreas Goldberg, “Islam in Germany” Shireen T. Hunter, (ed.) *Islam, Europe’s Second Religion* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002)

6. For the implications of the religious and cultural dimensions of Turkey’s EU membership process for international relations, see Elizabeth Hurd, “Negotiating Europe: The Politics of Religion and the Prospects of Turkish Accession to the EU.” *Review of International Studies*, 32, no. 3 (2006), pp. 401-418.


22. At the initiative of the Turkish and Spanish governments in 2005, the United Nations set up the “Alliance of Civilizations” project. Visit http://www.unaoc.org/


24. The Diyanet is linked to the Turkish state; the presidents of the organization in each European country also serve as the Counselor of Religious Affairs in the Turkish Embassies. This article focuses on non-governmental Islamic movements that disseminate distinct religious interpretations.

25. For instance, the Kaplan community is a revolutionary Islamic group whose goal is to replace the secular democratic regime in Turkey with Islamic-law-based theocracy. Cemaleddin Kaplan split from Milli Görüş and founded his own organization in 1983. The Kaplan community has been banned in Germany since 2001. Metin Kaplan, the last leader of the community, was extradited to Turkey on charges of attempting to change the secular character of the Turkish Republic by force. He was sentenced to imprisonment for life in 2005.


29. The figure of Muslims in Germany is from Religionswissenschaftlicher Medien und Informationsdienst e. V. (REMID), http://www.remid.de/remid_info_zahlen.htm. Last visited on July 5, 2007.


33 Hakan Yüksel, “Gülen’in Eğitim İmparatorluğu.” Yeni Aktüel, No. 13, 11-17 (October 2005) pp. 22-32

34. Andreas Goldberg “Islam in Germany.” Shireen T. Hunter, ed, In Islam, Europe’s Second

38. This fits with Gülen’s message to uphold temsil (exemplification) over tabligh (call to Islam). Gülen calls his followers to exemplify Islam in their actions rather than merely preaching.
40. General Secretary of Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş, European headquarters of Milli Görüş, Oğuz Üçüncü, gave this figure during annual meeting on May 30th, 2004 in Kerpen, Germany.
42. Interview with author. Amsterdam, February 24, 2004.
46. Ian Johnson, “Litigation Suits: Groups of Muslims who seek Legitimacy in Germany.”
49. Interview with author, Amsterdam, October, 16, 2003.
51. Interview with author, Amsterdam, November 11, 2003.