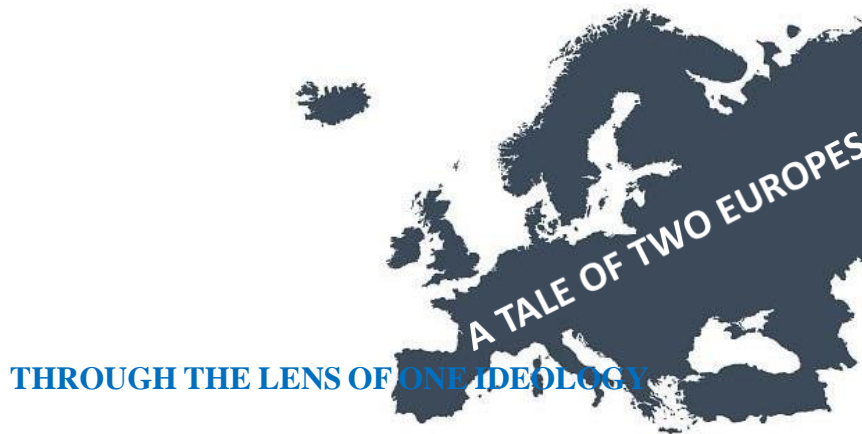


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Topic: Rise of The Extreme Right Wing in Europe

Title: A Tale of Two Europes'- Through the Lens of One Ideology



Ideology is a specious way of relating to the world. It offers human beings the illusion of an identity, of dignity, and of morality while making it easier for them to part with them. - Václav Havel

This adage brings forward one of the many aspects of ‘identity politics’. Scholars for a long time have tried to understand the relation between ‘identity’, ‘political ideology’ and ‘politics’. A better understanding becomes increasingly important as Europe is witnessing a rise in the extreme right-wing ideologies

One such group of scholars- who worked towards understanding the effects of the rise of right-wing ideologies in Europe- was recently spotted at a European restaurant. A thick spread of delicacies was laid for them. Spanish *Paellas*, Italian *Risottos*, French *Champagne*, German *Bratwurst* and the Turkish *Baklavas*. The inclusion of *Baklava* as part of the European cuisine not only raised eyebrows but also some debates. If *Baklava* is a European dish, then does Turkey have a European identity? How does the Turkish food, clothing and other cultural aspects- important factors of identity- fit in the mosaic of European culture?

Which nation-states then constitute Europe? And where exactly does Turkey fit in all of this? Europe has had two identities- the **occidental** and the **oriental**. As to which one is true, one has no definite answer.

During the first course of the meal, the proponents of the occidental identity geared up. Occidental identity is based not just on the geographical factor of being situated in the West, but also on the adherence to western concepts of Democracy, Liberty, Christianity and so on. Any entity who does not adhere to these principles is termed as the “other” and is then differentiated against.

This occidental identity is rather a product of the extreme right-wing ideology that includes persons or groups who hold extreme nationalist, xenophobic, racist, religious fundamentalist and other similar reactionary views and who also aim to uphold hierarchy and culture.

Popular belief has it that the emergence and rise of extreme right-wing politics in Europe is a fairly contemporary phenomenon, specially witnessed after the First World War. However, extreme right-wing ideas and ideologies have existed since long ago.

The **Battle of Vienna in 1683** serves as the hallmark event in this regard- serving not only as the factor that mobilized the population but also as the means that created a concrete idea of 'occidental Europe'. The battle saw the defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the hands of the Roman Empire led by the Habsburg monarchy and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, under the command of King John III Sobieski. This saw Europe rising against Islam, a phenomenon that still plays out till date.

Battle of Vienna serves as a reference point in the minds of many when opposing the inclusion of Turkey to be considered as a European entity.

As Europe witnesses a rise in extreme right wing, the ideas of nativism and anti-migration begin to dominate. Repercussions of this rise is seen when even today Turkey is denied the membership of the European Union. Countries such as Germany, Italy and France- that are increasingly coming under the right-wing influence- are against the entry of Turkey in the European Union

Pope Benedict XVI, in 2004, said, *"were Turkey to join the European Union this would represent the triumph of economics over culture"*

During the second course of the meal, the proponents of the oriental theory made their remarks.

The rise of right-wing in Europe has also strengthened this theory which has gained equal importance. Since the factor of culture is introduced, it is important to note that the oriental identity of Europe itself is a product of the ancient culture of Europe. And this orientalist perspective presents a strong case for the inclusion of Turkey in Europe. But the rise of right wing has dominated the narrative around this element and has perpetrated an identity that it finds suitable. Nevertheless, the true essence of Europe lies in its Greco-Roman intellect and its Judeo-Christian morality.

Europa, after whom Europe is named, was a Phoenician princess from Tyre, modern day Lebanon. Yet today, Lebanon is not considered a European country

Constantinople, modern day Istanbul in Turkey, was once the hub of Christianity when Constantine the Great adopted this faith for all of Rome and erected the city. The city also served as an important commercial and a natural harbour owing to its strategic location

Turkey is not one of the countries influenced by European culture but is in fact a contributor to European culture and has always been one of the shaping forces. It has been a country that upholds the democratic values that the right-wing ideologists claim as their forte. These values were increasingly witnessed in the 1940s, when Turkey was one of the most democratic countries in Europe, with equal voting rights for women, a secular Republic, and a liberal economy. In the difficult times of war, Turkey provided a safe haven for all people regardless of their religion and provided an example of what Europe should be. Adding to its credibility, Turkey is also one of the 12 founding members of the Council of Europe. Even in aspects of food, music and clothing, the Turkish and European elements are intricately woven. The famous Swedish meatballs are actually Turkish in origin. Similarly, the *Turquerie*- the European fashion of the 16th century is inspired by the Ottoman art and culture, which largely fascinated Queen Elizabeth I and Rembrandt, to name a few.

These facts posit not just the reconsideration but also the redefining of the European identity.

The right-wing ideas that emphasize on traditions, culture, religious fundamentalism and other reactionary views need to reassess the lens through which they view Turkey.

The final course of the meal also brought with it the end of the debate, stating that the rise of right wing in Europe is no longer merely a political phenomenon but is also seen shaping identities. Convenient interpretations of these identities are the real cause of the problem in Europe. These interpretations create the distinction between the “self” and the “other”. In dynamic times like these, these distinctions play out in the international domain in the form of inclusion or exclusion a particular country from a grouping- in this case Turkey. Turkey is trying to be a part of the Europe that is still at odds over its own identity.

The answer to Turkey’s European identity is directly linked to Europe’s own identity ‘Is Europe then an occidental entity or an oriental entity?’

The scholars walked out of the restaurant indecisively, just as all other scholars had for over multiple decades.

The task to resolve this question now lies on a new set of scholars- Us