Turkey’s Kurdish Question and the EU’s Dialogue-less Approach

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Abstract: Using Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism, this paper argues that the European Union’s approach towards Turkey is lacking of dialogue. This dialogue-less approach has been particularly damaging in relation to Turkey’s unresolved Kurdish question, contributing to the fact that the question remains unsolved. The paper argues that in addition to being an unethical position, the EU’s approach has hindered relations with Turkey, damaged the EU’s foreign policy strategy, and compromised both the EU’s and Turkey’s external and internal security.

Key words: Turkey, European Union, Kurdish question, Mikhail Bakhtin, Dialogism

INTRODUCTION

Russian philosopher and literature critic Mikhail Bakhtin has influenced a wide range of disciplines ranging from art criticism to educational studies. His ideas have been also introduced to International Relations (see, for example, Ashley & Shapiro, 1989; Neumann, 1999; Guillaume, 2002) to reflect upon, among others, questions of identity and otherness. In this paper a Bakhtinian approach is used to offer new insights into the EU’s somewhat inconsistent approach towards Turkey. The EU’s arbitrary engagement with Turkey sometimes takes the front seat in the analyses concerning EU-Turkey relations; accusations of the EU treating Turkey unfairly or in a hypocritical manner are prevalent not only in Turkey but in the EU and the US as well. Ankara has repeatedly argued that unfair obstacles are placed in Turkey’s way. NATO similarly accuses the EU of treating Turkey in an unfair manner (Turkish Daily News, 7 July 2010). In Europe, the Independent Commission on Turkey has talked about the unfair EU-Turkey accession process, arguing in its 2009 report that ‘unfair obstacles have been put in Turkey’s path to the EU’. This view is rampant among political commentators as well (see, for example, Ellemann-Jensen, 2006). The EU’s actions are often attributed to its lack of strategic thinking. As Sevinc (2010: 96) argues, ‘lack of political leadership and strategic vision has caused the continuing membership negotiations between Turkey and the EU to become a bit of an enigma, rather than an end-game’.

This paper analyses the EU’s official and unofficial utterances towards Turkey, arguing that there is indeed a strong sense of arbitrariness in the EU approach towards