



Identities and Modernities in Europe (IME): Briefing of Findings in External Promotion of Turkey



INTRODUCTION

IME has investigated European Identities, a wide range of definitions of 'us, the Europeans' proposed and acted upon by various actors in and around the current European Union (EU), in particular in nine cases: Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The project has addressed three major issues regarding European identities: what they are, in what ways they have been formed and what trajectories they may take from now on. This is a briefing of major findings in the Turkish case, focusing on the role of Yunus Emre Cultural Centres in the external promotion of Turkish identity.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

In the scope of the Identities and Modernities in Europe (IME) (SSH-CT-2009-215949) project, in order to provide insight into the case of Turkey, we began our research with an exploration of the meanings attached to Westernization and Europeanization leading to the realization that these concepts have been used interchangeably when referring to the modernization process in Turkey. At the second stage of the project, we investigated the internal and external identity promotion programmes carried out by Turkish state between 2000 and 2011. At this stage, we scrutinized the ways in which the external promotion of Turkish identity has recently been made by the newly established Yunus Emre Cultural Centres. Proliferating recently, these Centres have become essential for Turkish foreign policy makers with regard to the cultural promotion in the strengthening of regional ties.

These Centres are also important because a close analysis of their locations and their positioning in the Middle East, Balkans, Caucasus and in Central Asian Turkic republics show that they complement the efforts that were carried out in Europe, particularly those that were carried out by state and non-state actors in the scope of Turkey's bid for EU membership. Yunus Emre Centres on the other hand show that while discourses centered around Europe and the EU still persist in the political circles, there is also a revival of the neo-Ottoman discourse and a growing emphasis on the Turco-Islamist discourse.

As a part of this project we have also looked into the notion of modernity and Westernization, which are often used interchangeably in Turkey. When we refer to modernity and Westernization we are referring to a mode of understanding, which assumes Euro-American hegemony over the process of progress. In the light of this discussion, we see that the Turkish political elite challenge this presupposition by encouraging the promotion and propagation of Turkish cultural, linguistic, historical and religious beliefs on other nations, rather than being restricted by the western model of modernity. As we struggle to define the trajectory of European identities *vis-à-vis* the possibility of an alternative to the emphasis on the west and the western understanding of modernity, we see that these Centres embody efforts, which do not necessarily reject the western model of modernity but provide a path where the country's path to modernity consists of the protection and promotion of particularist cultural, linguistic and religious assets.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

IME Employed qualitative research Methods in its investigation including policy documents analysis, in-depth interviews with state/EU officials, civil society actors and private individuals. The details of the fieldwork can be supplied upon request.

PROJECT IDENTITY

Identities and modernities in Europe: European and national identity construction programmes and politics, culture, history and religion

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