

European Public Opinion and Turkey's Accession

Making Sense of Arguments For and Against

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This Working Paper is part of the Project "EU-CONSENT – Wider Europe, Deeper Integration: Constructing Europe Network", which is a Network of Excellence financed by the European Commission's Sixth Framework Programme (CIT3-513416), and in which the UNED University in Madrid is a partner.

The authors would like to thank the Juan de la Cierva Programme (Spain's Ministry of Education), the Elcano Royal Institute for International Affairs and the Juan March Institute in Madrid for their support while carrying out this study. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the "Third Pan-European Conference on EU Politics" organised by the Standing Group on the European Union of the European Consortium for Political Research, held in Istanbul in September 2006. The authors also wish to thank the participants in that meeting for their comments as well as an anonymous reviewer from CEPS for his/her very helpful remarks. They additionally wish to acknowledge Helene Sjørnsen and the CIDEL Project team at ARENA (University of Oslo) for their work on EU enlargement.

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ISBN-13: 978-92-9079-720-3

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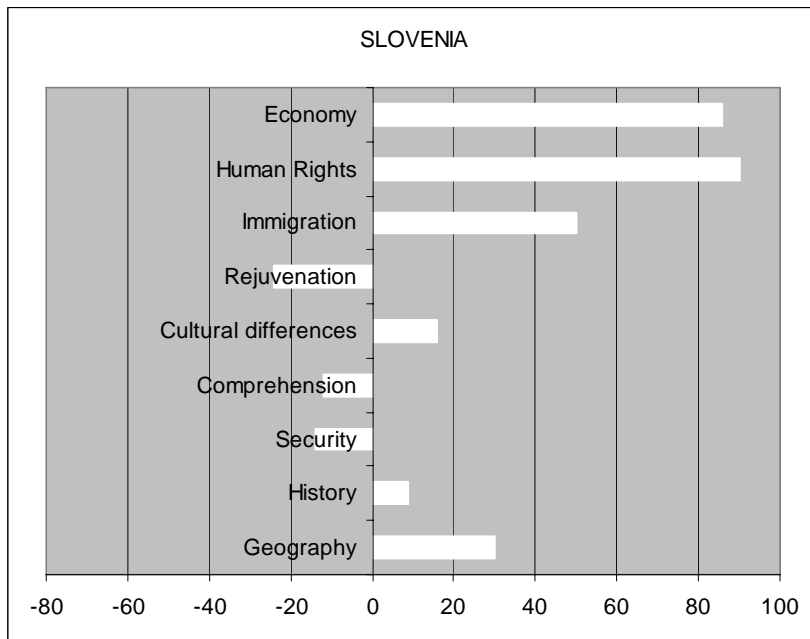
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Abstract

Turkey's accession to the European Union is one of the most controversial and divisive topics the EU faces. Both EU governments and citizens are deeply divided on whether Turkey should become a member or not. This paper takes an in-depth look at European citizens' attitudes towards Turkey's accession to the EU and explains which elements are key in determining support for or opposition to Turkish membership. We use new data, derived from the new questions measuring citizens' attitudes towards Turkey that have recently been introduced in Eurobarometer questionnaires. We prove that views for and against Turkish membership are multidimensional and that citizens use different arguments for both positions. In particular, we show that the likelihood of supporting or opposing Turkey's membership depends on whether citizens adopt a perspective that is utilitarian (resting on costs and benefits), identity-based (founded on Turkey being part of Europe) or post-national (linked to the view of a rights-based EU emphasising democracy and human rights). The main findings are as follows: first, support for Turkey's membership is mostly based on post-national arguments; second, opposition to Turkey's accession is mainly connected with identity-related arguments; and third, instrumental reasons (costs/benefits) play a less relevant role. Turkey's future membership in the EU, we conclude, will thus not be won or lost at the public opinion level on the material plane (costs/benefits) but on the relative weight of post-national visions of the EU vis-à-vis more essentialist visions of Europe. The key to Turkish EU membership, we suggest, may well lie in the way accession is argued and justified, and not wholly in the way it is negotiated.

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Figure C28. Net importance of single items of attitude towards Turkey's membership (supporters minus contesters) in Slovenia



Source: Eurobarometer 64.2 (2005).

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