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Title of the Thesis: Turkey's Membership Issue in the European Union: A Constructivist Approach

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Abstract

Compared to “the myth of Sisyphus”, Turkey’s admission process into the European Union has followed a rather unprecedented and challenging course. European Union was established to serve as a unique example of economic integration of nations on supranational level and Turkey was one of the first countries that applied for its membership. Having applied for membership in 1959, it was not until 2005 that accession negotiations were finally opened between Turkey and European Union. Even after the opening of these negotiations, the outcome was far from being satisfactory. Despite a rigorous progression, Turkey attempted to “strengthen the relations between Turkey and the EU in the framework of ‘positive agenda’”. Today, the Turkey-EU relations have witnessed more than fifty years of association wrought with ups and downs and no substantial outcome. The thesis titled “Turkey’s Membership Issue in the European Union: A Constructivist Approach” analyses this long standing issue of Turkey’s membership into the EU from a constructivist approach by looking at the possible reasons behind the delay in Turkey’s accession negotiations especially the identity differences between the EU and Turkey following the “the threat of ‘irtica’ (religious fundamentalism)”.

Turkey is a country with the most unique identity that cannot be easily characterized. It is the direct heir of the Ottoman Empire that has been Europe’s assumed “other” for centuries however aspiring to become a part of it. The country is located at the cusp of two continents, having religious and cultural ties with one and political affinity with the other. It straddles two worlds, presenting a clear symbiosis of the Islamic and

Western elements. Turkey has the longest history of secularization - legal, cultural and political. Its transition from an Islamic state prior to 1839 to the plural state existing till the formation of the republic and finally to the total transformation after the establishment of a secular democratic setup, has been one of the most noteworthy reformations of modern times. Turkey's Western orientation saw its greatest manifestation in the country's attempts to align and associate with Western organisations especially European ones. It was finally its application to be a member of the EU and its preceding organisation that ascertained Turkey's commitment to be a part of the West. Turkey has witnessed decades of slow paced progress towards fulfilling this persistent goal of integrating with the West through its membership in the EU. However, by the time Turkey was given candidate status, the conditions for accession and integration with the EU had changed drastically. The five expansions of the EU, that have taken place so far, did not have as stringent and detailed criteria as required for further enlargement including the Turkish membership issue. The constraints to Turkish membership into the EU are diverse and varied. Therefore, the primary focus of the thesis is on the cultural, religious, historical and social dimensions emanating from the distinct identity perspectives of Turkey and EU.

Hypothesis:

- The European identity or the "Europeanness" as propounded and emphasised by some EU member countries is the most important and dominant factor in shaping Turkey-EU relations and Turkey's membership issue.
- Turkey's European vocation and its membership bid into the EU is moulded by the country's long trajectory of modernisation and Westernisation.
- The changing, and sometimes divergent, perspectives based on identities of the two sides have made the membership issue