



Turkey's accession process to the EU in the Spanish press: Constructing otherness through language and news images

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the representation of Turkey's accession process to the European Union (EU) in the Spanish newspapers *El País* and *El Mundo*. It covers three key moments: The Treaty of Helsinki (1999); the opening of negotiations in 2005; and the unilateral freezing of negotiations by the European Parliament in 2016. 'MyNews' is the tool used to access the news. The study uses critical discourse analysis (CDA), which examines the use of language to reveal underlying ideologies and power dynamics. The findings show that Turkey is often portrayed through biased images as a conservative and religiously backward country. There is a lack of context in both media, which focus on specific events rather than comprehensive analysis. In addition, Turkish sources are under-represented, excluding statements by political figures, suggesting that the narrative is largely shaped by Spanish journalists, potentially overlooking local nuances. Through CDA, this paper highlights the way in which media narratives about Turkey's EU accession are constructed and shaped by dominant ideologies.

Keywords: Turkey, European Union, critical discourse analysis, foreign conflicts, media narratives

INTRODUCTION

It has been 25 years since Turkey was formally accepted as a candidate for the European Union (EU) membership, but since 2016 the process has been frozen. Although all Turkish leaders since the founder of the republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, have argued that their country must be part of Europe, not all European states have maintained this position. In addition to reasons related to human rights or the country's economy, cultural differences—mostly based on religion—have been used to justify the limited social and political support that Turkey has received in the EU (Kızılkaya & Bakıler, 2020; Taufiq et al., 2022).

Throughout its contemporary history, Spain has always been a friend of Turkey within the EU, due to geographical similarities—they are both Mediterranean countries—, sectoral similarities—predominance of tourism and agricultural exporters—and their similar historical pasts—Islamic presence and great empires. Since the creation of the Alliance of Civilizations in 2005 at the initiative of both countries, a high-level group whose aim is to combat intolerance between the Eastern and Western worlds, relations between Turkey and Spain have been an oasis of understanding with regard to the other EU members (López Garrido, 2009;

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Toygür, 2020). However, this privileged relationship has not been enough to significantly advance Turkey's EU accession, as Spanish support has failed to mobilize a broader consensus within the bloc.

The good diplomatic relationship reflects the lack of support that Turkey's potential membership has in Spanish society. In a 2017 survey conducted by the European People's Party in nine member states, 77 per cent of respondents were opposed to Turkish membership and Spain, despite a slightly more positive score, still had a social majority—60 per cent—against Turkish membership (Kroet, 2017). When Eurobarometer began asking about the 'Turkish question' in 2005, most European citizens thought that the main obstacle to accession was that cultural differences were "too significant" (European Commission, 2006).

This negative perception has been further exacerbated by the prevailing 'politics of fear' across the globe, especially following events such as the 9/11 attacks which, reinforced the belief that the aggressiveness of terrorist organizations is intrinsically linked to Islamic cultural and religious norms. Through narratives that suggest the possibility of widespread problems of violence and the need to defend Western values, political actors, with the support of certain journalists and commentators, have profoundly influenced public opinion (Afshar, 2013; Ekman, 2015). For example, far-right groups in Europe, which are increasingly on the rise, adhere to the so-called 'politics of fear'. An example of this is vox party in Spain, which tabled a motion in parliament to "ban the entry into Spain of immigrants from countries with an Islamic culture if their correct and peaceful integration cannot be guaranteed" (Euronews Staff, 2023).

This research aims to examine the representation of the Republic of Turkey in the Spanish press throughout its EU candidacy process to the EU. It focuses on three key periods: 1999, 2005, and 2016 to identify the main characteristics and narratives surrounding Turkey's portrayal in the media. Through a comparative analysis of these key moments, the paper identifies the main characteristics of Turkey's representation in the Spanish media. By understanding how Turkey has been represented over time, it is possible to draw broad implications in terms of public discourses and their impact on foreign policy.

Constructing Otherness Through Language and News Images

This section begins by highlighting the compatibility between the chosen methodological tool, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and the objective of examining media representations. A number of ideological functions are ascribed to the media, such as "the selective construction of social knowledge (...) the reflection of the plurality of the world (...) and the organization, ordering and unification of what is selectively represented and classified" (Hall, 1981, pp. 384–386). These functions make CDA a fundamental tool for understanding how the media construct and transmit information, critically examining social inequality as it is expressed, constituted and legitimized through language. The relationship between media texts and socio-political contexts has been amply documented by authors who claim that power relations are reflected and perpetuated by the content transmitted by the media (Fairclough, 1991; van Dijk, 1984; Wodak, 1989).

To analyze how the media perpetuates systems of power by elevating the voices of dominant groups and marginalizing underrepresented segments of society, CDA relies on critical theories of political economy. According to Hardy (2014), this phenomenon reinforces social inequality by limiting the diversity of media representations and contributing to the reinforcement of stereotypes. In this sense, discourses are neither neutral nor isolated but are determined by socio-historical contexts that influence which issues are debated, which perspectives are given visibility and which interpretations of reality are considered legitimate.

Analyzing the role of the media in the production and dissemination of discourse is therefore key to understanding its impact on public opinion and the construction of political and social reality (Schiller, 1975). Schiller (1975) argues that the media function as instruments of control in the service of economic and political elites, shaping social perceptions in their favor. The concentration of media ownership in large corporations with specific interests creates a tendency to reproduce discourses that perpetuate the status quo and social inequalities. In the same vein, McChesney (2004) argues that media conglomerates prioritize content that maximizes their economic benefits, leading to a superficial treatment of public affairs and the marginalization of critical positions. As a result, the media end up reinforcing narratives favorable to elites and excluding those who challenge the established order.

Methodological approaches based on CDA have been used to address social and political issues "such as the Gulf and Iraq wars, the war on drugs and terrorism (in particular the terrorist attack on the World Trade

Center) on the one hand, and globalization, sexism, racism and Islamophobia on the other” (van Dijk, 2016, p. 216). Critical approaches are essentially problem-oriented and seek to debunk common myths about language and its social functions, claim Chen and Wang (2022). Applying this perspective in this particular context allows for a deeper understanding of how the Spanish press’ representation of Turkey reflects broader discursive and ideological frameworks.

As CDA focusing on the discriminatory representation of Islam and Muslims in media texts has begun to proliferate since the second decade of the 21st century, there are differences of opinion on how it should be done (Sufi & Yasmin, 2022); however, what is important, according to Verschueren (2001) is “a responsibility to contribute to collaborative knowledge-gathering for the benefit of society, a responsibility to do so critically and a responsibility to engage in public debate” (p. 59). This draws attention to the ongoing discussion about the technique of CDA in relation to media representations of Islamophobia. While the methods may differ, the fundamental ethical obligation is always the same: academics must critically and actively engage in public debate in order to refute biased myths and promote an inclusive society.

Although this research focuses on the Spanish press, it is important to situate it within a broader European context in which Turkey’s EU candidacy is often portrayed negatively. For example, Germany, the EU country with the largest Turkish diaspora, has been identified in public opinion surveys as one of the most reluctant member states regarding Turkey’s accession. Media studies have shown that the Turkish community in Germany is frequently represented through negative frames, often portrayed as a ‘non-integrated’ population (Möllering & Schmidt, 2022; Ünver, 2022).

These representations foster the social belief that the responsibility for integration lies with the migrant population and not with both sides (host and receiving community). While the media environments differ, such portrayals help to construct a wider European narrative that may indirectly influence how Turkish accession is framed in other national contexts, including Spain. Furthermore, constructions of distinct groups that the media create and reproduce in societies affect not only public opinion, but also integration policies and the political debate around them.

Culture and religion are two related concepts, and there is often a mistaken interchangeability between them. While culture refers to “a set of all the riches created in the course of the socio-historical experience of humanity” (Makhmudova, 2022, p. 101), religion consists of a subset of culture that involves beliefs, practices and rituals related to the sacred or divine (Emeng & Okafor, 2022). This differentiation is important in order to analyze sociopolitical contexts where religious identity is often instrumentalized as a cultural marker, shaping public discourse and policy decisions.

Scholars criticize that the EU encourages the admission of those immigrants considered desirable from a socio-economic and cultural point of view (Bottero, 2022), so the fact that Western media associate Islamism with oppression, criminality, religious fanaticism and terrorism (Ekman, 2015; Sufi & Yasmin, 2022) could have a negative influence on the political process of Turkey’s accession to the EU.

There is a significant lack in the pertinent literature regarding the representation of Turkey’s accession process to the EU in the Spanish press. Similar studies that conducted content analysis in the Turkish press have been identified (see, for example, Gencel-Bek, 2004; Kejanlioğlu & Taş, 2009). Therefore, this paper represents an original contribution by filling a research gap and offering new findings on the representation of Turkey in the European context.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on CDA to examine how *El País* and *El Mundo*—two of Spain’s most influential newspapers—have portrayed Turkey’s EU accession process over time. The analysis focuses on both textual and visual elements to identify how discourse is constructed. The objectives of this research are twofold: first, to identify and analyze news coverage related to Turkey’s accession process in these newspapers, examining both the written content and accompanying images; and second, to investigate the presence of journalistic practices that may negatively influence the framing of this issue, with attention to potential biases or distortions in media representation throughout a longitudinal study.

It is hypothesized that *El País*, with its progressive ideological orientation, will present a less negative discourse, while *El Mundo*, aligned with a more conservative editorial stance, will offer a more critical and potentially discriminatory view. Additionally, it is expected that the Spanish press as a whole will tend to portray Turkey as a predominantly Muslim country in tension with European values, thus reinforcing narratives of cultural and political divergence.

Research Design

CDA is one of the qualitative research techniques. It is a valid method for analyzing different discourses in relation to their context and its purpose is to understand a social, cultural or political phenomenon. In this case, the object of study is the news related to a political event in contemporary European history, such as the accession process of the Republic of Turkey. This country has a number of characteristics that make it interesting for media studies: it has a large population (around 86 million inhabitants), it is known as 'The Bridge' between East and West, and, above all, it is the state that has been trying to join the EU for the longest time. While other reasons (economic, human rights, etc.) are mentioned in Europe, there is a growing number of voices in Turkey attributing the interminability of this process to its Islamic tradition (Anastas, 2023; TV100, 2021). This dual perspective underscores the complexity of Turkey's EU accession debate and the ideological and cultural factors shaping its media representation.

Sample

In this paper, a purposive sample has been chosen, i.e., a sampling technique that does not use random, stratified or regional methods, but is based on specific objectives (Arikunto, 2006). The following research is based on the three milestones that the European Council and the Republic of Turkey distinguish during the EU accession negotiations. The first is the signing of the Helsinki Treaty on 12 December 1999, when Turkey's official candidacy was accepted. The second is the opening of negotiations on 3 October 2005, when the Council initiated a negotiating framework. And the third is the European Parliament's resolution calling for the negotiations to be frozen on 22 November 2016, due to violations of human rights and the rule of law in the country. Given the importance and representativeness of these events in the overall accession process, the weeks coinciding with these dates were chosen for the analysis.

The chosen methodology is a cross-sectional study, covering news from three different periods spanning 17 years, with a critical focus on the practices that contribute to a negative portrayal of the candidate country. To this end, aspects of macrostructure (headlines, subtitles, body of the news, sources, etc.) and microstructure (syntax, lexis, rhetoric, and images) have been studied. In order not to bias the results for editorial reasons, two Spanish generalist newspapers with opposing editorial lines were chosen in their print editions: *El País* (progressive line) and *El Mundo* (conservative line). The selection of these newspapers reflects their importance in Spanish journalism, characterized by their long history and their presence in both print and digital formats. Both newspapers have correspondents in Turkey (Andrés Mourenza for *El País* and Lluís Miquel Hurtado for *El Mundo*) and supplement their coverage with information from international agencies.

According to the Asociación de Medios de Información, in 2022 *El País* had a circulation of 56,409 copies, making it the most widely read generalist newspaper in Spain, while *El Mundo* reached 35,794 copies. However, the impact of both newspapers is amplified in the digital environment where, according to the official GfK DAM measurement, *El País* reaches 16.28 million unique monthly users and *El Mundo* 14.82 million. These factors justify their inclusion in this paper.

The news was found using the 'MyNews' tool, a digital library of editorial content used by journalists and documentarians in Spain since 1996. Its search engine was used to filter the search by the selected dates and the keywords "Turkey" and "European Union" in the whole body of the text. Op-ed pieces, such as opinion columns or editorials, have not been included as they would distort the final result of the work, which aims to examine purely informative pieces.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Using the detailed methodology, a total of 40 publications were found: 13 published by *El Mundo* (33%) and 26 by *El País* (67%). Of these, 13 refer to the period of the Helsinki Treaty (8 in *El País* and 5 in *El Mundo*),

Table 1. The findings of CDA in the first period

Main structure	Sub-structure
1. Macro structure: Coverage of the Helsinki Summit and Turkey's EU candidacy	1.1. Thematic structure Discourse: Recognition of Turkey as an EU candidate Key concepts: Candidacy, Europeanization, human rights, Copenhagen criteria 1.2. Schematic structure Background context: The EU's strategic decision to include Turkey as a candidate Sociopolitical context: The debate on Turkey's European identity and democratic reforms
2. Microstructure: Use of language and rhetoric	2.1. Syntactic analysis - Frequent use of conditional sentences when referring to Turkey's accession, highlighting uncertainty - The passive voice is used when discussing Turkey's commitments, downplaying its agency 2.2. Word choice - Use of diplomatic and cautious language, emphasizing Turkey's "potential" for accession - Terms like "long process" and "strict criteria" suggest skepticism 2.3. Rhetoric - The EU is portrayed as a "guide" for Turkey, reinforcing a hierarchical relationship - Turkey's historical ties with Europe are downplayed

22 refer to the start of negotiations (17 in *El País* and 5 in *El Mundo*), and finally, 6 correspond to the announcement of the freezing of negotiations by the European Parliament (3 in *El País* and 3 in *El Mundo*).

First Period: Helsinki Treaty

The news on the Helsinki Treaty published by *El País* present facts related to several topics: the dispute between Greece and Turkey over territorial waters and Cyprus; the favorable positions of other EU countries towards accession; and the details of the Helsinki summit. *El Mundo*, on the other hand, gives less coverage to the event, both in terms of the number of news and their length and depth. From a perspective related to the issue of the enlargement of the Eastern European countries, this newspaper mentions in particular the complexity of Turkey's inclusion.

Apart from the scant coverage in comparison with *El País*, one of the five news items in this newspaper deals with the repression of the Kurdish people in Turkey¹. The text, which relies exclusively on sources from defenders of the Kurdish ethnic group in Turkey, concludes with the following statement: "The simple fact of writing in Kurdish or wanting to teach it makes us terrorists". In the rest of the items analyzed, *El Mundo* deems Turkey responsible for a favorable outcome of the signing of the Treaty, with statements such as "The problems in the enlargement chapter will come from Turkey. Ankara, which has been trying for 36 years to get the Union to accept its candidacy for membership, could succeed this time. But first it will have to overcome a stumbling block called Greece"² or as: "Although Ankara hesitated until the last minute, and raised multiple objections to the Fifteen's³ offer, in the end, at midnight, it reluctantly accepted the EU's conditions"⁴. This framing reinforces the idea that Turkey is the main obstacle to its own accession while downplaying the EU's internal divisions and external geopolitical factors that have also shaped the negotiation process.

Table 1 shows the findings of CDA in the first period.

In addition, the following findings were found to be common in both newspapers:

1. Lack of prior context. The texts follow a narrative structure, presenting events from the very recent past or the present in chronological order. Through the use of past perfect simple and present perfect tenses, there is a presentation of concrete actions, such as the diplomatic meetings that took place, but there is no in-depth explanation of issues such as previous agreements or historical analysis of EU-Turkey relations as a background to these contingencies.
2. Use of bellicose rhetoric: There are frequent allusions to Turkey's relations with Greece, described as "historical enemies", as well as to the Kurdish question. The press also features striking expressions like: "Execute Turkey's public enemy number 1" and in the realm of foreign policy, headlines such as

¹ <https://www.elmundo.es/papel/hemeroteca/1999/12/08/europa/785456.html>

² <https://www.elmundo.es/papel/hemeroteca/1999/12/10/europa/786027.html>

³ "The Fifteen" refers to the fifteen member states of the EU prior to the 2004 enlargement.

⁴ <https://www.elmundo.es/1999/12/11/europa/11N0039.html>

"Turkey could take NATO relations hostage" were found. Such expressions are common in news stories where the journalist, as an international analyst, interprets the course of events, often as the sole source or on the basis of public statements by the political actors involved.

3. Turkey as a background actor with limited maneuver. Both the syntactic and rhetorical analyses show that the country is presented as an agent with little capacity for action, limited either by Greece's demands or by the conditions imposed by the EU in a treaty that, although signed jointly, seems to be imposed only by the European side and "consented" by the Turkish side. A The selected statements from the then Finnish Foreign Minister Tarja Halonen present a paradigmatic example of the type of discourse used to frame Turkey's accession process within the European political context: "It is not a question of negotiations, but of informing Turkey of what has been decided here, so that there are no misunderstandings" or "Turkey's acceptance came after a formal amendment of the text"⁵, implying that, despite complex negotiations, Turkey accepted the text without changing the substance. Also the following sentence: "The invitation to Turkey, which may overcome decades of mutual mistrust, was accompanied by tough conditions for the government in Ankara and concessions to Greece, its neighbor and traditional rival"⁶.
4. Interpretation of facts with few sources: It should be noted that both newspapers frequently include analyses by their journalists. To make these interpretations, the authors rely on statements made by both Turkish and European politicians and diplomats in press conferences or other public statements. In general, the common thread running through these news items is public statements by actors on both sides, which contributes to an apparent unbiased account of events in terms of the number of sources but biased in terms of the interpretation of the situation, as statements by political actors are interspersed with the author's personal assessments of events⁷. Furthermore, many news reports lack testimonies or references to external sources, and instead simply rely on the journalist's personal account of the course of events⁸.

Second Period: The Start of the Negotiations

This stage of the process received the most coverage, with both newspapers reporting in most of their articles that Austria is the main obstacle to the start of accession negotiations with Turkey. Moreover, the underlying theme is a kind of "inability" on the part of the EU to mediate in order to reach agreements such as the opening of negotiations, where two opposing paths converge: on the one hand, the loss of EU identity, European values and loss of economic power. On the other hand, the promise of including a country that describes itself as a secular state with a moderate Islamist leader, which can become an example of tolerance and diversity within the EU.

However, there have been some shortcomings in the reporting of this information, which have had a negative impact on Turkey's image: Photographs that associate Turkey with Islamism and conservatism.

One photograph published in *El País* on 6 October 2005⁹, accompanying an article on EU-Turkey relations, shows Turkish women waiting to break the Ramadan fast in Istanbul. This Associated Press image has no thematic connection to the article itself. Its use appears to rely on stereotypical religious imagery, raising concerns about editorial intent and cultural framing.

In another news from *El País* (5 October 2005)¹⁰, the image shows a Turkish woman positioned next to a traditional image of a veiled woman. The visual juxtaposition seems designed to reinforce Western

⁵ https://elpais.com/diario/1999/12/11/internacional/944866802_850215.html

⁶ https://elpais.com/diario/1999/12/11/portada/944866801_850215.html

⁷ <https://www.elmundo.es/1999/12/11/europa/11N0039.html>

https://elpais.com/diario/1999/12/06/internacional/944434806_850215.html

<https://www.elmundo.es/papel/hemeroteca/1999/12/12/europa/786664.html>

⁸ <https://www.elmundo.es/papel/hemeroteca/1999/12/10/europa/786027.html>

https://elpais.com/diario/1999/12/09/internacional/944694008_850215.html

https://elpais.com/diario/1999/12/11/portada/944866801_850215.html

https://elpais.com/diario/1999/12/12/portada/944953202_850215.html

⁹ https://elpais.com/diario/2005/10/06/internacional/1128549606_850215.html

¹⁰ https://elpais.com/diario/2005/10/05/internacional/1128463206_850215.html

Table 2. The findings of CDA in the second period

Main structure	Sub-structure
1. Macro structure: Coverage of the start of EU-Turkey negotiations	1.1. Thematic structure Discourse: Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU Key concepts: Integration, Austria's opposition, European identity, Western values, moderate Islamism 1.2. Schematic structure Background context: Austria as the main opponent, EU's difficulties in enlargement Sociopolitical context: Dichotomy between the loss of European identity and the inclusion of Turkey
2. Microstructure: Use of language and rhetoric	2.1. Syntactic analysis - Passive structures reinforce Turkey's secondary role in the discourse - Arguments criticizing the EU lack clear sources, affecting credibility 2.2. Word choice - Use of images reinforcing stereotypes (women wearing veils, traditionalist Turkey vs. modern Europe) - Phrases like "Turkey must win the hearts and minds of European citizens" suggest inferiority 2.3. Rhetoric - The EU is represented as Turkey's "savior," reinforcing a narrative of dependence - The historical context of EU-Turkey relations is omitted, limiting reader understanding

conceptions of the burqa as a symbol of female oppression, projecting an oversimplified narrative about religious identity and gender roles in Turkish society.

A third photograph, published on 30 September 2005 in *El País*¹¹, presents an artwork by Turkish artist Burak Delier: a figure covered by a burqa patterned with the European flag. While artistically provocative, its editorial use may imply that Turkey is being metaphorically "oppressed" by European secularism—an interpretation that risks perpetuating orientalist tropes.

In *El Mundo* (2 October 2005)¹², a photo captures a Turkish couple with a baby carriage walking through Istanbul. The woman wears a headscarf, and both are shown seemingly disapproving of a mannequin dressed in revealing Western-style clothing. This staging conveys a dichotomy between "traditional" Turkish values and Western modernity.

Finally, an image distributed by a U.S.-based NGO and used by *El País* (30 September 2005)¹³ shows patients lying on the floor of Bakırköy Hospital for Mental and Neurological Diseases. Presented without context or justification, this image may be considered ethically questionable. Its inclusion, lacking explanation or editorial framing, raises serious concerns about the ethics of photojournalism.

Table 2 shows the findings of CDA in the second period. The analysis has revealed further findings:

1. Unnamed and unidentified sources in statements critical of Austria: In a significant number of news items, sources are not identified when dealing with diplomatic aspects that are damaging to the image of the EU, such as open criticism of Austria¹⁴. For instance, such statements tend to benefit Turkey, as they suggest there is no justifiable reason to obstruct its EU accession. However, the failure to identify these sources deviates from the best journalistic practices, as it undermines the authority and credibility of the news.
2. The EU as Turkey's salvation: Among the 22 news items analyzed from the period corresponding to the start of accession negotiations, numerous examples suggest that joining the EU is portrayed as the sole avenue for Turkey's prosperity, with an implied expectation of gratitude for the opportunity. Phrases such as "Turkey's dream for 42 years [to join the EU]"¹⁵, "Turkey must win the hearts and minds of Europe's citizens"¹⁶ and "Turkey's anchoring in the West will allow a Muslim-majority country to

¹¹ https://elpais.com/diario/2005/09/30/internacional/1128031211_850215.html

¹² <https://www.elmundo.es/papel/2005/10/02/mundo/>

¹³ https://elpais.com/diario/2005/09/30/internacional/1128031211_850215.html

¹⁴ https://elpais.com/diario/2005/09/30/internacional/1128031211_850215.html

https://elpais.com/diario/2005/10/02/internacional/1128204004_850215.html

<https://www.elmundo.es/papel/2005/10/02/mundo/>

¹⁵ <https://www.elmundo.es/papel/2005/10/04/mundo/1869766.html>

¹⁶ https://elpais.com/diario/2005/10/05/internacional/1128463205_850215.html

become a model of democracy and modernity that will spread throughout the region”¹⁷. Additionally, the statement of a pro-EU Turkish journalist—“Who” else are we going to unite with? Iran? Iraq? Syria?”—underscores Turkey’s perceived lack of viable alternatives, reinforcing the notion that EU membership is the most favorable path forward.¹⁸

News reports frequently lacking contextual background: In many instances, events are presented without prior analysis that situates EU-Turkey relations within a broader historical or political framework. This omission limits the reader’s ability to fully understand the complexities of the relationship and the implications of current events.

Third Period: Announcement of the Freezing of Negotiations by the European Parliament

The number of news items in this section is significantly low compared to the other two moments highlighted in the analysis (the Helsinki Treaty and the start of accession negotiations). Of the news analyzed, almost all headlines refer specifically to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister since 2003 and President of the country since 2014 with a moderate Islamic ideology that has drifted towards radicalism and authoritarianism. The news describes blackmail in the president’s message to the EU about breaking the migration pact. For example: “Turkey threatens EU with opening its borders to three million refugees”¹⁹ or “If you go further I will open the door. Turkey’s president again defies Europe over refugees and death penalty”²⁰.

In addition to this event’s coverage, it is worth noting that *El País*, taking advantage of the prize awarded to writers and journalists Zeynep Oral and Elif Shafak in Spain on the International Day of Persecuted Writers, published an article sharply criticizing Turkey’s standards of press freedom²¹. As for the sources, they predominantly rely on the newspapers’ own correspondents in Turkey: Andrés Mourenza from *El País* and Lluís Miquel Hurtado from *El Mundo*. These journalists provide an international analysis of Erdoğan’s statements.

Unlike the previous two chapters, this time Turkey assumes an active role in the narrative and no longer plays a complementary one, as it did in the coverage of the Helsinki Treaty and the beginning of negotiations in October 2005. The rhetoric in the analyzed news reveals several distinct tones. On the one hand, Erdoğan is depicted as threatening, blackmailing, and defying Europe—an approach visible in almost every news item. For example: “The harsh disqualifications that the Turkish president concluded yesterday with the threat to open the borders so that refugees and migrants on Turkish soil can freely cross into European territory ...”²² or “Turkey’s president yesterday lashed out at Brussels in his usual angry tone”²³. There is also a tone of concern about the repressive measures being taken in Turkey through examples such as the inclusion of the testimonies of journalists that espouses lack of freedoms: “We mark on a calendar the days that our ten colleagues have been in prison, now 18, and their columns are left blank; I am angry and sad, but I am not afraid when I write”²⁴.

In response to the European Parliament’s proposal to “temporarily suspend” Turkey’s EU accession process because of “disproportionate repressive measures” in the country, Turkey’s stance was to announce its withdrawal from the migration pact if Europe took further steps backwards in accession negotiations. The news coverage focused more on the Turkish president’s threatening response than on the European Parliament’s actual communication.

In two of the six news items analyzed during this period, both newspapers selected an image showing migrants and Bulgarian riot police at the Harmanli refugee center near Bulgaria’s border with Turkey. This image depicts migrant women wearing headscarves surrounded by police officers and was published by *El*

¹⁷ https://elpais.com/diario/2005/10/02/internacional/1128204004_850215.html

¹⁸ https://elpais.com/diario/2005/10/04/internacional/1128376804_850215.html

¹⁹ https://elpais.com/internacional/2016/11/25/actualidad/1480064543_937083.html

²⁰ <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2016/11/25/58380515ca4741ab398b4580.html>

²¹ https://elpais.com/ccaa/2016/11/21/catalunya/1479762177_850262.html

²² https://elpais.com/internacional/2016/11/25/actualidad/1480064543_937083.html

²³ <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2016/11/25/58380515ca4741ab398b4580.html>

²⁴ https://elpais.com/ccaa/2016/11/21/catalunya/1479762177_850262.html

Table 3. The findings of CDA in the third period

Main structure	Sub-structure
1. Macro structure: Reaction of the Spanish press to the announcement of the freezing of negotiations	1.1. Thematic structure Discourse: Media representation of Turkey and Erdoğan after the EU's decision Key concepts: Erdoğan, migration blackmail, threats, repression 1.2. Schematic structure Background context: Austria as the main opponent, EU's difficulties in enlargement Sociopolitical context: Dichotomy between the loss of European identity and the inclusion of Turkey
2. Microstructure: Use of language and rhetoric	2.1. Syntactic analysis - Declarative sentences reinforce the idea of threat 2.2. Word choice - Alarmist tone with words like "challenge," "blackmail," and "provocation" 2.3. Rhetoric - Selected quotes and photographs reinforce the image of a Turkey in conflict

Table 4. "Us vs. them" opposition table

Concept	Turkey (them)	EU (us)
Dogmatism	Portrayed as rigid, resistant to change, and holding onto outdated principles	Seen as rational, progressive, and driven by universal values
Lack of democracy	Framed as having weak democratic institutions, authoritarian tendencies, and lacking fundamental freedoms	Presented as the protector of democracy, rule of law, and human rights
Islam/religiosity	Emphasized as deeply religious, with Islam being a defining and potentially problematic characteristic	Implicitly seen as secular, where religion does not interfere with politics
Traditionalism	Depicted as conservative, bound to customs, and resistant to modernization	Associated with modernity, innovation, and social progress

País and *El Mundo* on 26 November 2016²⁵. Through this visual framing, Turkey's potential EU accession is linked to migration issues, with the depiction of women wearing headscarves reinforcing a narrative of Islamization associated with such challenges.

Table 3 shows the findings of CDA in the third period. The conflict between "us" and "them" in the Spanish press's discussion of Turkey's EU accession path has been studied. It was found that this antagonism is organized along four main axes: Traditionalism, Islam/religiosity, dogmatism, and lack of democracy.

These axes are summarized in **Table 4**, which also shows how Turkey and the EU are represented in relation to these axes.

According to **Table 4**, Turkey is typically characterized by a number of unfavorable traits, including resistance to modernity, authoritarianism, religious conservatism and rigidity. The EU, on the other hand, is portrayed as representing democracy, progress, secularism and universal principles. The ideological and cultural narratives that influence the portrayal of Turkey in the Spanish press are reflected in this binary opposition, which reinforces the division between supposedly 'Western' and 'non-Western' identities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The main arguments underlying this study are, on the one hand, that Turkey—a country outside the EU and one with a culture and religiosity distinct from European culture—would be portrayed in Spain in a prejudiced manner through stereotypes of backwardness and religiosity. On the other hand, it was assumed that *El País*, a newspaper with a progressive editorial line, would adopt a more inclusive stance and offer a more positive approach to Turkey compared to *El Mundo*. Both arguments have been partially confirmed. While *El Mundo* published significantly fewer news—especially during the coverage of the Helsinki Treaty—this limited number included pieces focused on issues such as social repression and the complexity of integrating Turkey into the EU. In contrast, *El País*, which was expected to adopt a more inclusive approach,

²⁵ <https://amp.elmundo.es/internacional/2016/11/25/58380515ca4741ab398b4580.html>
https://elpais.com/internacional/2016/11/25/actualidad/1480064543_937083.html

exhibited a more neutral tone in both language and framing, and even appeared to support Turkey's accession. However, in its choice of images accompanying the articles, *El País* conveyed an Islamist, conservative, and even denigrating context, including a photograph of psychiatric patients in bad conditions during the period of accession negotiations. *El Mundo* also used images of this nature, but this aligns more with the first argument.

CDA aims to examine media content to identify relationships of power, superiority, and even discrimination. The main issues found in the analyzed news were as follows:

- (1) they lacked prior context that would educate the reader on Turkey's historical and cultural issues and its relationship with the EU, such as the origins of the Cyprus division or Atatürk's modernization and Westernization efforts,
- (2) they employed warlike rhetoric to narrate the political negotiation process and international relations in an epic tone, and
- (3) a large number of interpretative pieces were based on statements from political actors on both sides but analyzed through the personal and biased lens of the news author.

These three findings together suggest that the media have the potential to sensationalize or oversimplify complex issues, leading to distortions. Such distortions may influence public understanding and engagement with the integration process, potentially affecting democratic participation (Gjerazi, 2022). Moreover, in the journalist's interpretations, by omitting contexts and using expressions such as "historic enemies" or "open historical wounds" to describe the relationship between Greece and Turkey, the media can foster emotional divisions in the reader by portraying two opposing sides: an "us" (Greece, Cyprus, and the EU) and a "them" (Turkey).

In contrast to the EU, which is portrayed as democratic, progressive and secular, Turkey is portrayed as authoritarian, conservative and intensely religious, as can be seen in Table 4. Similarly, the findings in Table 2 show how discourse structures support Turkey's peripheral position in the EU accession process. The media reinforces a division between Western principles and Turkey by highlighting Austria's rejection and portraying Turkey's candidacy as a threat to European identity. Passive constructions, rhetorical omissions and images that perpetuate stereotypes—such as images of veiled women or religious symbolism—are also revealed by the microstructural analysis. These findings show how the Spanish press, even in its seemingly neutral position, contributes to the creation of a hierarchical and exclusive narrative of European identity.

Future studies should examine how Turkey's EU accession process is framed by other European media, allowing for comparisons across different national contexts. Furthermore, longitudinal research that examines discourse shifts over time may shed light on whether media representations change in response to political events or stick to established narratives.

Finally, this study has certain limitations. Only three dates were identified as representative of the participation process. However, the fact that numerous pieces were studied in a cross-sectional work spanning 17 years makes it academically significant as a basis for the methodology of CDA and for studying the influence that discriminatory coverage can exert on social opinions and political processes.

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