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# Turkey in Italian Media: Between Islam and Europe

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## Abstract

*The aim of this article is to examine the representation of Turkey in Italian newspapers. The questions that are investigated are: a) if the representation of Turkey in Italian newspapers is stereotyped and ill-informed; b) if there is a convergence among the political elites and the media on Turkey; and c) whether Islam is being inserted into the construction of the perception about Turkey by the Italian media.*

*This study argues that religion plays an important role in the Italian newspapers' construction of the Turkish image. Several studies about the effects of mass media on public opinion argue that a linear relationship exists between the quantity of media reports and the opinions of the population. Thus it is argued that Italian public opinion on Turkey is highly related to the media coverage and, most importantly, on how it is addressed. Plus, it is also argued that there are similarities between the media's agenda and the political agenda, with certain media outlets*

*reflecting and repeating the positions of related political parties. This study concludes that the representation of Turkey in Italian newspapers is limited in its informative content and Islam is a major component of its representation.*

## Key Words

Turkey, Italian media, public opinion, European Union, Islam.

## Introduction

“*Cose turche!*” (“Turkish things!”) is an old Italian saying used to underline the weirdness of some actions or events. This is only one of the many proverbs that exist about Turks in Italy; there are numerous others, often with negative connotations. Some of them are full of peculiar references to Ottoman Turkey and to religious conflicts among Christianity and Islam, such as the reference to episodes of religious carelessness and blasphemous outrage as “*Bestemmiare come un turco*” (“To blaspheme as a Turk”) or “*mamma li Turchi!*” (“Oh mommy the Turks!”).<sup>1</sup>

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But if in one hand the Turks were the enemies of Italians and, more importantly, of Christians, on the other hand they were also important economic partners. In fact, there were prosperous commercial exchanges among the republic of Venice and Genoa and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup> A lot has changed in the centuries, but the “like-dislike” dichotomy in Italy-Turkey relations is still present. Economically speaking, relations among these two countries are still prosperous; in fact Italy and Turkey cooperate on a range of projects and are partners in diverse subjects.<sup>3</sup>

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However, the opinion on Turkey and its membership to the EU is various and not homogeneous in Italy. The official position of the Italian government towards Turkey’s EU membership bid is a supportive one but there is also some resistance against Turkey.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the reasons for support or opposition are different depending on the political affiliation of the parties: right-wing parties normally base their antagonism on religious, cultural and historical grounds while they support Turkey on strategic and economic fields; on the other side, left-wing parties do not make issues out of different and incompatible cultures and religions, but principally underline

the difficult situation of Turkey’s ethnic minorities and its poor human rights record. The population also seems to be confused about membership and about Turkey itself, more precisely there is a wide-spread lack of knowledge about the country, its bid for membership into the European Union and so on.

The Italian government’s support for Turkey’s membership to the EU does not represent Italian society at large. One may even identify the groups within the political elite, especially on the radical wings of the political spectrum. The *Lega Nord* (Northern League), which strongly opposes Turkey’s membership, especially on religious and cultural grounds, considers Turkey a clear threat, as the claim that:

it [Turkey’s membership to the EU] would make enter into the European Union a country that has about 70 million inhabitants who are Muslims and this would inevitably have a major impact on our cultural and religious identity. Furthermore, the lack of reference in the Treaty [the EU Constitutional Treaty] on European Union to the Christian roots (only as a vague reference in the Preamble) should force us to be vigilant, in order to avoid the risk of the Islamization of Europe.<sup>5</sup>

When different surveys on Italian public opinion are examined, it is observed that support for Turkey’s

membership is on the decline and that the Italian public is growing distant from Turkey generally. The issues of religion and identity appear as major determinants in shaping Italian public opinion, as Canan-Sokullu also argues in this volume.

## Turkey's Bid for EU Membership and Italy

Consecutive Italian governments have been among the earliest and strongest supporters of Turkey's EU membership. The governments of both the centre left and the centre right have consistently advocated the EU's enlargement to include Turkey on the grounds that it makes sense commercially and would enhance Europe's standing in the world while giving the EU a more diverse identity.<sup>6</sup> During his official visit to Turkey in November 2009, Italian President Giorgio Napolitano restated his support toward Turkey joining the European Union and the importance and richness this accession would represent for the EU. He stated that "The negotiations for membership should continue without obstruction or hesitation" because "Turkey is an added value for Europe".<sup>7</sup> The argument that Turkey is a "bridge" between civilizations and cultures of the West and the East enjoys broad support in Italy, but Italian elites have presented Turkey's bridging role as equally important from an economic and strategic point of view. Italian governments of different political

orientations have all emphasized the role Turkey can play as an "energy hub" connecting mainland Europe to much needed energy sources in Central Asia and the Caspian basin.<sup>8</sup> The centre-right parties particularly, especially those that are now in power, emphasize economic and strategic factors: they see Turkey's membership as a guarantee of Europe's continued strategic partnership with the US and NATO, and Turkey itself as an attractive market for trade and investment and a key economic partner for Italy.<sup>9</sup>

Italian political elites are not alone in their support. Italian economic stakeholders also support Turkey's EU accession process. In 2008, Italy was the third largest trading partner of Turkey, and, independent from Turkey's bid for EU membership, it always has been considered an important market for Italy.<sup>10</sup> Italy's most powerful business families and groups have exerted pressure on the Italian government for greater openness towards the Turkish economy since the 1960s, being among the first to ask the European Communities to sign a customs union agreement with Turkey.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the support of the Italian political elite for Turkey's membership, the place of Turkey in Italian minds is all but homogeneous. One has to keep in mind an old Italian proverb, "*Non son sempre rose e fiori*" ("it is not always roses and flowers"). Both at the political and economic level there are those who are skeptical about or directly against Turkey's joining the EU. Despite the fact

that Italian governments have always supported full membership on strategic and economic grounds, the Italian right has usually been against Turkey's entry into the EU, mainly on religious and historical grounds.<sup>12</sup> On the right of the Italian political spectrum, the following parties are extremely resolute against Turkish membership: the *Lega Nord* (Northern League) and *La Destra* (The Right). Both oppose Turkey's EU membership mainly on reasons of religion, identity, and "culture".<sup>13</sup> *Lega Nord* is a regionalist and xenophobic party that has strongly opposed Turkey as a member of the

European Union and is campaigning strongly against Muslim immigration. Their communications often relate Turkish membership with

religion and Islam: "*L'Europa sia Cristiana. Il vero pericolo è la Turchia, vero cavallo di troia dell' "Islam"*" ("Europe must be Christian. The real danger is Turkey, the real Trojan horse of Islam").<sup>14</sup> The motivation of its negative stance towards Turkey is clearly and self-admittedly a question of religion and identity: Turkey cannot be part of Europe because its state and society, however "secular on paper", are deeply imbued with Islamic culture, while Europe is "Christian".<sup>15</sup> Listening to the party slogans, this becomes

immediately clear: "*Padania: Mitteleuropa con Germania, Austria e Sud Tirolo. Italia magrebina con Egitto e Turchia*" ("Padania: Mitteleuropa together with Austria, Germany and South Tyrol. Maghreb in Italy with Egypt and Turkey").<sup>16</sup>

The debates on Turkish membership and the opposing views have their toll on the overall support over the time. There is an erosion of warm feelings toward Turkey in the Italian elite opinion, with a 16 percentage point drop from 2004 to 2006.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, while Italian MPs were strongly positive (74%) on Turkish membership in 2004, Italian Members of

European Parliament approached the issue less optimistically (58%) in recent years (2006-2007).<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, regarding the reasons why Turkey's membership would be

a good thing, the Italian elite considered that Turkish accession to the EU had a good prospect for "strengthening moderate Islam as a model in the Muslim world" (49%).<sup>19</sup>

There is an important fact that should be underlined here: not only is there a decrease in positive views towards Turkish membership to the EU inside the Italian elite opinion, but there is also a decrease in the positive opinion on Turkey itself.<sup>20</sup>

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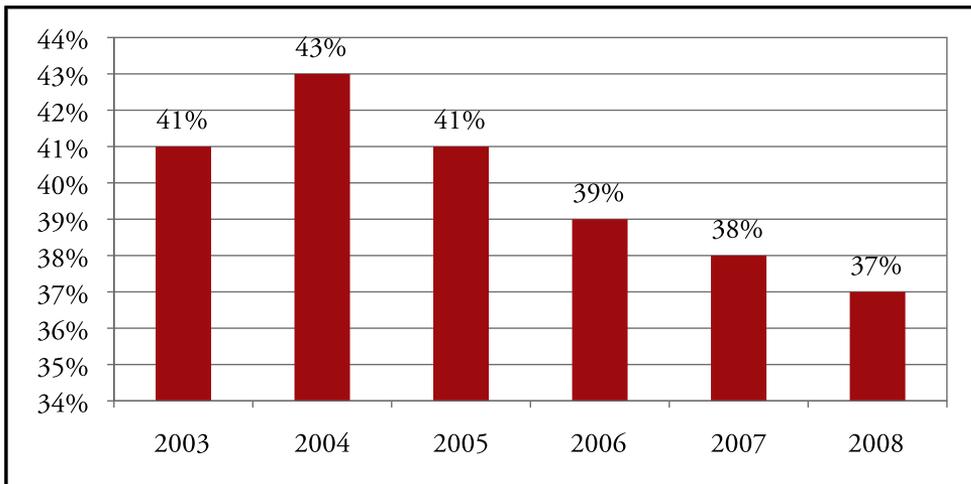
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The decrease in positive opinion on Turkey in last years has not been felt only among the Italian elite. The Italian public has also displayed a decrease in positive attitudes towards Turkey. This is clearly visible from the data collected by the Transatlantic Trends Surveys (TTS)

from 2003 to 2008. In this period the positive feelings towards Turkey among the Italian public declined from 43% in 2004 to 37% in 2008 (Figure 1). Furthermore, the “not so cold” category is also on the decline, meaning that there is a general turn from the positive to the negative.

**Figure 1: Italy’s warm feelings toward Turkey (%)**



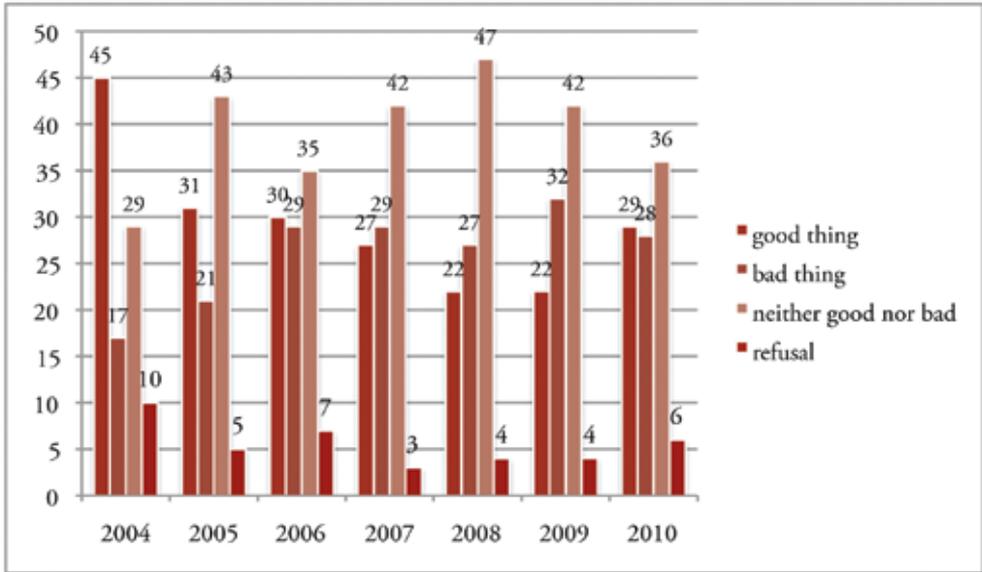
Sources: TTS 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008.

*Question wording:* Next I'd like you to rate your feelings toward some countries, institutions and people, with 100 meaning a very warm, favourable feeling, 0 meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling, and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold. You can use any number from 0 to 100. If you have no opinion or have never heard of that country or institution, please say so.

The Transatlantic Trends Survey also asks the respondents whether Turkey's EU accession would be a “good thing”, a “bad thing” or “neither/nor a good/bad

thing”. Over recent years, the support of the Italian public displayed on this matter too has declined, as can be seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Turkey’s membership perceived as... (%)**



Sources: TTS 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010.

*Question wording:* Generally speaking, do you think that Turkey’s membership of the European Union would be a “good thing”, a “bad thing” or “neither/nor a good/bad thing”?

The highest category is “neither/nor a good/bad thing” almost every year, except for 2004 (29% in 2004, 43% in 2005, 35% in 2006, 42% in 2007, 47% in 2008, 42% in 2009, and 36% in 2010). In the same figure we can observe that there was a steady decrease in the “good thing” category starting in 2005 (45% in 2004, 31% in 2005, 30% in 2006, 27% in 2007, 22% in 2008, and 22% in 2009) while there was an increase in the “bad thing” category starting in the same year (17% in 2004, 21% in 2005, 29% in 2006, 29% in 2007, 27% in 2008, and 32% in 2009). This situation goes more or less unvaried until 2010 when

the first category increased a little bit (29%) and the second one decreased in the same way (28%).

When the respondents who stated that “Turkey’s membership would be a bad thing” were asked to give their reasons, we observe the effect of religion. The most popular reasons given were “Turkey’s democracy is still problematic” with 34% of responses, and “as a predominantly Muslim country, Turkey does not belong in the EU” with 32% of responses (Figure 3). It is remarkable to notice that these two principal reasons correspond with the general skeptical pattern towards Turkey in recent years.

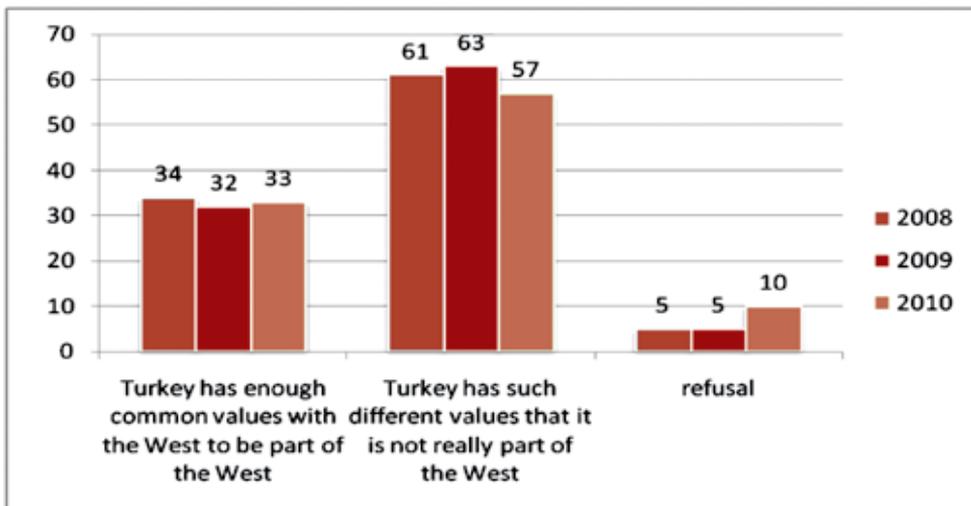
**Figure 3: Turkish membership is a “bad thing” because of... (%)**

	<i>Breakdown</i>
As a predominantly Muslim country, Turkey does not belong in the EU	32
It would drag the EU into the Middle East conflict	16
Turkey is [too poor or too populous] to be digested in a growing EU	5
It would make the running of the European Institutions more complicated	13
Turkey's democracy is still problematic	34
Total	100

Source: TTS 2004.

Since 2008 respondents were asked the following: “Some people say that Turkey has enough common values with the West to be part of the West. Other people say that Turkey has such different values that it is not really part of the

West. Which view is closer to your own?” The majority of Italians answered that “Turkey has such different values that it is not really part of the West” (61% in 2008, 63% in 2009, and 57% in 2010) (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Is Turkey part of the West or not? (%)**

Sources: TTS 2008, 2009, 2010.

*Question wording:* Some people say that Turkey has enough common values with the west to be part of the West. Other people say that Turkey has such different values that it is not really part of the West. Which view is closer to your own?

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The presence of radical right-wing parties in the current coalition government has also strengthened the negative perception of Turkey.

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Opponents of Turkey's EU membership have often tended to phrase their arguments against Turkey's accession in terms of cultural identity. Christianity, for many, still appears to be an important component of "European identity", and so it follows that Islam continues to be seen as an important "Other". Turkey appears to be widely constructed at popular and media levels as Europe's "Other" regarding the older "Christendom" aspect of European identity and, by extension, to the "Enlightenment" values underlining the EU integration project, which are frequently seen as exclusive to "Christian civilization".<sup>21</sup>

A survey conducted by A. Pitasi, M. Marchionni and M.F. Massoni reveals that Italians feel threatened by what they see as people who have strong differently oriented cultural identity that is in opposition to the traditional, more familiar Italian one.<sup>22</sup> Italians tend to consider their homeland as a safe shelter that they do not want to share with people of different cultures. Thus with the mass immigration of Muslims to the country, especially in the 1990s, many Italians began to fear for their traditions, culture and identity.<sup>23</sup> As McLaren argues, such fears may cause opposition to enlargement and to the EU.<sup>24</sup> In the results of the Pitasi *et al*

survey, a sizeable number of Italians appear to be rather optimistic and proud of their new European identity, even if they are uncertain what that identity precisely entails.<sup>25</sup> Uncertainty on what European identity is could also be influenced by the enlargement of the EU, accompanied by the practical need to reform its institutions and functioning mechanisms, which has accentuated the need to clarify the EU's objectives and identity. Increasing immigration into the EU and the consequent expansion of Islam in the region, especially in the course of the 1990s, has intensified this need further. This urgency to demarcate the EU's cultural identity along with its borders became even more manifest after the start of the accession negotiations with Turkey in 2005.<sup>26</sup>

Recent scholarship suggests that a new religion-based cleavage has emerged in Europe in the post 9/11 era in the form of tensions between the Christian majorities and the Muslim minorities.<sup>27</sup> Thus, "common Christian roots" is one of the most discussed topics about the definition of a European cultural identity and a question mark on Turkey's EU accession.

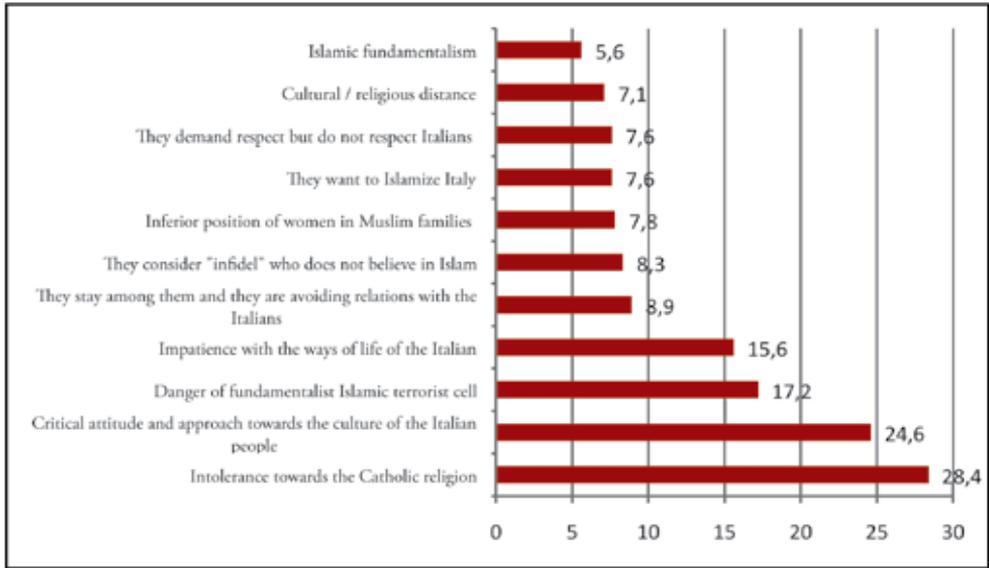
Italy's historically close relations with the Catholic Church and the presence of the Vatican on its soil have definitely marked the way in which Italian society relates to religious communities and has led to particular privileges for the Catholic Church. So, looking at the Italian situation, it is interesting to note how, during public debates on European

identity in the course of 2004, even atheist intellectuals joined with Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) in the claim that Europe should reassert its “Christian roots”.<sup>28</sup> In fact, Christian public opinion is fairly strong in Italy and while this has not led to a large-scale “no Turkey in the EU” movement so far, it does include intellectual and political leaders who subscribe to a Christian interpretation of Europe’s political future, asserting that the EU’s borders should not extend to encompass Muslim Turkey.<sup>29</sup> Christianity is viewed not as a belief but as a cultural marker. Thus, for these actors, the accession to the EU of a country like Turkey with a Muslim population is seen as highly problematic.<sup>30</sup>

The presence of radical right-wing parties in the current coalition government has also strengthened the negative perception of Turkey, related with their radical views on immigration. Immigration is perceived by the Italian public as a threat to their “survival” in a certain sense, especially regarding their jobs. Restrictive policies carried out by the current coalition (e.g., the Bossi–

Fini law which brings strict and harsh regulations on irregular immigrants) are justified by politicians and reported by the media as being matters of security for Italian citizens, thus creating a fear of immigrants. A big part of the migrant populations in Italy are coming from North African countries and most of them are Muslim and therefore Islam and immigration are linked in Italian minds and are approached with suspicion, especially after 9/11. Furthermore, research by the social observatory of the Italian Ministry of Interior on immigration conducted by Makno & Consulting shows some interesting results: The majority of Italians consider “Muslim immigration” as posing a greater risk to Italy than the immigration of other groups. In the same survey, at the top of the perceived problems that the Muslim immigration poses to Italians there are: “intolerance towards the Catholic religion” (28.4%), “critical attitude towards Italian culture and Italian people” (24.6%), and the “danger of terrorist attacks from fundamentalist Islamic cells” (17.2%) (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Potential threats posed by Islamic immigrants**



Source: Reproduced from Ministero dell’Interno, Osservatorio Sociale sull’Immigrazione 2008.

According to the same survey, one out of three Italians opposes the construction of mosques in Italy not just because of the perceived link between sites of worship and terrorist activities, but simply as a matter of Catholic religion and culture.

It is on the issue of religion and culture that Christian public opinion plays a role, maybe further influenced by the debates over Turkish accession and the question of its cultural and religious belonging to Europe, especially after the start of accession negotiations in 2005. Moreover, we can also argue that the skeptical attitude of the Italian public towards Islam in general and Muslim immigrants in particular strengthens the spread of *Islamophobia*, which subsists in the severe form of “Islamist

fundamentalist threat” in the minds of “ordinary Italians” who link the political issue of Turkey’s membership to a cultural and religious dynamic.

Due to the fact that in the “negativity” of the dichotomy in Italian-Turkish relations religion plays a role, it can be argued that Islam influences the perception of Turkey that Italians have and also the image of Turkey portrayed by the media.

### Italian Newspapers’ Role in the Construction of Turkey’s Image

Emiliano Alessandri and Sebastiano Sali criticize the information about

Turkey in the Italian media as being scarce and ill-informed, full of simplifications, deformations and manipulations, and influenced by the stereotypical views of Turkey, in which Turkey is principally and foremost referred to as a Muslim country.<sup>31</sup> This linkage with Islam has negative consequences, as the image of Islam given by the media is not very positive either. As Bruno argues in the conclusion of his influential publication, *L'Islam immaginato: Rappresentazioni e stereotipi nei media italiani (Imagined Islam: Representations and Stereotypes in the Italian Media)*, the Italian media has an active role in the social construction of a stereotypical representation of Islam that tends to be superficial and alarmist, misleading the public that moderate Muslims are the minority compared with radical, fundamentalist violent factions.<sup>32</sup> Thus, it helps to create a perceived threat of “Islam” and “Muslims”. This negative perception of Islam and Muslims and the spread of *Islamophobia* link the political issue of Turkey’s membership to EU to the cultural religious dynamics, and it seems that Turkey is not placed in such a good light in the minds of the Italians.

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In theory, newspapers enrich the symbolic legacy of the community by

giving multiple perspectives to readers, helping to undermine the information monopoly. This, in a sense, means giving the individual the opportunity to reflect on a given topic and then form an opinion on the facts. On these personal interpretations of the reader, Zaller argues that the acceptance or not of the messages coming from the media by the public depends on the individual, as individuals are less likely to accept messages that are inconsistent with their prior beliefs.<sup>33</sup> In the famous formulation of Walter Lippman, presented in his classic *Public Opinion*, “citizens in large societies are dependent on unseen and usually unknown others for most of their information about the larger world in which they live”.<sup>34</sup>

The journalist is an opinion maker, a person who essentially is a character of culture, journalism, politics or show, who directly or indirectly leads the judgments and the choices of the public.<sup>35</sup> Therefore it may be argued that the news is never a “pure” representation on the facts. Together with that, the reader is subjected to “agenda-setting”, “which is the role of the media to influence the salience of topics of the public agenda by the selection and display, day-by-day, of the news in order to focus our attention and affect our perceptions of what the most important issues of the day are”.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, it is remarkable to note another approach aimed at expanding the cognitive perspective of the agenda-setting, the “media priming”, which is the process by which the news media call

attention to some issues while ignoring others, thereby influencing the standard by which the public judges political figures and issues.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the information that reaches the public is never a full record of important events and developments in the world. It is, rather, a highly selective and stereotyped view of what has taken place.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the opinion of the Italian public on Turkey depends on how much this topic is covered by the media and, most important, how it is addressed.

So, in order to understand the image of Turkey given by the Italian media, the presence, interconnection and connotation of the use of religion will be analyzed within newspapers' articles. The question that will be investigated is whether Italian newspapers contribute to the construction of a religion-based perception of Turkey.

## Methodology and Sampling

In order to get a more accurate picture of the image of Turkey given by Italian newspapers it is important to focus on three principal issues:

- a. **Quantity:** how many subjects, how many articles and of which subject category, how many words of this or that kind, etc.;
- b. **Quality:** which subjects and which words;
- c. **Politics:** ideological relations between the political elites and

newspapers that are reflected in the articles.

In the analysis of the selected articles on Turkey, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is employed. CDA's central assumption is that speakers make choices regarding vocabulary and grammar, and these choices are consciously or unconsciously principled and systematic, in other words ideologically biased.<sup>39</sup> Starting from Critical Linguistics (CL), which aims to show "how ideology and ideological processes are manifested as systems of linguistic characteristics and processes", CDA is "a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context".<sup>40</sup>

For this research two newspapers that Audipress<sup>41</sup> data shows as the most read newspapers in Italy, *La Repubblica* (with 3,250,000 readers, Audipress 2011/I) and *Il Corriere della Sera* (with 3,056,000 readers, Audipress 2011/I), were chosen. Secondly, political affiliation is still important in Italy because the position on the left-right political spectrum is a direct determinant of the attitudes toward Turkish membership. Therefore one leftist newspaper, *L'Unità*, and one rightist one, *Libero* were also included in the analysis. Lastly, due to the importance of economic relations between Italy and Turkey, the main Italian economic newspaper, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, was included in the analysis.

Furthermore, the research was based on the websites of the above mentioned newspapers because this new medium has special features that have transformed the work of journalists. In fact, beyond the innovations introduced in the style of writing, from a more “structural” point of view, there are elements of online journalism that has had major effects, among which the one that has the most relevance in this work is *interactivity*. Websites allow researchers to observe the audience feedbacks to the text (thus the impact that the text has on audience) when it is presented, for example with the readers’ comments related to the articles to be found in the website pages.

For time span two, periods of six months were chosen: from 1 July to 31 December 2005, and from 1 July to 31 December 2009. The first period covers the start of accession negotiations between the EU and Turkey, and the second period covers the high-level contacts between Italian and Turkish politicians, including the official state

visit to Turkey by the Italian president, as well as important events such as the signing of the Turkey-Armenia Protocols in October 2009, and the signing of economic accords for gas pipelines between Italy, Turkey and Russia.

## Analysis

All the articles related to Turkey in the newspapers were collected for analysis for the periods selected. Second, a classification was done to separate the “articles directly related to Turkey” (A), from the “articles in which the word ‘Turkey’ just appears” (B). In the periods of time studied there are 276 articles on Turkey (A).

Later on, the articles were classified according to their subjects, which was determined from their headlines, and the presence of religion-related words were counted in order to define both on which fields more about Turkey has been written, and how much of that was linked to Islam.

**Figure 6: Categories of Articles on Turkey**

Subjects	Religion-related words
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Bombs and attacks</i></li> <li>- <i>Turkey-EU</i></li> <li>- <i>Avian influenza</i></li> <li>- <i>H1N1 influenza</i></li> <li>- <i>Turkish foreign relations</i></li> <li>- <i>Society</i> (in which we grouped all the articles that in somehow show various aspects of Turkish society).</li> <li>- <i>Violence/human rights</i> (in which we grouped all the articles related to violent acts or to matters that in Turkey immediately involve violence or human rights, as for example the Kurdish question or the Orhan Pamuk court case).</li> <li>- <i>Turkey's economy</i></li> <li>- <i>Gas pipeline</i></li> <li>- <i>Others</i> (in which we grouped all the articles which subjects were not relevant for my research, such as movies, books, art, etc.).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Islam</i></li> <li>- <i>Islamic</i></li> <li>- <i>Muslim</i></li> <li>- <i>Fundamentalist</i></li> <li>- <i>Terrorist</i></li> <li>- <i>Kamikaze</i></li> <li>- <i>Al-Qaeda</i></li> <li>- <i>Jihad</i></li> <li>- <i>Jihadist</i></li> <li>- <i>Fatwa</i></li> </ul>

### *La Repubblica*

*La Repubblica* was founded on 14 January 1976 by Eugenio Scalfari. It is the most read newspaper in Italy with 3,250,000 readers and “it is - [as written in its presentation] - an information newspaper composed by people who belong to the vast arc of the Italian left”.<sup>42</sup> It is owned by the Editorial Group *L'Espresso*. In 2005, when searching for the word “Turkey”, a total of 135 articles

were found, of which 30 were about Turkey, while in the other 105 “Turkey” just appeared as a word. Among the articles about Turkey, the majority were published in October (12), followed by August (8), July (6), September and November (2), and December (0). The newspaper’s section that contained the most number of stories on Turkey was “Foreign affairs” (13), followed by “News item” (7), “Culture” (6), “Sport” (3), “Others” (1), and “Politics”, “Economics” and “Opinion” (0).

In 2009, the total of the articles was 237, of which 34 were about Turkey and 203 just had the word appear. Of the 34 articles on Turkey, eight were written in September, seven in October and December, five in November, four in August and three in July. Again, “Foreign affairs” was the section with the most articles about Turkey (10), followed by “Economics” (9), “Culture” (8), “News item” (5), “Others” (2). The “Politics”, “Sport” and “Opinion” sections had no articles on Turkey at all.

Both in 2005 and 2009, the period in which there were more articles about Turkey was the one in which there had been major internationally important events, such as accession negotiations starting in October 2005 and the Turkey-Armenia Protocols in October 2009. Also, neither in 2005 nor in 2009 were there any editorials or opinion articles on Turkey.

As articles’ subjects and religion-related words are concerned, in 2005 it can be observed that the major number of articles were in the “Others” category (8) in which all the items about which there was just one article were grouped, followed by “Bombs and attacks” and “Society” (6), and “Turkey-EU” and “Avian Influenza” (5). Regarding religion-related words, the majority were found in the “Culture” section, and in decreasing order there were the following words: Islam (14), Muslim (12), Islamic (5), Fundamentalist and *Kamikaze* (4), and Al-Qaeda (1). Also in 2009 the largest number of articles were contained

in the “Others” category (14), followed by “Violence/human rights” (7), “Gas pipeline” and “Turkey’s economy” (4), “Turkey’s foreign relations” (3), and “Society” (2). There were only two religion-related words present, “Islamic” and “Muslim”, that both appeared four times.

### *Il Corriere della Sera*

*Il Corriere della Sera* is the second most read Italian newspaper with 3,056,000 readers. It was established on March 5, 1876, exactly one century before *La Repubblica*. It was bought in 1974 by the publisher Rizzoli, which is today Rcs Editori Spa.<sup>43</sup> In searching the word “Turkey” in the newspaper’s website, in 2005 there were a total of 105 articles, of which only 22 were properly about Turkey (and 83 were just mentioning Turkey in a larger context). Among the ones regarding Turkey, the largest number of articles were posted in October (8), followed by July and September (5), August (2), and November and December (1); the section where Turkey was more present, as it was for *La Repubblica* as well, was the “Foreign affairs” section (15), followed by “News item” (3), “Others” and “Opinion” (2), and the other categories (“Politics”, “Economics” and “Sport”) did not have articles at all. In 2009, in a total of 148 articles, 44 were about Turkey, 10 of which (the ones in the “Others” category) were readers’ stories of trips to Turkey and not of journalists, and they provided

some interesting insights to have a look at the readers' interpretation of Turkey. So, also here, October was the month with the most articles (12), followed by August (10), July (9), September (7), November (4) and December (2). Regarding sections, the first was "News items" with 11 articles, and then "Others" (10), "Foreign affairs" (9), "Economics" (5), "Politics" (4), "Culture" and "Sport" (2), and "Opinion" (1).

As with *La Repubblica*, in *Il Corriere della Sera*, both in 2005 and in 2009, the largest number of articles appeared in the period in which there were major internationally important events, that is the month of October. In 2005, there were principally three subjects that were addressed by *Il Corriere della Sera* regarding Turkey, that first, with nine articles, was "Turkey-EU", followed by, with eight articles, "Bombs and attacks" and third "Avian Influenza" with three articles. In 2009 the largest category for number of articles was "Others" (10), followed by "Society" (7), "Violence/ human rights" and "Turkey's foreign relations" (5), "Gas pipeline" and "Influenza H1N1" (2), and "Turkey-EU" (1). For religion-related words, the most were in the "Foreign affairs" category, together with "Bombs and attacks" and "Turkey-EU" articles. Regarding religion-related words, the time that they were used the most was almost the same as in 2005 (27 in 2005 and 23 in 2009), but there was a minor variation.

## *Il Sole 24 Ore*

*Il Sole 24 Ore* was established on November 9, 1965 with the union of two newspapers, *Sole* and *24 Ore*. It is produced by the publishing company *Il Sole 24 Ore*, which is controlled by *Confindustria* (the Italian employers' federation) and it is the major Italian economic newspaper.<sup>44</sup>

In 2005, out a total of only 36 articles, just eight were about Turkey of which five were in the "Foreign affairs" section and three in "Economics". In 2009 the number of articles on Turkey increased a little bit from eight to 13 from a total of 37 articles found. The majority of the texts were in the "Foreign affairs" section (10) and surprisingly there were no articles in the "Economics" category. The articles in 2005 were equally distributed among the following subjects: "Turkey-EU", "Turkey's economy", "Gas pipeline" and "Others". Also only two religion-related words ("Islamic" and "Muslim") were present and in a small number (two and four respectively). Also in 2009 the articles were almost equally distributed among three subjects: "Turkey's foreign relations" (4), "Gas pipeline" (4) and "Others" (5). The same religion-related words of 2005 were present: "Islamic" (1) and "Muslim" (2).

## *L'Unita*

*L'Unità* was founded on February 12, 1924 by Antonio Gramsci.<sup>45</sup> It was

originally the press branch of the PCI (Italian Communist Party), then of the PDS (Party of Leftist Democrats,) and then of the DS (Leftist Democrats). It is edited by L'Unità Publishing House, controlled by first the PCI and then the PDS.<sup>46</sup>

In 2005 there were 141 articles containing the word “Turkey”, 112 had other subjects, while 29 were properly on Turkey. The number of articles each month was as follows: October (11), July (7), September (5), November (3), December (2), and August (2). The largest section that had articles was “Foreign affairs” (17), while “News item” had no articles and the other sections had between one and three articles (“Culture” and “Opinion” had three, “Politics” and “Sport” had two, and “Economics” and “Other” had one). In 2009, out of a total of 116 articles, there were 30 properly about Turkey of which the majority were contained in the “Foreign affairs” section with 11 articles (“News item” had six, “Culture” and “Economics” had four, “Politics” and “Sport” had two, “Others” had one and “Opinion” none). The most prolific month for articles was again October with 10 (eight in September, six in August, three in November, two in December and one in July). As it has also been seen with other newspapers, the largest number of articles, for both for 2005 and 2009, were published at times that coincided with major internationally important events, with, at least in 2005, a “bigger” production (only three) of editorials on Turkey. “Turkey-EU” (9)

was the subjects with the most articles in 2005, immediately followed by “Bombs and attacks” (7). The difference here is that the “Violence/human rights” (4) category was present in 2005, while in the above analyzed newspapers it appeared only in 2009. There was also a bigger presence of religion-related words (“Islam” (14), “Islamic” (22), “Muslim” (18), “Fundamentalist” (8), “Kamikaze” (11), “Terrorist” (2), “Al-Qaeda” (6), and a new entry, “Jihadist” (7)). In 2009, there were fewer religion-related words and in fewer number (“Islam” (2), “Muslim” (1), and “Fatwa” (3)). The number of subjects was fewer as well with the “Others” category at the top with 11 articles, followed by “Turkey’s foreign relations” (8), “Violence/human rights” (5), “Gas pipeline” (4), and “Society” (2).

### *Libero*

*Libero* was founded on July 18, 2000 by Vittorio Feltri, former editor of *Il Giornale*, a centre-right Italian newspaper, and put itself politically in the liberal-democratic area; it is published by the Vittorio Feltri Editore & C.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, it has not been possible to analyze the second half of 2005 because the newspaper’s website archive starts from 2008.

In 2009, out a total of 197 articles, 66 were properly about Turkey and 131 were not. October was the most prolific month, with 19 articles being published, followed by December (16), November

(10), July and September (8), and August (5). As regarding the newspaper's sections, in the first place was "Foreign affairs" (36), followed by "Economics" (12), "Culture" (5), "Politics" and "News item" (4), "Others" (3), "Sport" (2), and "Opinion" with no articles at all.

In *Libero* in 2009 there was a large variety of subjects, however the majority of the articles were contained in the "Others" category (25), followed by "Violence/human rights" (12), "Turkey's economy" (7), "Turkey-EU" (6), "Turkey's foreign relations" (5), "Society" (4), and "Bombs and attack" and "Gas pipeline" (2). Also for religion-related words there was a larger variety and number in comparison to the other newspapers analyzed for the year 2009.

## Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

In terms of quantitative analysis, the following partial conclusions may be made. In all newspapers the number of "articles directly related to Turkey" was always smaller than the "articles in which the word 'Turkey' just appears". Both in 2005 and 2009, in all newspapers the majority of the articles were published in the months in which there had been internationally important events, such as the start of EU accession negotiations (3 October 2005) and the signing of the Turkey-Armenia Protocols (10 October 2009). In the majority of newspapers

in 2005 the categories of subjects most often written about were "Bomb attack", "Turkey-EU" and "Avian influenza", while there was an increase in the variety in 2009, which were more or less the same in all newspapers, except for *L'Unità* that presented the "Violence/human rights" category in 2005. The "Turkey-EU" subject was principally discussed in 2005, while in 2009 it has almost been "forgotten", except for in *Libero*. In all newspapers, except for *Libero*, the variety of religion-related words was more prolific in 2005, where also terrorism-related words were used; while in 2009 terrorism-related words almost disappeared, leaving generally to the use of "Islam", "Islamic" and "Muslim". In all newspapers, except for very few examples, there were no editorials or opinion articles. This can really influence the qualitative section of this research because there was not an "open" expression of the journalists' thoughts and so it would be more difficult to understand and analyze them.

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Leftist newspapers tended to place more emphasis on the human rights issue.

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Following the quantitative analysis, in line with the Critical Discourse Analysis, detailed qualitative analysis were conducted, looking under each subject category to analyze which subjects and which words were used in which context.

Some further conclusions can be drawn from the second reading and qualitative analysis. *Il Sole 24 Ore* did not satisfy the needs of this research because of the lack of articles about Turkey. The newspapers with leftist ideologies tended to report news in more detail. *Libero*, the right-oriented newspaper, had very short articles with very little information. *Il Corriere della Sera*, the most read newspaper without specific political affiliation, had even less detail and its news coverage lacked exhaustive information on Turkey. *La Repubblica*, the most read politically left-oriented newspaper, had a more detailed and exhaustive approach of addressing the various categories than the other two newspapers, at least in 2005. In 2009 its “style” changed and became more superficial and less detailed. *L’Unità*, a politically left-oriented newspaper, provided the most detailed and exhaustive information, especially for the “Turkey-EU” category.

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**In the “Turkey’s economy” category there was a general positive attitude towards Turkey, especially due to the opportunities that its market gives to Italian enterprises.**

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Leftist newspapers tended to place more emphasis on the human rights issue, with *Libero* focusing only on violence and *L’Unità* only on human rights. When human rights were concerned, all the newspapers presented a negative image

of Turkey, giving more or less the same message: the scarce improvement on this issue represents an obstacle to Turkey’s membership to the EU. The human rights issue is presented in all newspapers were especially concerned with freedom of expression (represented by the court case against the writer Orhan Pamuk) and the minority issue, particularly the Kurdish question, but also on the so-called Armenian genocide and, in *La Repubblica*, the Christian minority.

The articles under the “Turkey-EU” category in more or less all the newspapers represented the official view of the Italian, and also some European, elite, in that Turkey’s membership was seen as a good thing because it would constitute a bridge between Europe and the Muslim world. Openly or not, in all articles Turkey is referred to as a Muslim country and in their presentation, Islam played an important role in the Turkey’s EU membership process. In the “Bomb attack” and “Turkey-EU” categories, however for different reasons, more or less all the articles discussed the risk and fear of a rising of Islamic fundamentalism in Turkey. The opposite positions of the left-oriented *L’Unità* and the right-oriented *Libero* on Islam are noteworthy. *Libero* referred to Islam in general from a point of view of suspicion, linking it several times to fundamentalism. *L’Unità*, especially in the “Turkey-EU” category, addressed this issue from a different point of view, in line with the Italian political left, in which religious difference is not considered a problem but in some ways a value. However *L’Unità* too principally

referred to Turkey as a Muslim country, but also as a European and secular country as well because, in their opinion, the real obstacle to Turkish membership is not religion, but lack of full respect of human rights. In short, *L'Unità* did not to present Islam and EU membership as mutually exclusive. Other newspapers gave confusing messages, feeding to an alarmist perception of Islam, linking it with terrorism and immigration while often underlining the fact that Turkey is a predominantly Muslim country.

In the “Turkey’s economy” category there was a general positive attitude towards Turkey, especially due to the opportunities that its market gives to Italian enterprises. All the newspapers were more exhaustive and interested in Turkey in 2005 than 2009. At least one time per newspaper, the presence of a stereotyped, Orientalist vision of Turkey was present, even though in different contexts.

## Conclusion

Three principal issues were addressed in this article: a) the lack of information that newspapers give about Turkey, b) the image of Turkey portrayed, and c) the weight of Islam in this portrayed image.

Starting with the first point, it is argued that Italian newspapers principally give scarce and sometimes ill-informed and stereotyped information about Turkey. In fact, in all newspapers the number of “articles directly related

to Turkey” is always lower than the “articles in which the word ‘Turkey’ just appears”. Plus, both in 2005 and 2009, the majority of the articles were published in the months in which there were internationally important events, such as the start of EU accession negotiations, the signing of the Turkey-Armenia Protocols, or the signing of the South Stream gas pipeline agreement, while in the other months the number of articles was lower. It may be concluded that for Italian newspapers, Turkey is under the spotlight only when there is something internationally important on the table rather than there being an ongoing debate on Turkey and its membership. To illustrate this case, the “Turkey-EU” issue was discussed only in 2005, in relation to the start of the EU accession negotiation, while in 2009 this issue had been totally “forgotten”. Plus, there were almost no opinion articles on Turkey, just short news pieces that had little information and were without any details, except for in *L'Unità*, as it seemed more dedicated to Turkey, and in *La Repubblica*, but only in 2005, because in 2009 it became more similar to the other newspapers’ “quick” style.

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The reasons for support or opposition were different depending on the political affiliation of the parties.

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One may also argue that there was a convergence of the political agenda

and the media. On several occasions, the image of Turkey in the articles reflected the vision and position of the different political groups. At the elite level, Italy officially supports Turkey's membership of the EU, arguing that "it would strengthen moderate Islam as a model in the Muslim World, it would increase EU influence in the neighboring regions, it would be a bridge among cultures and civilizations, and it would be a new energy hub for Europe (gas pipeline)". Almost identical messages were to be found in the few articles that dealt directly with Turkey's bid for EU membership.

The reasons for support or opposition were different depending on the political affiliation of the parties: right-wing parties normally base their antagonism on mainly religious, cultural and historical grounds, while support Turkey for strategic and economic reasons. On the other hand, left-wing parties do not make an issue of different and incompatible cultures and religions but principally underline the difficult situation of Turkey's ethnic minorities and its poor human rights record.

The analysis of newspaper coverage displayed a very similar, if not identical, presentation of Turkey. In fact, we see leftist newspapers tending to report in more detail and place more emphasis on the human rights issue. Turkey is referred

to as a Muslim country, openly or not, in all newspapers and in all articles, and it is argued that Islam plays an important role in the Turkey's EU membership process. In fact, in connection with the start of negotiation process, more than one newspaper reported the "fear" on part of the political elite by which a refusal to Turkey's membership would expose it to a possible rise of Islamic fundamentalism. The opposite positions of the left-oriented *L'Unità* and the right-oriented *Libero* on Islam are quite interesting. *Libero* referred to Islam principally suspiciously, linking it several times to fundamentalism. While *L'Unità*, especially in the "Turkey-EU" category, saw Islam in some way as a value and, while it referred to Turkey as a Muslim country, it also referred to it as a European and secular country. Finally, the positive evaluation of

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Turkey is referred to as a Muslim country, openly or not, in all newspapers and in all articles, and it is argued that Islam plays an important role in Turkey's EU membership process.

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Turkey by the Italian elite on its economic performance and increased geopolitical activism was seen in newspapers too. Especially the opportunities provided by Turkey's positive market conditions and growth rate to Italian enterprises were emphasized repeatedly.

Regarding the impact of newspapers on readers, it is difficult to determine as there are few readers' comments on the various articles, except for in *Il Corriere della Sera*. This newspaper presented some articles written by readers telling of their trips to Turkey. When these few

articles were analyzed, it was clear that Islam played a big role in the perception of Turkey in readers' minds. In fact, in the travelogues, which principally covered Istanbul, Ephesus and Cappadocia, but also included one on eastern Turkey, there was a mystical perception of Turkey oscillating between West and East. It becomes clear from these texts that the travelers were fascinated by Turkey, in which they found the atmosphere of the Orient. In fact, in almost all these readers' articles there was a strong distinguishing element of constructing an "Us versus Them" narrative in the form of religion, with constant references to mosques and muezzins' call for prayer, women hidden behind secretive veils, and palaces and harems.

The link between Islam and Turkey in Italians' mind also becomes clear in the comments left to the websites following an article dated 17 November 2009, covering the official visit of Italian President Giorgio Napolitano to Turkey. In the article, the supportive statement of President Napolitano on Turkish membership indicating that "Turkey is an added value for Europe" was reported. The readers that took the time to leave their comments to this article were rather negative on Turkey. In fact, out of a total of 12 comments, 10 are very negative and against Turkey in the European Union, basically because of religion. Furthermore, they are really

stereotyped and ill-informed, referring to Turkey as a country in which covered women are killed like flies because they are inferior, some parties have theocratic aspirations and the death penalty was still present (although it was abolished in 2004). The remaining two comments, although they are not completely pro-Turkey, show more concrete knowledge of the country, trying to correct the erroneous information given in the negative comments that presented a Turkey that is far away from the reality.

The results of this research are even more important if one considers that in Italy the newspapers constitute the more diverse source of information compared to Italian TV networks, of which three major groups control 92% of the market share.<sup>48</sup>

In conclusion, it may be argued that the initial expectations were met. The analyzed newspapers give a stereotyped, scarce and ill-informed vision of Turkey, and moreover they represent and reproduce the opinions about Turkey shared by the different Italian political elites. As a consequence, the public is influenced by these factors and, together with the erroneous and alarmist information given by the media about Islam, it is easier to understand the rise of an *Islamophobia* that created a negative perception among the Italian public not just about Turkey itself, but also about its membership in the EU.

## Endnotes

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