The Long, Difficult, and Tortuous Journey of Turkey into Europe and the Dilemmas of European Civilization

José Casanova

After a long and contentious meeting of the European Commission to draft the negotiating rules for potential membership talks with Turkey, Olli Rehn, the EU enlargement commissioner declared: “Turkey will not become a member of the union today or tomorrow…It will be a long, difficult, and tortuous journey.”¹ The fractious compromise reached by the 25 commissioners on June 29, 2005 was as difficult and as tortuous as the road ahead. The aftershocks produced by the rejection of the European Constitution in referenda in France and Holland framed the debates. Post-referendum surveys indicated that resistance against enlargement, particularly against Turkey’s membership, nativist anxieties over predominantly Muslim immigration, and generalized apprehensions over Islam had played some but not a very large role in the punishment vote.² But politicians throughout Europe have interpreted the results as an indication of voters’ dissatisfaction with the rapid pace of enlargement and as a warning to slow or freeze the process.³ Chastised Euro-politicians in Brussels kept repeating, “We must listen better to our citizens.”

Viviane Reding, the commissioner from tiny Luxemburg, where a referendum on the European Constitution was scheduled to take place in two weeks, led the voices clamoring for a halt in the negotiations with Turkey. Echoing her were the commissioners from Austria, Poland, and Greece. After an impassioned defense by President Durao Barroso, a majority agreed that the EU ought to “keep its promises” and stick to October 3 to initiate the formal negotiations with Turkey.

However, the commission left a loophole by resolving that this decision now needs to be ratified by each of the 25 governments. In the present climate of European opinion, practically any government could easily exercise its veto power while claiming to be following the dictates of its electorate. France’s Interior Minister and President Chirac’s likely successor, Nicolas Sarkozy, a politician clearly attuned to the public mood, has already stated unambiguously the need to suspend enlargement at least until Europe’s political crisis is resolved. “Europe must have borders,” he said. “Not all countries have a vocation to be in Europe.” Similar calls to stop or at least to postpone the negotiations have come from the governments of Holland, Austria, and Denmark. The German, British, Italian and Spanish governments, by contrast, have spoken in favor of starting the negotiations.
on October 3, as agreed last December. But the Christian Democrats in Germany, who won national elections in September, oppose Turkey’s entry into the Union, offering Turkey instead a “privileged association” short of full membership. This is the position of the European People’s Party (EPP), the umbrella organization of Christian Democrats and center-right parties from all member countries of the European Union, which holds the largest number of seats (268 out of 732) of any political bloc in the European Parliament.

Moreover, even if all 25 governments were to agree in the end to start the talks as scheduled, the European Commission has set a much tougher framework of negotiations. As a pre-condition for the negotiations, Turkey had to agree to sign customs agreements with all EU members, including one that explicitly recognizes Cyprus, as a first step in Turkey’s reluctant commitment to resolve the three-decade division of the island. The commission also made clear that the talks will be long and will last at least until 2014. The usual requirements of membership (rule of law, market economy, democracy, human rights, recognition and protection of minorities) have been strengthened by emphasizing that far more than during previous enlargements in the case of Turkey the EU will insist on the implementation of changes and not just the promise of them. A special clause has been added whereby the talks can be suspended at any time if there is “a serious and persistent breach” in the political criteria. The commission also underlined that this time around negotiations would not necessarily end in full membership, adding ambiguously that the European Union’s “absorption capacity” would need to be taken into account. Moreover, even if at the end Turkey is able to meet all the tough conditions and ultimately joins the EU, the admission will fall somewhat short of full membership anyhow, insofar as the communitarian principle of freedom of movement and the right to work anywhere within the union will not apply to Turkish citizens. In an apparent effort to allay European public opinion and the fears of massive Turkish immigration, European countries will maintain the right to close their borders to migrating Turks.

The crisis of European geopolitical and civilizational identity, the difficulties which European societies find in integrating non-European immigrants, who are predominantly Muslim, in an age in which global migrations have become practically unavoidable, and the dilemmas presented by Turkey’s determination to join the EU have become inextricably entangled. In his presentation of the negotiating rules, Rehn reiterated the official EU position that Turkish membership was in the strategic interest of Europe, adding that “Europe needs a stable, prosperous and democratic Turkey,” precisely in order to prove wrong the alleged “clash of civilizations” between Islam and the West. But the European Union cannot make up its mind whether it should accept or reject Turkey until it resolves its own crisis of civilizational identity. Europeans are not sure whether European civilization is to be defined by the particular historical legacy of Western “civilization,” of which cultural Christianity, to be sure in an increasingly secularized form, remains a central component. Or, alternatively, whether European civilization
ought to be defined by the cosmopolitan “civilization” of secular modernity, which Europe itself claims to have produced. The very fact that these two radically different concepts of “civilization” are presented as alternatives reveals the nature of the dilemma. If Europe is defined in terms of its traditional historical civilization as “Christian” and/or “Western,” then one could legitimately argue that there can be no room for Turkey in the European Union, unless Turkey undergoes a drastic Westernization. On the other hand, if Europe is defined in terms of the civilization of “modernity”, then there should be no reason why a “modern” Turkey which meets the usual economic, legal and political conditions required of all new members ought not to be admitted to the EU. But, the apparent fear of many Europeans is actually that Turkey may be ready to meet all the stated “modern” conditions. Indeed, the closer Turkey gets to meet the political conditions, the more the unstated cultural conditions of already belonging to European civilization tend to gain prominence in the debate.

In declarations shortly before the European Commission was to set the negotiating rules, Turkey’s Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan bluntly addressed those unstated conditions when he said, “If you really claim that the EU is not a Christian club, if you believe this, then you should take Turkey among you,” adding that Ankara would not agree to any new conditions for EU membership, that it was not fair to change the rules as negotiations were to start and that Turkey expects “honest politics” as it begins the negotiations. On the same day, more diplomatically but no less firmly, Turkish Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, Abdullah Gul, while attending a meeting of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Foreign Ministers’ Conference in Yemen, stated that there was no disagreement with the EU. “The Copenhagen political criteria have been fulfilled,” Gul said. “Political criteria were the conditions for the beginning of membership negotiations…and since we have fulfilled them.” The day after the EU unveiled the draft rules for negotiations with Turkey, in his speech to the Azerbaijan Assembly in Baku, Erdogan reiterated the same message: “We think that the EU is an economic or political unit, not a Christian club. EU has to be a civilization meeting area, not a quarrel area. And for this, they must take Turkey into EU. We know we have to work very much for this aim, we have a long way. We are walking on this way only for ourselves…The Turkish Republic wants to be a member of the EU in order to increase people’s living standards…We will start EU discussions on the 3rd of October.”

Secular Europeans usually retort that the EU is not and should not be a Christian club, and that religion, therefore, should not be an issue, as long as religion, of course, remains a private affair and is not politicized. But the fact that the declarations were made in Yemen, in a meeting of OIC Foreign Ministers, and in Azerbaijan, a Muslim country with which Turkey also wants to maintain special “Turkic” civilizational ties, certainly ruffles European feathers, “Christian” and “secular” alike. Erdogan and Gul, moreover, are leaders of the ruling Muslim democratic Justice and Development Party (AKP), the successor to the more
explicitly “Islamist” Welfare Party (Refah/Fazilet), which was deposed and banned by the soft coup of 28 February 1997, when the Turkish military, the self-appointed guardians of republican secularist Kemalism, intervened in order to prevent a “fundamentalist” Islamic takeover of the state. The AKP, which claims to be not an “Islamist” but a “Muslim” Democratic party, akin to Europe’s Christian Democrats, even has observer status within EPP in the European Parliament along with the Christian Democratic parties of other candidate states such as Rumania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine.

The paradox and the quandary for modern secular Europeans, who have shed their traditional historical Christian identities in a rapid and drastic process of secularization that has coincided with the very success of the process of European integration and who therefore identify European modernity with secularization, is that they observe with some apprehension the reverse process in Turkey. The more “modern,” or at least democratic, Turkish politics become, the more publicly Muslim and less secularist they also tend to become. In its determination to join the EU, Turkey is adamantly staking its claim to be, or its right to become, a fully European country economically and politically, while simultaneously fashioning its own model of Muslim cultural modernity. It is this very claim to be simultaneously a modern European and a culturally Muslim country that baffles European civilizational identities, secular and Christian alike. It contradicts both the definition of a Christian Europe and the definition of a secular Europe. Turkey’s claim to European membership becomes an irritant precisely because it forces Europeans to reflexively and openly confront the crisis in their own civilizational identity, at a moment when the EU is already reeling from a series of compounded economic, geopolitical, administrative, fiscal and legitimation crises.

As if responding to the Turkish leaders’ claims that Turkey is ready to meet the EU’s political and economic criteria, but not necessarily cultural ones, enlargement commissioner Rehn in a press conference on June 30, 2005 after reiterating that “it will be a very long and difficult journey” and that by their very nature the negotiations are “open-ended,” added that “European values need to become reality in all walks of life, in all corners of the country, before Turkey can join the European Union.” Rhen, however, never defined what he meant by “European values.” Neither are Europeans – elites or ordinary people, political leaders or scholars – likely to agree on what constitutes their shared “European values” and whether those values are uniquely or peculiarly “European.” Ronald Inglehart’s attempt to map all the countries that have participated in the World Values Surveys shows that, more than any other region of the world, European countries empirically fall all over the plane, filling three of the quadrants along the vertical and horizontal axes measuring the dual “traditional vs. secular-rational” and “survival vs. self-development” dimensions. There emerge five distinctly different, in some dimensions radically distanced, European value areas: a Protestant, a Catholic, an Orthodox, an English-speaking and a Baltic-former communist one. Similarly the quarrels provoked by the wording of the Preamble
to the new European Constitution, particularly over any possible reference to God or to the Christian European heritage(s), show how difficult it is to reach any consensus on “values” even among the elites.\footnote{13}

The serious political crisis in the process of European integration had initially nothing to do with Turkey’s membership per se, but was precipitated by the political mismanagement of a process of constitution-making that was meant to address precisely the deficit in democratic legitimacy of the European institutions. Instead of remedying this deficit, however, contributing to European social integration and enhancing a common European identity, the quarrels over the new constitution and its plebiscitarian rejection by the French and Dutch electorates have amplified the deficit in democratic legitimacy and transferred the crisis from the Euro-politics of Brussels to the national politics of its member states, laying bare the cleavages and divisions across Europe. Turkey has simply become one of the mirrors where these cleavages are being reflected.

In The Clash of Civilizations, Huntington depicts Turkey as the classic and paradigmatic case of a “torn country,” that is, a country with a single predominant Muslim culture whose leaders want to shift it to the West.\footnote{14} Given his essentialist conception of civilization, Huntington considers such a task nearly impossible. At least three requirements must be met for a torn country to redefine successfully its civilizational identity: “First, the political and economic elite of the country has to be generally supportive of and enthusiastic about this move. Second, the public has to be at least willing to acquiesce in the redefinition of identity. Third, the dominant elements in the host civilization, in most cases the West, have to be willing to embrace the convert.”\footnote{15}

In the case of Turkey, the first requirement has been a given since the 1920’s. Building upon the legacy of the Young Turks (1908-18), Mustafa Kemal, “Father of the Turks,” was bent upon begetting a modern Western secular republican Turkish nation-state based on the principles of positivist secularism modeled after French republican laïcité, Jacobin statism, and vanguard elitism. But the “six arrows” of Kemalism (republicanism, nationalism, secularism, statism, populism, and reformism), codified in the Fourth Congress of the People’s Republican Party in 1935, at the height of competing authoritarian state ideologies in Europe, could not succeed in producing a Turkish secular homogeneous nation from above. What it did produce was a ruling administrative military-civilian bureaucratic elite with a distinct identity as “laik Turks,” separate from ordinary backward Muslim subjects, and the ideology of a national security state with an exclusionary code of violence.\footnote{16}

Turkey remained neutral during World War II, but the Cold War offered the opportunity to align itself geo-politically with the West. Given its extended frontier with the Soviet Union, Turkey became a crucial bulwark in the containment of communism and thus became part of “the Free World” despite its authoritarian political structures. In 1952 Turkey joined NATO, becoming fully integrated into its command structure. Two years earlier, following Western European models,
it had shifted from one-party rule to a competitive party system, but it banned political parties based on religious, ethnic or linguistic identities. The military, the self-appointed guardians of the sacred Kemalist principles, intervened frequently whenever there was a threat to the system from below.

Ultimately, the project of constructing such a nation-state from above was bound to fail because it was too secular for the Islamists, too Sunni for the Alevi, and too Turkish for the Kurds. A Turkish state in which the collective identities and interests of those groups that constitute the overwhelming majority of the population cannot find public representation cannot possibly be a truly representative democracy, even if it is founded on modern secular republican principles. 17

But Muslim Democracy is as possible and viable today in Turkey as Christian Democracy was half a century ago in Western Europe. Secular Europeans, apprehensive of Muslim political parties, or of any other religious political party for that matter, seem to have forgotten that the initial project of a European Union was basically a Christian-Democratic one, sanctioned by the Vatican, at a time of a general religious revival in post-World War II Europe, in the geopolitical context of the Cold War when “the free world” and “Christian civilization” had become synonymous. But this is a forgotten history that secular Europeans, proud of having outgrown a religious past from which they feel liberated, would prefer not to remember. Moreover, practically every continental European country has had religious parties at one time or another. Many of them, particularly the Catholic ones, had dubious democratic credentials until the negative learning experience of Fascism turned them into Christian Democratic parties. 18

The formation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 by the six founding members (Benelux, France, Italy and West Germany) and its expansion into the European Economic Community (EEC) or “common market” in 1957 was predicated upon two historic reconciliations: the reconciliation between France and Germany, two countries which had been at war or preparing for war from 1870 to 1945 and the reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics within Christian Democracy. Indeed ruling or prominent Christian Democrats in all six countries played the leading role in the process. The Cold War, the Marshall Plan, NATO, and the newly established Washington-Rome Axis formed the geopolitical context for both reconciliations. Greece in June 1959 and Turkey in July 1959, hostile enemies yet members of NATO, were actually the first two countries to apply for association to the EEC. That same July, the other Western European countries formed EFTA as an alternative economic association. Only Franco’s Spain was left out of all initial Western European associations and alliances.

Turkey, therefore, has been patiently knocking on the door of the European club since 1959, only to be told politely to keep waiting, while watching latecomer after latecomer being invited first in successive waves of accession. Formally, it applied for membership in 1987. But until very recently there was no chance that Turkey could or actually seemed eager to meet the EU’s stringent
economic and political conditions for membership. Only after the landslide victory of Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) in November 2002 have the structural conditions been created to introduce the kind of constitutional, legal, and democratic reforms that makes EU membership possible. The paradox, therefore, is that only the rise of Muslim Democracy in Turkey has created the conditions for real democratization.\textsuperscript{19} About Turkey’s eagerness to join the EU and willingness to meet the conditions, there can be no doubt now that the AKP government has not only reiterated unambiguously the position of all the previous Turkish “secularist” administrations, but has proven with deeds its readiness to introduce the required reforms. Turkey’s “publics”, secularist and Muslim alike, have spoken in unison. The present government is certainly the most representative democratic government of all of Turkey’s modern history. A wide consensus has seemingly been reached among the Turkish population, showing that Turkey on the issue of joining Europe and thus “the West” is no longer a “torn country.”

According to a national survey in February 2005, over 70 percent of respondents said they would vote yes if a referendum was held on Turkey’s membership in the European Union, while only 16.2 percent said they would vote no.\textsuperscript{20}

Huntington’s second requirement, therefore, has also been met. What is less clear is whether the third requirement will follow, namely whether the Europeans, the political elites as well as ordinary citizens, are willing if not to embrace at least to admit a modern Muslim democratic Turkey into the EU. The first open, if not yet formal, discussions of Turkey’s candidacy during the 2002 Copenhagen summit touched a raw nerve among all kinds of European “publics.” The widespread debate revealed how much “Islam” with all its distorted representations as “the other” of Western civilization was the real issue rather than the extent to which Turkey was ready to meet the same stringent economic and political conditions as all other new members. Critics within and outside Turkey still accuse the AKP of Muslim fundamentalism and of undermining Kemalist secularism by bringing their religion into the public sphere, despite their explicit rejection of “Middle Eastern political Islamism.” One wonders, who are the real “fundamentalists” here: “Muslims” who want to gain public recognition of their identity and demand the right to mobilize in order to advance their ideal and material interests, while respecting the democratic rules of the game, or “secularists” who view the Muslim veil worn by a duly elected parliamentary representative as a threat to Turkish democracy and as a blasphemous affront against the sacred secularist principles of the Kemalist state.

There are those like Bassam Tibi, an influential Syrian-German scholar of Islam and modernity, who argue that the AKP is not to be trusted and that their strategy of democratization and Europeanization is only a subterfuge.\textsuperscript{21} But the argument is only plausible if one assumes that the AKP’s project of joining the European Union, their new discourse of human rights, democracy, civil society and rule of law, and all the democratic reforms they have introduced are only diversionary tactical moves by “pseudo-democrat” Islamists to reach their real
strategic goal of imposing an Islamist *sharia* state. Legal Europeanization, that is, the adaptation of Turkey’s constitutional and legal system to European standards, would serve the instrumental purpose of dismantling the secularist Security Council, still controlled by the military as guardians of the Kemalist order, which is the only thing that stands in the way of their conquest of absolute state power. I find such an argument totally implausible. Even if one was to concede that such was the hidden agenda which the Islamists adopted after the experience of the 1997 military coup, it should be evident that such a tactic of legal Europeanization could never lead to the strategic goal of establishing an Islamist state. Parallels with the Fascist democratic road to power in the ’30s, the communist strategies of the ’40s, or the Algerian FIS in the ’90s are simply misplaced. The AKP is using its electoral victory to advance legal and cultural Europeanization in order to meet the conditions to join the European Union. The notion that once they are in the EU, they will reveal their true intentions and impose an authoritarian Islamic state seems to me preposterous.  

Officially, Europe’s refusal to accept Turkey so far is mainly based on Turkey’s deficient human rights record. But there are not too subtle indications that an outwardly secular Europe is still too Christian when it comes to the possibility of imagining a Muslim country as part of the European community. One wonders whether Turkey represents a threat to Western civilization or rather an unwelcome reminder of the barely submerged yet inexpressible and anxiety-ridden “white” European Christian identity. The public debates in Europe over Turkey’s admission have shown that Europe is actually the torn country, deeply divided over its cultural identity, unable to answer the question whether European identity, and therefore its external and internal boundaries, should be defined by the common heritage of Christianity and Western civilization or by its modern secular values of liberalism, universal human rights, political democracy and tolerant and inclusive multiculturalism. Publicly, of course, European liberal secular elites can not share the Pope’s definition of European civilization as essentially Christian. But they also can not verbalize the unspoken “cultural” requirements that make the integration of Turkey into Europe such a difficult issue. 

The specter of millions of Turkish citizens already in Europe but not of Europe, many of them second generation immigrants, caught between an old country they have left behind and their European host societies unable or unwilling to fully assimilate them, only makes the problem the more visible. “Gastarbeiter” can be successfully incorporated economically. They may even gain voting rights, at least on the local level, and prove to be model or at least ordinary citizens. But can they pass the unwritten rules of cultural European membership or are they to remain “strangers,” ultimately “Fremdarbeiter”? Can the European Union open new conditions for the kind of multiculturalism that its constituent national societies find so difficult to accept? The question of the integration of Turkey in the EU is inevitably intertwined, implicitly if not explicitly, with the
question of the failed integration of Muslim immigrants and, in turn, the way in which Europe resolves both questions will determine not only Europe’s civilizational identity but the role of Europe in the emerging global order.

When confronting immigrants in their midst, Europeans rarely reflect upon the fact that throughout the modern era European societies have been the primary immigrant sending region in the world. In the last decades, however, the migration flows have reversed and many Western European societies have become instead centers of global immigration. But European societies still have difficulty viewing themselves as permanent immigrant societies or viewing the native second generation as nationals, irrespective of their legal status. They prefer to maintain the illusion that immigration is a temporary phenomenon, that those are “guest workers” that can be sent home or refused entry whenever is convenient. But unless it is willing to turn itself into “fortress Europe,” with heavily policed external borders, and thus belie the self image of cosmopolitan modernity it would like to have, the EU is unlikely to be able to stop completely the constant global flow of refugees and of legal and illegal immigration. Moreover, most responsible politicians recognize that given demographic trends, the dramatic drop in birth rates and the graying of the population, Western European countries will need to import young and qualified labor in order both to be able to compete economically with the rest of the world and in order to finance their shrinking welfare states. Under contemporary conditions of globalization, “fortress Europe” would be economically, geopolitically and culturally self-defeating. It would turn Europe into a parochial, ethnocentric, and peripheral peninsula of Asia, the position it had before the rise of European hegemony in early modernity.

But what makes “the immigrant question” particularly thorny in Europe, and inextricably entwined with “the Turkish question,” is the fact that in Europe immigration and Islam are almost synonymous. The overwhelming majority of immigrants in most European countries, the UK being the main exception, are Muslims and the overwhelming majority of Western European Muslims are immigrants. This identification appears even more pronounced in those cases when the majority of Muslim immigrants tend to come predominantly from a single region of origin, e.g., Turkey in the case of Germany, the Ma’ghreb in the case of France. This entails a superimposition of different dimensions of “otherness” that exacerbates issues of boundaries, accommodation and incorporation. The immigrant, the religious, the racial, and the socio-economic disfranchised “other” all tend to coincide. Moreover, all those dimensions of “otherness” now become superimposed upon Islam, so that Islam becomes the utterly “other.” It is interesting to observe that only 30 years ago Islam was absolutely “invisible” among immigrants. Nobody in Europe “saw” immigrant workers from Turkey or the Ma’ghreb as “Muslims.” Today by contrast, all immigrants from Muslim countries are viewed as “Muslims” irrespective of their own religious attitudes.

After September 11, the global war on terror, and the ever more visible proliferation of global Muslim discourses and networks and of global discourses on
Islam, on veiling, on Islamic fundamentalism, in Europe it has turned into a panic that can only be characterized as “Islamophobia.” In Europe, even more so than in the United States, the problem is compounded by the confluence of three separate sources of Islamophobia which can easily gang together in a rejectionist front: the nativist, xenophobic, racist, nationalist right; the culturally protectionist, conservative and traditional Christian center; and the modern, progressive, liberal, anti-fundamentalist secular left.

The discourse of the nativist, xenophobic, anti-immigrant is well known from the political discourse of Le Pen in France or Jörg Haider in Austria. The message is also straightforward. Islam is simply unassimilable because it is un-European, a foreign immigrant religion. Such a nativist and usually racist attitude can be differentiated clearly from the conservative “Catholic” position, paradigmatically expressed by the Cardinal of Bologna when he declared that Italy should welcome immigrants of all races and regions of the world, but should particularly select Catholic immigrants in order to preserve the Catholic identity of the country. The Catholic position nostalgically and anachronistically holds unto an identification of Christianity and European civilization, a kind of cultural European Catholicism, which theologically is suspiciously un-Catholic (i.e., non-universal) and historically is passé, at a time when secular Europe has become post-Christian and global dynamic Christianity has become post-European. Sociologically speaking it is also self-defeating, since the only chance for a Catholic renewal in Europe is from the competition of Islam or other non-Christian religions, otherwise European Catholics simply drift into the kind of non-practicing, non-believing secular cultural Catholicism that the new pope Benedict XVI wants to confront.

Liberal secular Europeans tend to look askance at such blatant expressions of racist bigotry and religious intolerance. But when it comes to Islam, secular Europeans also tend to reveal the limits and prejudices of modern secular liberal toleration. One is not likely to hear among liberal politicians and secular intellectuals explicitly xenophobic or anti-religious statements. The politically correct formulation tends to run along such lines as “we welcome each and all immigrants irrespective of race or religion as long as they are willing to respect and accept our modern liberal secular European norms”.

There are two versions of this discourse, one more explicitly secular, the other more explicitly liberal progressive. Internal differences notwithstanding, Western European societies are deeply secular societies, shaped by the hegemonic knowledge regime of secularism. As liberal democratic societies they tolerate and respect individual religious freedom. But due to the pressure towards the privatization of religion, which among European societies has become a taken for granted characteristic of the self-definition of a modern secular society, those societies have a much greater difficulty in recognizing some legitimate role for religion in public life and in the organization and mobilization of collective group identities. Muslim organized collective identities and their public representations
become a source of anxiety not only because of their religious otherness as a non-Christian and non-European religion, but more importantly because of their religiousness itself as the other of European secularity. In this context, the temptation to identify Islam and fundamentalism becomes the more pronounced. Islam, by definition, becomes the other of Western secular modernity, an identification that becomes superimposed upon the older image of Islam as the other of European Christianity. Therefore, the problems posed by the incorporation of Muslim immigrants become consciously or unconsciously associated with seemingly related and vexatious issues concerning the role of religion in the public sphere, which European societies assumed they had already solved according to the liberal secular norm of privatization of religion.26

The explicit articulation of those “secular liberal European norms” may vary from country to country. Indeed, European societies have markedly different institutional and legal structures regarding religious associations, very diverse policies of state recognition, of state regulation and of state aid to religious groups, as well as diverse norms concerning when and where one may publicly express religious beliefs and practices.

The controversies over the Muslim veil in so many European societies and the overwhelming support among the French citizenry, including apparently among a majority of French Muslims, for the restrictive legislation prohibiting the wearing of Muslim veils and other ostensibly religious symbols in public schools, as “a threat to national cohesion” or simply to French laïcité, may be an extreme example of illiberal secularism. But in fact one sees similar trends of restrictive legislation directed at immigrant Muslims in liberal Holland, precisely in the name of protecting its liberal tolerant traditions from the threat of illiberal, fundamentalist, patriarchal customs reproduced and transmitted to the younger generation by Muslim immigrants.

The positive rationale one hears among liberals in support of such illiberal restriction of the free exercise of religion is usually put in terms of the desirable enforced emancipation of young girls, if necessary against their expressed will, from gender discrimination and from patriarchal control. This was the discourse on which the assassinated Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn built his electorally successful anti-immigrant platform in liberal Holland, a campaign which is now bearing fruit in new restrictive legislation. While conservative religious people are rightly expected to tolerate behavior they may consider morally abhorrent such as homosexuality, liberal secular Europeans are openly stating that European societies ought not to tolerate religious behavior or cultural customs that are morally abhorrent in so far as they are contrary to modern liberal secular European norms. What makes the intolerant tyranny of the secular liberal majority justifiable in principle is not just the democratic principle of majority rule, but rather the secularist teleological assumption built into theories of modernization that one set of norms is reactionary, fundamentalist and anti-modern, while the other set is progressive, liberal and modern.
Anti-immigrant xenophobic nativism, the conservative defense of Christian culture and civilization, secularist anti-religious prejudices, liberal-feminist critiques of Muslim patriarchal fundamentalism, and the fear of Islamist terrorist networks, are being fused indiscriminately throughout Europe into a uniform anti-Muslim discourse which practically precludes the kind of mutual accommodation between immigrant groups and host societies that is necessary for successful immigrant incorporation. The parallels with Protestant-republican anti-Catholic nativism in mid-nineteenth-century America are indeed striking. Today’s totalizing discourse on Islam as an essentially anti-modern, fundamentalist, illiberal, and un-democratic religion and culture echoes the nineteenth-century discourse on Catholicism. What is new and different, however, is the strength of European secular identities.

Interesting sociologically is not so much the fact of progressive and drastic religious decline among the European population since the 1960s, but the fact that this decline is accompanied by a “secularist” self-understanding that interprets the decline as “normal” and “progressive”, and therefore as a quasi-normative consequence of being a “modern” and “enlightened” European. It is this “secular” identity shared by European elites and ordinary people alike that paradoxically turns “religion” and the barely suppressed Christian European identity into a thorny and perplexing issue when it comes to delimiting the external geographic boundaries and to defining the internal cultural identity of a European Union in the process of being constituted.

Moreover, the European conception of a single universal secular modernity has serious repercussions for conceptions of the emerging global order, for contested definitions of the West and its multiple modernities, and for the failure to recognize the plurality of modern interrelated civilizational dynamics. It is not accidental that the discourse of global secular cosmopolitanism is a paradigmatically European discourse, while the discourses which emerge from America are either evangelical imperial callings to eradicate evil and make the world safe for democracy or realist warnings of a global civilizational clash between the West and the rest. The model of cosmopolitan Europeanization is that of expansion of its territorial borders through integration of the external periphery into an internally homogeneous space, what Timothy Garton Ash calls “the power of induction.” 27 As the successive enlargements and the aspirations of Turkey, and most recently of Ukraine, to join the European Union demonstrate, the model has tremendous appeal for neighboring countries which would rather be within this privileged space that guarantees democracy, economic prosperity and security, than outside its borders. But such a model of cosmopolitan Europeanization must sooner, rather than later, face its internal and external limits. The inability to Europeanize its immigrants is the most obvious manifestation of the internal limits of cultural Europeanization. Externally, the European Union cannot continue expanding unless one imagines the process of cosmopolitan globalization as the enlargement of a single European nation-state until it encompasses the entire globe. Once
territorial enlargement comes to an end and Europe closes its borders to further immigration in order to protect its cosmopolitan, universal values what remains is exclusionist “fortress Europe.”

NOTES


2. According to a post-referendum Eurobarometer study, six percent of Dutch voters gave enlargement as the reason for their no vote, while only three percent gave the inclusion of Turkey as the reason. In the case of France, the percentages were reversed, with three percent against further enlargement and six percent against Turkish membership. According to the indepth voter analysis, the main reasons for the no votes were: in the Netherlands, lack of information (32%), fear of a loss of national sovereignty (19%), opposition to the government (14%); in France, negative effect on employment (31%), bad economic situation in France (26%). In both cases roughly two thirds of the electorate thought that the failure to ratify the constitution would lead to its renegotiation to make it, either economically more social (France) or to better defend the interests of the Netherlands. Honor Mahony, “Enlargement Played Small Role in Constitution No Votes,” EUObserver.com, June 27, 2005.


5. For this and other official statements see ABIG’s web site: http://www.abig.org.tr/en/template.asp. ABIG (European Union Communications Group) is a mixed public and private initiative of the Turkish government, the Union of Chambers of Commerce, and the Association of Turkish Businessmen and Industrialists to promote Turkey’s candidacy for membership in the EU.

6. The still unresolved conflict between Muslim Azerbaijan and Christian Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh and the refusal of Turkey to publicly acknowledge the Armenian genocide often become entangled with the Greek-Turkish conflict in Cyprus as cultural-civilizational issues that are often introduced by those who are opposed to Turkey’s membership.


Dilemmas of European Civilization: José Casanova

13. Casanova, “Religion, European Secular Identities”.
15. Ibid. p. 139.
22. In the same volume, Yavuz offers a much more plausible argument, buttressed by convincing sociological empirical evidence of the transformation of the AKP from an Islamist to a Muslim Democratic party, that is akin to earlier transformations of the dubiously democratic Catholic parties of the 30’s into the Christian Democratic parties of the late 40’s and 50’s, the very ones which sponsored the project of the ECC. Hakan Yavuz, “Islam and Europeanization”. For a comparative analysis of Catholic and Muslim aggiornamenti, see José Casanova, “Civil Society and Religion: Retrospective Reflections on Catholicism and Prospective Reflections on Islam,” Social Research 68:4 (Winter 2001).
24. A controversy has erupted in Germany because Oskar Lafontaine, the left socialist leader, dislikes the euphemism “Gastarbeiter” (guest worker) and prefers to call immigrant labor “Fremdarbeiter (foreign worker), the term used during the Nazi period.

José Casanova is Professor of Sociology at the New School for Social Research. He is the author of Public Religions in the Modern World (1994) and Opus Dei and the Modernization of Spain (forthcoming).