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**Domestic Ethnic Nationalism and Regional European Transnationalism: A Confluence of
Impediments Opposing Turkey's EU Accession Bid**

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Abstract

The proliferation of European Union (EU) institutions has served, in part, to change the nature of identity in Europe. Not only do people identify with their national state, but they also increasingly identify themselves as European. The structure of the EU currently falls between the positions of intergovernmentalism and supranationalism, and this debate helps to explain the middle ground between concurrent identifications with the national state and also with the continent.

This paper specifically examines statements made by three nationalist parties in Western Europe including Vlaams Belang (VB) in Belgium, Front National (FN) in France, and the Freedom Party (FPO) of Austria. All three nationalist parties have made negative statements about the potential accession of Turkey into the EU. Since domestic politics still contributes to EU decision making processes, the role of nationalist parties is important because each of these parties often receives the support of 10-15 percent of the electorate. In order to maximize votes, other mainstream parties often adopt some of the nationalist rhetoric and, unwittingly, endorse the platforms of these nationalist parties.

In all three cases, dissenting opinions of Turkey's EU accession bid also correlate to notions of identity encompassing both national and European identity. Each nationalist party argues that Turkey does not fit into Europe culturally and therefore should not be able to join the EU. This position is often co-opted by mainstream parties and serves as one factor that has contributed to Turkey's difficult road to EU accession.

Introduction

Author's Note: Field research has been completed in Belgium. Further field research in France and Austria is tentatively scheduled for June 2013

From the emergence of the Ottoman Empire into Constantinople in the mid-fifteenth century to their third place finish at the Euro 2008 football tournament, Turkey's place in Europe has, on the one hand, been accepted and encouraged, and, on the other hand, long been opposed and challenged. Turkey has long existed on the margins of Europe, participating fully at times within the political, diplomatic, economic, and social life of the continent, and withdrawing at other times (sometimes by choice and sometimes by force) to the Middle East or to relationships with co-religionist or co-cultural states and entities. Since 1987, however, Turkey has more formally desired to entrench itself within Europe by attempting to join what is now the European Union (EU) and, since 2005, started the arduous accession process to align Turkish domestic political, economic, social, environmental, and legal policies with that of the standards set by the EU in the Copenhagen Criteria.

It is often argued by opponents of Turkey's accession bid that Turkey is outside of Europe in terms of geography, culture, socioeconomics, and religion. However, Turkey also participates in major European football competitions, the Eurovision song contest, and has been allowed to start the accession process. If the question was one of geography, then the precedent of Morocco in 1987 would have stifled the possibility of Turkey joining the EU. If the question was one of culture, then the EU project would never have started since all member states have proud and separate historical cultures. The borders of Europe have never been—at least for the EU—defined in an entirely concrete way so Turkey's inclusion in Europe rests on part of its landmass located within the European continent. If the question was one of socioeconomics, then

the accessions of 2004 and 2007 would have been very different and much more limited. It is likely that some accession would still have occurred for wealthier states like the Czech Republic and Slovenia, but the situation post-2004 would have been markedly different. If the question is one of religion, then a wider debate on identity in Europe is necessary since substantial Muslim minority populations already live in the EU, and other Muslim majority states such as Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo may, at some point, join the EU. Moreover, Turkey is a historically secular state, which would fit many of the requirements for EU membership. Much of Europe is historically Christian, but this can be broken into Roman Catholicism, various denominations with Protestantism, and also multiple strains of the Orthodox Church. All of these factors, for opponents of Turkey's EU ambitions, constitute possible reasons for blocking Turkey's membership bid, but a wider debate on the EU project is necessary, and, in some senses, is already ongoing within Europe both domestically and transnationally. This paper investigates the tension described so far: whether or not Turkey fits in the EU, by examining particular influences of nationalist parties at both the domestic and European levels in this debate over Turkey's accession bid.

Domestic opposition—to some extent within all 27 member states of the EU—has made the accession process for Turkey's attempt to join the organization much more difficult. Even with significant support in a number of states, vocal dissenting voices opposed to Turkey's accession have led to a particular focus on this case. Some of this dissent is merely due to situation factors such that 12 of the EU's 27 members joined the organization in either 2004 or 2007, so there is a level of fatigue in allowing a larger, poorer (measured in GDP per capita) country to join the organization when significant money is spent trying to raise the standard of living for other poorer countries across the continent. Additionally, there are further economic

problems with the Eurozone in which the EU is already dealing with major complexities when it comes to the financial health of the continent. All of these important issues that take attention away from Turkey. These factors, coupled together with Turkey's large population, and opposition to Turkey's accession has as much to do with Turkey's cultural and religious history as it does with the contemporary economic woes of Europe. Domestic nationalist parties tend to be fearful of immigration, cited frequently is the size of Turkey's population and their entrance into the Schengen zone allowing people to move and work across bordered with few constraints. Dissenting voices against what they view as Turkey's different culture and religion provide an added challenge in the ability of Ankara to join with Brussels in the EU. This paper examines this opposition and the impact of domestic ethnic nationalism on the supranational organization.

Nationalist political parties in three countries have, in particular, decried the possible admission of Turkey to the EU. There are many other parties that oppose Turkey's accession and a range of different actors within each state, but of particular note are vociferous voices from Vlaams Belang (VB), Front National (FN), and Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) that provide a line of opposition against Turkey in the EU. This paper investigates the questions of how domestic nationalist parties are opposing Turkey's EU accession bid? And whether these voices are influencing a wider transnational debate over Turkey's potential entrance into the EU?

Diffusion

This conference is meeting, in part, to discuss the concept of "diffusion" in world politics. Diffusion has multiple different meanings, but, in the context of this paper is taken, most simply, to mean the spread of a concept or an idea from one area—defined geographically—to another. The idea being investigated here is opposition to Turkey becoming a member of the EU.

In some senses, numerous domestic nationalist parties are opposed to Turkey joining the EU, but given the concurrent separate national legislatures, the idea of opposition to Turkey has been diffused across national borders, and these nationalist parties influence other domestic political parties within their respective countries. Moreover, at the European Parliament level, these same parties are influencing the debate at a transnational level.

Diffusion, therefore, with the presumption of domestic and transnational influence, has altered the debate on Turkey. Diffusion is difficult to predict, but many similar voices in Europe have adopted the same tone, tenor, and arguments against Turkey's accession; the single-mindedness of nationalist opposition shows, at least in this case, that the diffusion of some ideas is popular even across different national political contexts.

Methodology

This paper employs a range of different methods. Given the nature of this study, inclusive of three cases, qualitative methods have been employed. However, given an investigation of all twenty-seven EU member states, a similar study could employ various statistical tests. The three selected case studies—VB, FN, and FPÖ—are amongst the most popular nationalist parties in Europe and often convince over 10 percent of voters to vote for their party in their respective countries, which is a major reason for their inclusion in this paper. Support for these three parties has fluctuated over time and although it is unlikely that any of three parties will gain political power in the near future, all three parties, at the very least, influence domestic politics within their respective countries.

Since field research in Belgium has been completed, interviews with political elites have been employed as a mode of research. Interviews, as a research method, provide depth and

understanding to a subject, especially since the information comes from elite-level politicians and their staffers (Flick 2007, 2). Ten interviews were conducted amongst members of Vlaams Belang in April and May of 2010 in the lead up to the June 2010 Belgian general elections. Interviews have not yet been conducted in France or Austria.¹ However, this paper investigates a range of primary and secondary sources inclusive of party platforms and electoral results for VB, FN, and FPÖ. As the research continues, party statements will be combined with more formal interview statements by elite political leaders in FN and FPÖ.

Each of the three political party websites provides some evidence of the respective nationalist parties and their views towards Turkey's accession bid to the EU. Websites present a useful way to examine domestic ethnic nationalist tendencies against Turkey's EU desires. There are limitations as to the range and depth of knowledge that can be obtained by a party website. Nonetheless, a website is a presentation of a political party to the wider public and is a mode of communicating information with likely voters.

Eventually, with the completion of the research, several methods will be utilized to "triangulate" the research. In essence, the weaknesses of each area of research are strengthened by using different methods (Yin 2003). Utilizing interviews, website, and secondary source research, as well as survey data provide a way of triangulating research methods. Triangulation adds validity and credibility to the findings as this method serves as a way to check the shortcomings of each research method (Maykut and Morehouse 1994, 146).

¹ Once the field research has been completed, this paper will employ a more theoretical discussion of the role of nationalist parties within the political spectrum utilizing the Downs Median voter theory as well as the work of Herbert Kitschelt to further build a theory of nationalist party (right/far right) behavior. Some of these works are discussed in the paper, but an updated version will show a more robust connection between the cases and theoretical developments related to nationalist party behavior in Europe.

Vlaams Belang

The wider nationalist debate in Belgium is more nuanced than in other cases. Not only does VB support the protection of ethnic kin over others, but the main platform of the party is to create an independent state for Dutch speakers in the north of the country, in Flanders. VB supports Flemish nationalism, which includes an attempt to protect what it considers to be a “Flemish” and “European” cultural heritage from immigration on the domestic front, and also Turkish admission into the EU on the transnational front. Some background on the history of Flanders and VB is useful to provide context.

Since Belgium attained independence in 1831, Flemings have long protested their status in the country, as many Dutch speakers in the north have long felt like second class citizens (Lyon 1971, 127). As a response to this complaint, a group of Flemings created Volksunie in 1954, a Flemish federalist party, which advocated the policy platform of generating greater autonomy for Flanders (Murphy 1988, 201); the origins of which link back to a merger of a number of small pro-Flemish parties (Rudolph 1977). Volksunie, at times, had some electoral success even gaining support from upwards of 20 percent of the voting population in Flanders (not including Brussels or Brabant). Volksunie was an active political party in Belgium and, with other parties in the political system, on two separate occasions, formed part of the national coalition government. Some, more radical members of Volksunie, however, wanted more political action on the issue of autonomy (and also independence) and created a new party called Vlaams Blok, the precursor to VB (Rocher, Rouillard, and Lecours 2001, 178). Vlaams Blok started in 1977 and slowly grew into a significant player in Flemish politics. The party was made up of members of the Volksunie who refused to support the Egmont Pact, an agreement, which cemented the federalization of Belgium (Stallaerts 2007, 68; Snyder 1982, 93). The issue of

Flemish autonomy became a major component of Vlaams Blok's new platforms, as these breakaway members viewed Volksunie as squandering an opportunity to gain more rights for Flemings.

Since the creation of the party, VB's base of support has grown steadily; they obtained a significant electoral breakthrough of 12 seats in 1991, which was followed up by further electoral seat growth up through the Belgian regional elections of 2004. However, during this time period there were also serious challenges party as a result of policy platforms and public statements, which ultimately led to a court case over the issue of inciting racial prejudice. A judge, during their famous court case in 2004, ruled that Vlaams Blok was racist and ordered that the party had to be disbanded. It was after the official ruling that Vlaams Blok changed its name to Vlaams Belang. (Vlaams Belang can be translated to Flemish Interest whereas the translation of Vlaams Blok is Flemish Bloc.) The name change, and subsequent changes to policy as a result of the court case, led to a number of important changes to party platforms (Erk 2005, 493). The Belgian court effectively mandated a change in platforms such that the new VB complied with Belgium's anti-racism laws and therefore kept state funding (Stallaerts 2007, 85). VB, the court argued, continually incited discrimination and racial segregation because they advocated deportation as a strategy to decrease the number of people from North Africa and Turkey—recent immigrants or the family members of guest workers from the 1960s and 1970s. This incitement violated Belgian anti-racism laws.

So, VB has two major components to their platforms. On the one hand, VB supports independence for Flanders, and, on the other hand, VB also typically supports a Flanders for ethnic Flemings, inclusive of some "integrated" immigrants. For VB, independence is the number one priority. This is stated in virtually every party publication, broadcast, and statement,

by party members from the leadership to layperson party members. One of the major reasons for independence, members of the party argue, is that all other problems in Flanders can be fixed much more easily once Flanders is independent. Despite the predilection towards ethnic Flemings, many members of VB reject the labels of ethnic nationalism, racism, or extremism. VB politicians rather emphasize the need to protect Flanders from cultural erosion and to decrease crime rates. When immigrants come to Flanders, members of VB want them to assimilate absolutely into Flemish culture. The problem here is that no real concrete definition of “assimilation” exists. Throughout the interview process, members of VB were able to articulate some traits of assimilation, but there is no clear definition of what a person could do to become a Fleming. Nonetheless, this desire on the part of VB’s political elites to protect a “pure” form of Flemish culture is the first reason why VB maintains a platform of ethnic nationalism (Duerr 2012).

We are a Flemish party and we are fighting for Flemish interests and identity, so if there are immigrants who agree and consider themselves as part of our society, that is a good thing and we agree. We welcome that. But we only work with them as such, as people who have integrated into our society. So we don’t want to reach out to them as Moroccan or Turks or whatever. If these people consider themselves Flemings, well we do too, then we don’t have any reason to do anything special for them—Interview with Philip Claeys on April 9, 2010

VB, in its official statements and documents, does not oppose immigration outright, but this sentiment is limited depending on the point of origin for the immigrant. Members of VB welcome immigrants, especially from other parts of Europe as is the obligation under the EU and the Schengen Zone—so VB supports the EU and wants to continue participating in the organization. Many members of VB oppose what they describe as “mass immigration” and

although the party does not often state so explicitly, this targets non-European immigrants—specifically from countries like Turkey. The reason for this is that the party is more explicit about not accepting Islamic immigrants or immigrants from largely Islamic states—as noted in the quote below. For VB, the party advocates immigration from European sources, with the intended outcome that this immigration will happen without any, in the words of one member of VB, “adverse” effects on Flemish culture.

Let me say that when it comes to immigration, [when] it comes to numbers and to culture, and the business of culture. For example, we’ve had Italian immigrants, and Spanish immigrants who live in Belgium. After a generation or two, they are completely assimilated. But they do not come from an Islamic background, which is completely opposed to western and European values, then it becomes very difficult—Interview with Jan Lievens on April 22, 2010

For members of VB, the policy platforms are motivated by a fear that Flemish culture is being eroded by outside influences and being replaced by a religious, Islamic identity for Belgium. Many members of VB specifically point to immigrants from two main areas, the Maghreb region of northern Africa and Turkey, where people are also described in terms of their religious and cultural backgrounds as well—Islamic. Typically, the religion of the immigrants is listed selectively, whether or not the individual immigrant is religious or not.

Now I think the reason many people vote for us because they see around [their region], the veil, the mosques, [and] the minarets, so people see that. But also in small towns, not just in Brussels. So in Belgium, Islam is getting bigger and bigger, people are very sensitive to that, which is why we will gain again votes also—Interview with Tanguy Veys on April 26, 2010.

And:

For us a big problem is Islam. Islam is standing in the way for many people to adapt. The way [such as] ritual slaughter, genital mutilations, honor killing, [and] all those things. Also, wearing the burqa, those things. That's the way for these people—Interview with Tanguy Veys on April 26, 2010

Political elites from VB oppose immigration mainly from Muslim states. The vast majority of party statements focus on the particular variable of immigration from regions where Islam is the major religion. VB's policy platforms are not a form of religious nationalism because most members of VB are secular and not Christian. So, the motivation for VB is that party elites seek to uphold secularism in opposition to Islamic cultural dynamics. The problem, however, is that the majority of immigrants are non-religious given the low rates of mosque attendance. So the issue is not so much religion, it is ethnicity. That ethnicity is also tied to, what members of VB see as, a different religion and different cultural moorings. In their public statements, VB often targets some of the more radical elements of Islam. For example, there are some people who try to speak for Muslims and argue things like sharia law should be the law of Belgium, but they do not represent the vast majority of people in the Maghrebian and Turkish diaspora's in Belgium.

There is also a socioeconomic component to the base of VB's ethnic nationalism. Given the current situation in Europe and the wider Eurozone where several governments are having difficulties maintaining fiscal solvency, VB asserts a need to protect the economy of Flanders from overt strains caused, they argue, by too much immigration, and too few jobs for ethnic Flemings. This is the second reason why VB maintains a policy platform of ethnic nationalism. When it comes to balancing a government budget, members of VB argue that it is theoretically much easier to fund a society—and find jobs—for a smaller number of ethnic Flemings rather

than a larger, multiethnic society because fewer jobs are required and a smaller social safety net is good enough to provide for the population. For example:

It was made for our own people, not for a million strangers because we are putting in money and when you are retiring [sic] then you get it back, or when you are ill, or in that situation, or if you are unemployed. It's impossible to have the social system when 10,000 or 100,000 immigrants come. They don't speak the language, they don't have houses, they don't work, no job, and it's impossible to pay—Interview with Jan Laeremans on April 13, 2010.

In Flanders, VB was created to fill a particular role in the policy process by advocating for certain policy positions. The overarching strategy was to point attention to a particular opinion on major issues for VB like independence, immigration, and safety, on the domestic level. At the European level, some of this attention is focused most narrowly towards Turkish accession process to join the EU (Claeys and Dillen 2008). Two VB members of the European Parliament—Philip Claeys and Koen Dillen²—wrote a book entitled, “Turkey in the European Union: A Bridge Too Far.” In the book, Claeys and Dillen argue that Turkey is not a European country, that it is not a European-style democracy, nor can it fit into the social and economic norms of Europe. Moreover, the authors argue, Turkey's entrance into the EU will lead to a major wave of immigration into Europe causing major problems (Claeys and Dillen 2008). These prominent members of VB argue that Turkey cannot be admitted into the EU given these problems and others like support for the Turkish Northern Republic of Cyprus, which has divided the EU member state of Cyprus since 1974 (Claeys and Dillen 2008, 139). Given that VB has become a more powerful force in Belgian politics, the domestic and transnational influences of VB has, in some senses, shaped the debate over Turkey.

² Koen Dillen is no longer an MEP.

Although VB was a marginal force at first in Flemish and Belgian politics, VB gained in popularity throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s. VB gained popularity on the electoral fringe and thus it made electoral sense to stay on the fringes and continue to garner support. Scholar, Herbert Kitschelt, predicts that extremist parties will remain on the fringes of national politics where and when they find issues that affect the country and build support for the party (Kitschelt 1997). VB has been quite successful in maximizing their base on the extreme(s) of the Flemish political spectrum. At the time when VB entered the political arena, there were fewer parties on the right and far right of the political spectrum, which allowed VB to appeal to a lot of people, and support for the party grew. Members of VB often acknowledge that they cannot gain widespread support in Flanders, but they do influence the debate on issues like immigration and Turkey's desire to join the EU. As VB continued to grow, other parties had to at least reconsider their stances towards immigration and Turkey in order to win votes and seats in Belgian elections.

The high position reached by the party at the 2004 regional elections has, however, changed. VB has not been able to replicate its early success and the party no longer wins 24 percent of the vote. In the 2010 national election, VB received 12 percent of the vote. From a vote maximizing point of view, it would make sense to change policy platforms, especially on issues pertaining to immigration. However, one reason for the decrease in support is that when VB was formed, there was a lot of political space between the center-right Christen Demoractisch en Vlaams (CD&V) and VB. Now, there are several newer parties like Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA) and Lijst Dedecker (LDD) that have moved into that space.

Perhaps as a result of eroding support, VB has changed and moderated some policy positions. Some of the positions have been moderated over time. For example:

I think that the VB has changed in all of the years that we have been operating. We have changed. We were much more radical, it's not the right way to put it, we were much more harsh. We still defend the same principles and the same program, we have the same basic program, but we were in our campaigns and communications [and] we were much more harsh 10-15 years ago. But we changed, we adopted our language so we were in favor of sending back most of the non-European, especially Moroccan, [and] African immigrants. Now that is not what we are saying just put a stop to mass immigration—Interview with Philip Claeys on April 9, 2010

The above quote illustrates the point that VB has made some subtle changes to their policy platforms over the years, and presents a softening of policy positions towards immigrants. Some of the more overtly ethnic nationalist language was toned down, but not changed. Members of VB argue that anyone can become Flemish, though, as noted below.

Because our own point view changed because we said if someone from Morocco or Turkey learns the language, works here, has adapted, his children go to school here, it's not correct to send them back because if he has become Flemish like the Flemish people, why do you want to send him back?—Interview with Tanguy Veys on April 26, 2010

Despite the overtures to different a range of different immigrant groups, especially those of Moroccan or Turkish background, people are expected to assimilate in order to live in the society and be considered a member of Flemish society. This is, on some levels, fine if a person intends to live in a society provided that they are accorded a range of global freedoms like religion, belief, and expression, but VB has not articulated obvious ways that assimilation can be proven. Rather, the response for VB is to simply reduce immigration from Turkey, which can be done domestically through the Belgian political system and through Europe with opposition towards Turkey's accession bid.

VB has made a concerted effort to retain policy platforms that are opposed to “mass” immigration especially from Morocco and Turkey, which is evidence of ethnic-based nationalism at both domestic and transnational levels. There is political space on the electoral extreme for VB and party leaders note that their policy positions affect the political dialogue in Belgium. In Flanders, there is almost no political room in the center, so there is no incentive for VB to change. The Social democratic, Sp.a., occupy the left, the Christian-Democrats, CD&V, LDD, Groen, Open Vld, and N-VA all fill the space between left and right, and VB is left with the extreme right. Given that there are seven significant parties in the region, it would be very difficult to move elsewhere in the political spectrum. With a large number of parties in the system, each party is careful to hold slightly different positions than the others, but where a given position is popular, other parties often consider, and then sometimes adapt their own position towards that policy.

VB continues to appeal to its core electorate on the platforms of independence, resolute protection of a “pure” Flemish culture, opposition to “mass immigration” mainly from Islamic states, and zero tolerance on crime. For example:

I think that our core public, I think [is] between 10 and 15%. I can’t say exactly, but I think it is correct, which is fairly normal for a radical party—Interview with Eric Bucycoye on April 30, 2010

And, as some members of VB argue, there is a role for the party in the wider political dialogue. Given the number of parties in Flanders, VB has to work together with other parties like N-VA in order to achieve the goal of independence. For example:

We support each other [VB and N-VA]. We have different roles. They have their role and we have ours. And there are some people of N-VA who do not like VB and there are some people of VB who do not like people of N-VA, but there are a lot of people of VB

who appreciate N-VA and there are a lot of people from N-VA that appreciate VB. So there is a sort of crossover—Interview with Steven Utsi on April 30, 2010

Despite changes to some specific policy platforms, VB remains tied to an ethnic form of nationalism. The party sees for itself an important role to play in the political discourse in Flanders. Because VB is rooted on the extreme of the political spectrum, and because the field is crowded, other parties have to compete in order to win votes. Some of these voters are attracted to more stringent immigration policies and so the role of VB has been to influence the Belgian debate on immigration. This influence affects both domestic and European politics, especially as it relates to Turkey and the Turkish diaspora.

Front National

Front National (FN) has been active since its arrival on the French political scene in 1972, but, at various times, has strongly influenced the political system in France, most notably in the 2002 presidential election. Although FN has won very few seats in the National Assembly or the Senate in its history, FN has a significant presence in the European Parliament and in France's regional councils. On the issue of Turkey's proposed accession to the EU, FN, given the competitiveness of the party, has the ability to affect views on this issue.

Starting in 1984 with the European Parliamentary elections, FN began to win a sizeable minority percentage of the vote in France's presidential, parliamentary, regional, and European votes. Although FN has typically won few seats in the National Assembly, FN representatives often hold hundreds of seats in France's regional parliaments and have held upwards of ten seats in the European Parliament.

In the last five presidential elections—1988, 1995, 2002, 2007, and 2012—FN has received over ten percent of the vote and finished, at worst, in fourth place. In 2002, FN finished second behind Jacques Chirac reaching the second round of the majority runoff system. In 2012, under Marine Le Pen, FN finished in third place, and, in many respects, had an effect on the second round of voting when Marine Le Pen refused to support Nicolas Sarkozy over Francois Hollande.

With FN's leadership transition from father (Jean-Marie Le Pen) to daughter (Marine Le Pen), FN is positioning itself in a slightly different way. The party is slightly softer on a range of different issues, which, in some respects, has opened the party to the possibility of greater support—along the lines of the Downs Median Voter theory (Downs 1957). Marine Le Pen has thus far advocated policy platforms that are slightly softer and more rounded than her father (and longtime FN leader) Jean-Marie Le Pen. This is not to say that support for FN was higher in the important 2012 presidential election as a result of Marine Le Pen's policy platforms, because the increased vote for FN may simply have been a result of the global economic downturn and an opportunity for voters to vent frustration at the economic stagnation in France.

FN currently has just two deputies in France's National Assembly, but has a slightly larger contingent of three Members of European Parliament (MEP's) at the European level. FN is very limited in its role in parliament, but the party has, on several occasions, finished either second or third in national elections. In many respects, this political support serves to change the debate in the country and to influence the positions of other parties.

Nonetheless, Turkey's potential accession into the EU remains a prominent issue for FN as it is linked to the issue of Muslim immigration into France. Some major French cities have more concentrated immigrant populations (and, as noted by many FN members, Islamic

populations), which have become a target for FN. One of FN's major platforms is, like VB, to stop immigration and to strengthen "French" identity (frontnational.com).

Like VB, FN links the issue of immigration to crime rates (Lubbers and Scheepers 2002, 122). One way of framing immigrants to France is to present a label as an out-group in the society (Kitschelt 1995). In 1995, for example, 54 percent of FN voters listed immigration as the main reason for their vote (Mudde 1999). Immigration is not the only major issue in France; however, the issue of immigration is strongly tied to parties like FN and, in some respects, is their number one party platform. It is noteworthy, however, that FN has dramatically increased the scope of its policy platforms (Swyngedouw and Ivaldi 2001). This expansion of policy platforms extends immigration and culture to the European level to shape the interests of FN in France, through Europe in terms of EU level policies, and global issues such as the Global War on Terror and intervention overseas in conflicts such as the recent Malian war.

Taken at the European level, FN similarly frames Turkey's position in Europe as that of an out-group, one that is sufficiently different from the rest of the continent to be included in the organization. In many respects, FN's policy towards immigrants in France is very similar to its treatment of Turkey in the EU.

One of the major issues regarding Turkey's accession bid into the EU is the structure of the European Parliament (EP). Given that the European Council functions like an "upper house" of the parliament (Lewis 2005), the EP serves somewhat more naturally as the lower house. The tradeoff between the upper and lower houses is similar to the American House of Representatives, based on population, and the Senate based on representation. Turkey's accession to the EU and its large population would grant the country—at the present time—the second most seats in the EP, lagging behind only Germany. Since France is a major power within

the EU, potential Turkish membership, FN argues, would decrease the influence of France within the organization (Shields 2007, 299).

FN has not won a major election in France, but the party somewhat consistently contests third place in national politics behind the UMP and Parti Socialiste. Moreover, FN frequently influences the platforms of UMP because some disgruntled voters of the UMP will vote for FN as a form of protest. This, in turn, causes some high level members of UMP to move to the right on the issue of immigration and Turkey's connection to the EU as a means of cultivating greater domestic support, in essence refuting aspects of the Downs Median Voter theory in this instance.

The nature of elections in France make it difficult for smaller parties to win seats in the National Assembly, which can serve the important purpose of blocking extreme parties, but still FN wins some seats showing higher levels of support in some areas of the country. Moreover, whilst winning some seats, FN has influenced UMP, which, if the party seeks to regain the presidency from Francois Hollande's PS, will have to reconsider some policy platforms for the 2017 Presidential election.

Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria)

The Freedom Party of Austria was created in 1956 and has grown from a fairly small party winning approximately 5-7 percent of the vote, to a party that once attracted over one-quarter of the votes in Austria. Since its high point in 1999 where the party won almost 27 percent of the votes, FPÖ continues to attract a significant following, although the party has declined from its zenith. At the European level, a smaller country like Austria has fewer seats in the European Parliament, but FPÖ has won upwards of six seats over the course of its history.

The current state of Austrian politics is different from much of Europe because the country has the lowest level of unemployment in the EU and, although there have been economic problems, this country has managed to avoid some of the major problems associated with other member states of the EU and the Eurozone. Qualitatively, Austria is somewhat different from the cases of Belgium and France, which have been hampered by high unemployment and high debt-to-GDP ratios. Nonetheless, FPÖ maintains similar policy platforms to the other parties studied in this paper, FN and VB.

Electoral support for FPÖ has fluctuated over time. The party has been quite successful relative to other “protest” parties winning over 20 percent of the vote in three consecutive elections—1994, 1996, and 1999. FPÖ dipped sharply in the 2002 National Council election when former leader, Jörg Haider (in many ways the architect of FPÖ’s ascent in Austrian politics), left the party. Several new leaders attempted to lead FPÖ, but the party continued to flounder electorally. However, under the leadership of Heinz-Christian Strache, FPÖ has begun to gain more support and won 17.5 percent of the vote in 2008 signaling a rise once again in Austrian politics. With a substantial increase once again in electoral support, other Austrian parties have to consider how to bolster their own levels of support relative to FPÖ. This means that more centrist or center-right parties will often move more towards the political extreme as a way of undercutting the support of FPÖ. FPÖ has, like VB and FN, found a niche in the political spectrum of its country and constitutes a permanent place in the political debate of the state.

Immigration has long been at the forefront of FPÖ’s platforms. Former leader, Jörg Haider, for example, called for an “Austria First” referendum in 1993 to limit immigration into the country (Mudde 1999). Despite Austria’s smaller population, the country has historic concerns with Turkey given the Ottoman Empire’s territorial gains to the “gates of Vienna” in

1683. The national narrative—at least with this period in history—views Turkey with historical skepticism. Like in the Belgian and French cases, nationalist parties have linked immigration with the issue of Turkey’s EU accession bid. In 1995, for example, 50 percent of voters supporting FPÖ cited immigration as the main reason for their vote (Mudde 1999). This linkages between immigration on the domestic level, and Turkey on the supranational level, have become more concrete over time.

For example, in a recent party programme from 2011, FPÖ presents a number of statements on identity, immigration, and Turkey’s EU accession bid.

“Our western culture is rich and diverse. It unites the cultural nations of Europe. In this context, preserving our cultural heritage is extremely important for us. We need to enable our own culture to continue developing freely from its high level, and protect our native language as a key factor establishing our culture (2011 programme).”

FPÖ makes the case for cultural protection. Like VB, there is a sense that immigrants can become Austrian, but there are strict limitations. FPÖ members assert the need to protect the German language and the Austrian cultural community, which is typically defined in more ethnic terms.

“We are committed to our homeland of Austria as part of the German-speaking linguistic and cultural community, to the groups of people native to our country and to a Europe of free peoples and fatherlands (2011 programme).”

FPÖ views Austria as a central part of Europe and for an EU as an association of people. On the issue of Europe, FPÖ more explicitly provides a perspective:

“Austria is part of the cultural region of Europe. The roots of European culture stretch back to Ancient Times. Europe was decisively shaped by Christianity, influenced by

Judaism and other non-Christian religious communities, while humanism and the Enlightenment marked its continued fundamental development (2011 programme).”

The view here is that Europe has been shaped by a range of non-Islamic factors. European cultural identity is based on a range of central influences, none of which, FPÖ argues, are linked to an Islamic Turkey.

“The aim of European integration is to have a community of states that make up Europe geographically, spiritually and culturally, and which have bound themselves by the western values, the cultural heritage and the traditions of the European peoples (2011 programme).”

Although not stated explicitly, the EU, according to FPÖ should be limited to “European peoples.” This view does not mention Turkey by name, but the reference is clearly made towards Turkey’s EU accession bid.

“We are committed to a Europe of peoples and autochthonous groups of people which have developed through history, and firmly reject any artificial synchronisation of the diverse European languages and cultures by means of forced multiculturalism, globalisation and mass immigration. Europe shall not be reduced to a political project of the European Union (2011 programme).”

FPÖ is, in many respects, Euroskeptical. Like VB and FN, FPO supports involvement in the EU, but only as a group of sovereign states with protections for national identity. Mass immigration is listed as a problem for FPÖ, but like VB, there is no clear definition of “mass” or whether or not it is possible for an immigrant to assimilate into a culture. Again, as with the cases of VB and FN, the issue of immigration is often aligned, perhaps somewhat implicitly, with the issue of foiling Turkish EU accession ambitions.

Tentative Transnational Linkages

Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty—a former political group in the European Parliament—was created in early January 2007 as a grouping of twenty-three parliamentarians from France, Italy, Belgium, Austria, the United Kingdom, Romania, and Bulgaria. The elected members of the latter two countries are particularly controversial because Romania and Bulgaria entered the EU at the start of 2007 and the added members from the Parti Romania Mare (Greater Romania Party) and the National Union Attack (Bulgaria) allowed ITS to cross the twenty seat threshold (at that time) to create a pan-European party.

Political parties that joined ITS included FN from France, VB from Belgium, FPÖ from Austria as well as Alternative Sociale and Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore in Italy as well as independent candidates in the United Kingdom and Italy. For the purposes of this paper, the focus on VB, FN, and FPÖ is important showing the linkages of these major parties in particular as showcasing domestic ethnic nationalism through a transnational forum.

ITS had a relatively nascent set of policy platforms given the newness of the party. The original charter of the party expressed three main components: opposition to the EU Constitution, opposition to immigration, and opposition to Turkey joining the organization. As argued in this paper, the confluence of domestic opposition to immigration was coupled with transnational opposition to Turkey's accession candidacy. This diffusion of linked ideas spread across national borders to the European level. Despite the creation of ITS, several internal problems emerged and the party dissolved less than a year after it started.

The brief history of ITS exposes several different trends, inclusive of the formation and dissolution of a grouping of nationalist parties at the transnational level. On the one hand, the formation of ITS shows that support for nationalist parties is significant enough across Europe

for the institutionalization of this political position in the European Parliament. On the other hand, however, the dissolution of ITS shows that nationalist political parties are not able to resolve differences, nor keep a unified presence in the European Parliament.

Although ITS disbanded, it is important for policymakers within the EU to be wary of the development of another nationalist political bloc. Moreover, it is possible that another party will rise, especially if support for FN, VB, FPÖ, and others increases as a result of the recession—for some countries, double dip recession—in Europe. A related factor is that since elections at the European Parliament level usually only see low levels of turnout, it is possible that another bloc will rise and gain greater prominence within the EU, potentially threatening the larger integration project. June 2014 could be a time when the EU changes radically, either with the emergence of another, more radical political bloc, or with challenges from Euro-skeptic states like the UK.

The transnational element to domestic challenges opposing Turkey's accession bid, adds another layer to the Turkish accession debate. Although ITS is not a functioning bloc in the European Parliament any longer, the possibility remains that a permanent challenge to Turkey could exist at the European level. This transnational opposition to Turkey presents a further challenge for supporters of Turkey's inclusion in the EU.

FN, VB, and FPÖ all played a significant role in the creation of ITS. FN of France played a significant role in the creation of ITS with Bruno Gollnisch, a longtime leader with FN and a candidate for the leadership of the party after the retirement of Jean-Marie Le Pen, became the President of the ITS bloc in the European Parliament. Philip Claeys of VB served as the Vice-President of the ITS bloc.

Turkey has also faced numerous challenges over the Copenhagen Criteria, which lays out the necessary changes that must take place within a country in order to be accepted into the EU.

Turkey has been on the accession path officially since 2005 and has only successfully managed to complete one of the required chapters—Science and Research—for accession. Moreover, Turkey has been blocked from completing some of the chapters by different states. France is currently blocking Turkey’s EU ambitions on a range of different chapters. Part of this is due to France ensuring the democratic norms of the EU, but part of this is also due to the context of national debate, which is shaped by the policy platforms of FN. Although Belgium and Austria have not formally blocked Turkey on any specific Copenhagen Criteria chapter, the influence of FN in France has created one significant difficulty for Turkey. Although FN, VB, and FPÖ have marginal influence now at the European level, there is linkage between their party positions and a challenge for Turkey’s accession to the EU.

Conclusions and Discussion

Turkey’s accession process remains mired in the institutional challenges associated with aligning complex domestic policy areas with the norms and ideas of the EU on these same policy areas. It does not look likely that Turkey will join the EU in the near future and a level of accession fatigue—from the 2004 and 2007 accessions—expressed by numerous political parties across Europe remains over the organization. Croatia will likely join the EU in July of 2013 meaning that accession is still possible, but for small countries that have more easily harmonized their policies with the EU. Iceland has also moved through significant parts of the accession process and joining the EU may be more a matter of domestic support rather than supranational opposition.

Domestic opposition from nationalist parties in three major countries—France, Austria, and Belgium—has made Turkish accession more challenging. With some success for each of

these nationalist parties, more traditional conservative (and to some extent liberal) parties have adjusted their policy platforms to become more reticent towards Turkey's EU ambitions, which has further destabilized Turkey's support around Europe. Domestic opposition to Turkey's EU bid has had an effect on relations between Turkey and the EU. Although, VB, FN, and FPO are by no means the only opponents to Turkey's accession bid, these parties have altered the debate in their respective states, which has made it more difficult to Turkey to smoothly enter the EU.

Turkey's EU bid faces significant problems within Turkey, simply in the form of domestic challenges in aligning policy areas with EU norms on democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and a range of different policy areas. Harmonizing longstanding Turkish laws with Europe-wide laws has proven to be difficult. The process of harmonizing policies is challenging for many countries, but so far all countries that have started the accession process have been able to finish and enter the EU.

Of the three countries from which the cases are drawn, two of the cases are from smaller countries—Austria and Belgium—whilst the third case—France—is much larger in population. Nonetheless, as noted earlier, given the structure of the Council of Europe, each individual state matters. No political party that holds a consistent stance of opposition to Turkey's accession to the EU has gained power, but any party with 5 percent plus support influences domestic politics in their respective countries.

A major issue for Turkey may be fatigue with the EU and there have been some sporadic signs. Turkey may well be content with a position between Europe and the Middle East and policies under Prime Minister Recep Erdogan seem to show Turkey holding the line between these two regions. Turkey has a prominent role to play in conflicts such as Syria's civil war as well as a mediator role with the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A major, ongoing question is whether Turkey will become fatigued with the EU accession process and decide against entering the organization. This is a possible outcome despite the efforts of the Turkish government since 2005 to join the EU. Moreover, of the over thirty requirements for accession, Turkey has made only limited progress. In comparison to another country on the accession list, Iceland, it has been much more challenging for Turkey to progress through the accession requirements, let alone obtain support from all 27 member states.

Overall, the confluence of domestic opposition to Turkish EU accession has, at the very least, made it more challenging for Turkey's European ambitions. Moreover, there are some—albeit limited—transnational linkages between domestic nationalist parties that have further lobbied to decrease Turkey's chances to join the EU. This diffusion of ideas at the domestic level and spread to the transnational level and currently affects the EU as a whole.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES AND LOCATIONS

April 9, 2010:

Philip Claeys (VB), Brussels, Flemish Brabant

April 13, 2010:

Jan Laeremans (VB), Grimbergen, Flemish Brabant

April 14, 2010:

Pieter Logghe (VB), Brussels, Flemish Brabant

April 16, 2010:

Tomas Verachtert (VB), Brussels, Flemish Brabant

April 22, 2010:

Jan Lievens (VB), Brussels, Flemish Brabant

April 26, 2010:

Tanguy Veys (VB), Brussels, Flemish Brabant

April 28, 2010:

Hagen Goyvaerts (VB), Leuven, Flemish Brabant

April 29, 2010:

Raf Liedts (VB), Antwerp, Antwerp

April 30, 2010:

Steven Utsi (VB), Brussels, Flemish Brabant

Erik Bucquoye (VB), Leuven, Flemish Brabant

May 12, 2010:

Karim Van Overmeire (VB), Brussels, Flemish Brabant