

## New Cold Wars? Civilization Discourse & Beyond

Paper presented at the conference on Expanding Horizons - Challenges, Solidarities, Resistances, Lisbon, November 30, 2007 by: Kemal Kirişci, Executive Board Member of EDAM; Professor of International Relations, Director of European Studies Centre and Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence, Boğaziçi University.

The rise of tension between the West and the Muslim world is often reflected in public opinion polls revealing a fear of Islam among the publics of the West while the public in many Muslim countries manifest deep resentment against the West and the US in particular. Is this tension a manifestation of a new “cold war” slowly and surely engulfing the world? The “use and abuse” of the historical legacy of imperialism and colonialism accompanied by the more recent heavy handed actions of the United States in Iraq have played an important role in fuelling resentment against the West in the Muslim world. Terrorism associated with radical Islamic groups, the failure to integrate parts of the Muslim immigrant communities in major European countries accompanied by a fear of Islam again “used and abused” by politicians in Europe has engendered a “politics of Islamophobia” in Europe. It is ironic that at a time when globalization is transforming the world into a “global village” there is an ever widening gulf of misunderstanding and a kind of an “iron wall” composed of deep prejudices and myths emerging between the West and the Muslim world. This article argues that emphasis needs to be put on recognizing diversity, diversity of cultures, diversity of opinion, diversity of religious beliefs and practice, not to mention many sorts of political and social diversities, rather than a homogenous representations of the world be it the West be it the Muslim world or any other world/civilization.

Identity building has long been based on creating an “other”, often artificially fabricated or constructed, to image a homogenous threat in order to define and develop a homogenous “self” to resist this threat coming from the “other”. The composition of what the “self” and the “other” may be has constantly evolved through time and has not always been based solely on religion or nationality. During the course of the last “cold war” one had on the one hand a “West” that ironically included Muslim countries such as Turkey and a “socialist bloc” that ironically also included Muslim countries such as Syria or Algeria or Egypt at least until the arrival of Enver Sadat. Clearly during the last cold war the construction of the “self” and the “other” was politically and ideologically driven. Religion did not matter after all; Osama Bin Laden was personally supported by American intelligence against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Similarly, in the First World War you actually had Catholic Habsburg, Protestant Hohenzollern and Muslim Ottoman soldiers fighting side by side against Catholic French, Anglican Windsor and Orthodox Romanov soldiers. The “self” and the “other” in the First World War were defined in terms of straight-forward power politics.

Fukuyama led us to believe that with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union the “end of history” and hence the end of major conflicts, cold wars, confrontations and destructions and identity politics was supposed to come to an end. Yet, Samuel Huntington simultaneously announced to us the arrival of a new era to be characterized by the “clash of civilizations” especially between the Judeo-Christian and Islamic ones. Many people opposed and tried to refute his thesis. Yet, very few of these people today would argue that in the aftermath of 9/11, the invasion of Iraq, the Danish cartoon crisis and many other similar events that Huntington's thesis can not be so easily and convincingly dismissed or discredited. Many actors both in the West and the Muslim world have actually adopted a discourse associated with Huntington's ideas and in a curious manner inadvertently helped to perpetuate his ideas. Yet, this need not be the case if only one is prepared to take a much more critical, diverse and nuanced view of the world.

EU-Turkish relations and the issue of Turkish membership is one of the many issues that is often contested from a Huntingtonian perspective. In the EU there are many who in a thinly veiled manner argue that the EU is basically a Christian club and that a Muslim and alien country such as Turkey has no place in this project. The president of the convention

that drew up the ill-fated European draft constitution, Valéry Giscard D'Estaing, and Nicholas Sarkozy are two prominent personalities who have advocated this position. Opponents of Turkish membership recognizing Turkey's close relations with the West and the importance of Turkey for them have invented the idea of a "privileged relationship". This is very much reminiscent of Huntington's idea of Turkey as a "torn country" that Huntington argued could be treated and healed by advocating for Turkey a leadership role in the Muslim world. Sarkozy's enthusiasm for the notion of a Mediterranean Union in which Turkey would be an important member calls to mind Huntington's ideas.

Yet, in Europe there is, even if it constitutes a minority, a group of leaders, officials, academics accompanied by a small portion of the public opinion who think otherwise. These are people who see the EU as a union of values and norms that welcome diversity and do not define the EU in terms of religion. For them the membership of Turkey to the EU on the condition that membership criteria are actually met is seen as much as a test of whether the EU lives up to its own standards as it is a test of Turkey's "Europeanness" in terms of those very same standards. These people undoubtedly include the Spanish Prime Minister Rodriguez Zapatero, as well as quite a few other leaders such as Carl Bildt from Sweden, Olli Rehn from the European Commission, Joost Lagendijk from the European Parliament etc. In return, in Turkey there are many who believe that the EU is indeed a Christian club that would never admit Turkey as a member come "hell or hail". Most interestingly, this opinion is held by those who are most closely associated with secularism such as the members of the Turkish military and the major opposition party, the Republican's People Party, so intimately associated by Kemal Atatürk and his legacy of wanting to see Turkey civilizationaly "westernize". Ironically, it is the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), the current party in power that supports EU membership and has seen Turkey through a major political transformation to meet the Copenhagen criteria required to start accession negotiations.

It is ironic that the leader of a staunchly secularist political party, Deniz Baykal, is adopting a discourse that exacerbates distrust and prejudice towards the West or "Christian" Europe while the party in government that is so much closer to Islam seeks to build bridges and harmonize Turkey's laws and practices with those of the EU. The reform process that the current government has seen through has drastically transformed Turkey. Turkey's democracy is much healthier than it ever was in the past. It is much more pluralist and Turkey is slowly but surely learning to live with diversity. This of course does not mean that there are no problems. Turkey has experienced a serious increase in nationalism, populism and not to mention xenophobia. The assassination of Hrant Dink and the murder of Christian missionaries and a priest in Trabzon are manifestations of these developments. Yet, it should not be forgotten that more than 20 million foreigners entered Turkey during the course of 2006 and an overwhelming proportion of these people came from the West and the ex-Soviet world. They also included a large number of Armenians some of whom have taken up jobs working in Turkish households looking after small children and the elderly of Turkish professionals. They have not encountered any serious problem and have by and large been welcomed.

The expansion of democracy accompanied by the emergence of a "real" economy has brought about a buoyant civil society and electorate that seeks transparency and accountability. This is contributing to Turkey's efforts to look back at its past, come to terms with darker spots in its history, and also to learn to live with greater ethnic and religious diversity. A comparative study of public opinions in Turkey in 1999 and 2006 ran by TESEV reveals that the Turkish public in 2006 is much more religious than it was in 1999. Yet, this public at the same time is much more against the notion of Sharia Law today than they were in 2006 and strongly abhor the use of violence in the name of religion. The public is also much more attached to democratic norms and values such as the freedom of expression, the freedom of association etc. Yet, the public is also bitterly divided into on the one hand, a small (around 28 %) homogenous group that is staunchly secular and perceives a threat from Islamic fundamentalism and on the other hand, a

larger group that is less homogenous and diverse but that is comfortable with the idea of a greater manifestation of religion in the public space without necessarily compromising secularism.

The results of the public opinion show very much how Turkey still needs to consolidate its democracy. The EU here is very critical. Just as the EU played a critical role in assisting Portugal and Spain to consolidate their democracies Turkey needs the EU's engagement in that sense. The need has manifested itself in a conspicuous manner during the course of the last years when Turkey saw itself slipping into nationalism and populism and when some backsliding occurred in respect to reforms. It is not surprising that this happened at a time when the EU's commitment to Turkey weakened and the habit of questioning Turkey's membership prospects increased. In the spring of 2007 Turkey saw a long series of huge public demonstrations across the country in support of secularism. This sense of insecurity does not bode well for Turkey and the concerns as well as fears of this public about the future of Turkey need to be born in mind. Just as the EU has an important role to play here, the government has an important role to play as well. In Turkey there are many who fear that the AK Party may have a hidden agenda to undermine secularism in Turkey and raise the influence of Islam in the public and private sphere.

Western fears of Islam are very much formed by the state of women rights in the Muslim world. Domestic violence against women, repression of women and their rights, forced marriages are typically the kinds of problems that shape Western images of Islam. Furthermore, this is reinforced by an absence of democracy and human rights. The image that Europeans have of their own Muslim immigrants tends to reinforce their images and prejudices about Islam. This happens often independent of the fact that there are many Muslim immigrants who do integrate into mainstream life and also independent of the fact that until very recently there was very little questioning of Europe's integration policies or the lack of it. Yet, the transformation that Turkey has gone through and the progress in democracy, human rights and civil society ought to show that the difficulties faced in the Muslim world and among Muslim immigrant communities in respect to women rights for instance, are not necessarily a function of Islam but often a function of bad governance be it in the Muslim world or be it in Europe with respect to Muslim immigrants.

At the same time, the Muslim world needs to acknowledge that there are serious problems of governance with respect to transparency, accountability and human rights. The tendency to blame the West and imperialism for the ills of the Muslim world does not help to resolve these problems. There are many intellectuals like Fuad Ajami and Ghassan Salame who have highlighted such problems especially in the Middle East. The Arab UNDP Reports since 2002 have been systematically addressing the social, educational, political and cultural reasons explaining why the Arab world has stayed behind. The ability to take a critical look at oneself is clearly an important development that needs to be encouraged.

It is important to encourage both the Muslim and Western worlds to recognize diversity within themselves as well as the diversity in the midst of the "other". Furthermore, it will also be very important to recognize that these so called two "civilizations" do merge into each other on the "edges" and overlap with each other. In that context Turkey's journey toward greater democracy and eventual EU membership should be seen as a development demonstrating how the two "civilizations" do actual merge with each other especially over what ought to be universal values. This will help to build the dialogue that will be critical to avoiding a "new cold war". The Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Diego Freitas do Amaral may well have been thinking of Turkey's role in that context as he walked out of the meeting in the early hours of 4 October 2005 "the very meeting that started accession negotiations with Turkey" observing that the loser of the result of the meeting was Osama Bin Laden.