"AVRUPA FATIHI" (THE CONQUERORS OF EUROPE)
THE EUROPEAN STAKES OF SPORT IN TURKEY

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This communication will focus on the political dimensions of sports in Turkey. Refusing the so-called separation between sports and politics, it will show that sports are not only a reflection of international relations but in the specific case of Turkey are a strong expression of Turkey’s main political challenges, embodied in the fundamental question of its membership of the European Union.

For fifteen years, Turkey has been present on the international sporting arena, either through the results of its teams and its athletes or through its numerous bids to host international sport competitions\(^2\). Istanbul has been repeatedly bidding to organize the Olympic Games since 1992, in vain, and has been just as unsuccessful in its joint application with Greece to organize the Euro 2008 football championships. In 2000, it organized the World Swimming Championships, and in 2001 the European Basketball Championship. More recently, in 2005, Istanbul hosted the final of the Football Champion’s League and the first Turkish Formula One Grand Prix. The increasing number of these international sporting events must be linked with the political stakes of sport in Turkey and its specific relationship with Western countries and more precisely, with Europe.

The question of the links between sports and politics is as recurrent in common reasoning as it is in the academics field\(^3\). Despite certain naïve periodic statements such as “sports and politics are different” or “sport is not war”, and despite the sporting world’s affirmation of the neutrality of sport\(^4\), sport, being a “total social fact”, has numerous effective and potential implications in political issues.

\(^1\) This slogan of Turkish football fans clearly refers to the Ottoman sultan Mehmet who conquered Constantinople in 1453.
\(^2\) See the table at the end of this paper.
The question of the political dimension of sport is obvious in International Relations. According to P. Milza, the international stakes of sport cover three areas: sport as part of and reflecting the international stage; sport as a means of foreign policy; sports as revealing public feeling\(^5\). Thus, the organization of sports competitions, or merely the act of bidding to organize such events goes far beyond the economic benefits, which remain hazardous as we can see by the debt levels of cities hosting the Olympic Games.

While the first signs of sport in England were linked to personal development and the socially acceptable confrontation of might, international competitions quickly turned into a quest for recognition of national power\(^6\). There are numerous examples in History where States have striven to demonstrate their power through the success of their teams and athletes at international sporting events\(^7\).

Even the restoration of the Olympic Games by Baron Pierre de Coubertin is partially due to the will to enhance the French nation, humiliated after its defeat in 1870\(^8\). Thus, international sport is deeply impregnated with nationalism, which has often reached spectacular degrees. From Nazi propaganda in 1936\(^9\) to the arrogant American demonstration in the Atlanta Games in 1996, there are numerous examples of the political uses of sports results.

International sport is not only a means for a state to show off its power; it can sometimes simply be a way of achieving recognition of its existence, of its legitimacy. International sports authorities, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Football International Federation Association (FIFA) and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), sometimes act as an efficient parallel channel for international diplomacy. Obtaining the organization of an international sporting event such as the World Cup or the Olympic Games means international recognition. The fierce competition between states to host this kind of event shows just how strongly they believe in this. In authoritarian states, hosting an

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international sporting event has been used to give legitimacy to their political system or at
least to make them less unattractive in spite of it (Argentina Football World Cup in 1978, OG
in Moscow in 1980, etc.). In other contexts, such sporting events help to demonstrate that the
country has reached a high standard of development (OG in Seoul in 1988, Barcelona in 1992,
etc.). Similarly, FIFA would like to reward South Africa for its peaceful political transition
from apartheid by allowing the country to organize a future World Cup.

Finally, the issue of sport as a sign revealing public feeling is linked more broadly with
the meaning of these events for individuals or groups. Sport often helps to express the feeling
of belonging to a community, to a nation, whether by nationalistic means or by the
proclamation of plural identity.10

With regard to Turkey, the multiplication of its applications to hold sporting events has to
be put back in the specific context of the country’s relationship not only with the international
stage but also with itself, and more broadly speaking, the complex relation of Turkey with the
West.

A loyal ally of the USA (at least until the war in Iraq), a member of NATO since 1952,
and a candidate for EU membership since 1987, Turkey continues to claim its anchorage to
the West, thereby pursuing the work of its founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. However, this
western polarization is questioned both inside and outside its borders. Although Turkey
applied to the EU before the new Eastern European members did, negotiations for its
membership have only just been opened in October 2005 and will last at least ten years
because of the strong reluctance of the EU to admit Turkey. Hosting international sporting
events is a means for the Turkish state, whose key founding words are “modernity, laicism,
nationalism”, to demonstrate its modernity, its organizational abilities and thus the legitimacy
of its application for membership of the European Union.

In this perspective, the frontier between sport and politics becomes vague, indistinct,
blurred by political actors who want to give more legitimacy to their political goals. However
this use of sport is not one-dimensional: the sport elites who promote these candidacies also
hope to benefit directly from the interest of political elites in sport, by asking them to support
their own sporting projects. These two Turkish elites, who have experienced the same
socialization circles and share the same values of the Republic, show us the overlap, and even

10 Cf. ARNAUD P., “Le sport, vecteur des représentations nationales des Etats européens”, in ARNAUD P.,
RIORDAN J. (dir.), Sport et Relations internationales (1900-1941), Paris, L’Harmattan, 1998, p. 11-26 ;
DAUNCEY H., HARE G. (eds), France and the 1998 World Cup. The national impact of a world sporting
the alliance between sport and politics. Thus, we cannot be satisfied with an analysis reduced to the assumption of the exploitation of sport by politics, because it prevents us from understanding not only the relationships that exist between the two, but also the complexity of politics in Turkey. Just as various analyses look at changes in society through sport\textsuperscript{11}, we will see in this presentation how sport can be a relevant framework for understanding political meanings. We will try to go further than an analysis of the exploitation of sport. Sport in Turkey has specific political meaning based on Turkey’s relationship with Europe. Sport helps us to understand how in applying for European Union membership, Turkey is striving to get rid of European contempt while declaring its attraction to Europe. The analysis of the meaning of sport in Turkey will help us to figure out its role in Turkish society’s modernization project and improve our understanding of the strategies of both elites (sport and political), which are blurring the borderline between sport and politics.

We will show that Turkey’s bids to host sporting events are aimed at promoting Turkey in Europe (I), but that they stem from the same fundamental political goals chased after by both Turkish elites (II). Finally we will see that sport reveals, beyond the international stakes, the tensions, the ambiguities of Turks with their own identity and history, and thus the complex relationship of Turkey with Europe (III).

I. Sport as a means of supporting EU membership

The question of the link between sport and politics in Turkey can be included in a classic problematic of International relations. The multiplication of Turkey’s bids to organize international sporting events is based on its determination to strengthen its international position. However its ambition goes beyond this. Sport is perceived as a means of demonstrating that Turkey belongs to the west even if the west is reluctant to admit it. In Turkey, sport is perceived as part of the “modernity” of the country, which is the main principle at the heart of Turkey’s political project. Becoming an EU member will mark the ultimate recognition of Turkey’s European identity. It will be the materialization of its age-old attraction for the West and prove that Turkey is European. In this context, sport can be perceived as one of several means\textsuperscript{12} of promoting its European dream despite its poor image in Europe\textsuperscript{13}.

1. Sport as a symbol of political modernity

From the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, during the reformation period of the \textit{Tanzimat}, the Ottoman Sultans tried to modernize the Ottoman state, administration, army, and education as a means of resisting the decline of Ottoman Empire. The political modernization process throughout the 19th century drew examples from European models\textsuperscript{14}. At the beginning of the 20th century, while the Ottoman Empire was becoming more and more decadent, the “young-Turks” and then Mustafa Kemal decided to make a clean break with the Empire state and create a new state, the “modern and lay Republic of Turkey”. Once again, the West was the model. For Mustafa Kema Attatürk: “peoples who are not civilized are condemned to remain dependent on those who are. And the west is civilization. If Turkey wants to survive it must be part of the modern world. The nation has decided to adopt exactly and completely in both shape and content the way of life and the means that contemporary civilization offers all nations”\textsuperscript{15}. Turkey may have escaped from European ambition, but it remains close to Europe. The fascination for the West is still just as powerful and Mustafa Kemal, the father of the Turkish nation, wanted to create a new country based on the European model. All the reforms

\textsuperscript{12} The victory of a Turkish singer in the Eurovision song contest in 2003 and the successful organization of the United Nations International Conference \textit{Habitat 2000}, were also celebrated in the Turkish Media with the same enthusiasm.

\textsuperscript{13} This poor image is linked with the effects of the war against the Kurdish guerrilla, the still considerable role of the army in public affairs (during the coups or in peace periods), and also in some ways, because of the large Turkish immigrant population in Europe (notably in Germany) from the poorest and rural areas of Turkey.

\textsuperscript{14} The process reached an outstanding stage in 1876 with the promulgation of the first Ottoman constitution.

undertaken by Atatürk aimed to transform and adapt Turkish society to Western values. The recurrent statement that “the Turks have always been walking to the West” is becoming crucial now with EU membership. Like the Principle of national independence, the European dimension is at the heart of the Turkish identity as defined by Atatürk and has never been questioned (at least theoretically).

The obsession with modernity has guided Turkey’s various political reforms from the Tanzimat period to the birth of the Republic in 1923, especially educational reform. Modern sport, which developed in English colleges in the 19th century, was considered as an educational activity to be enhanced and developed. In the English mindset, sport was linked with a pedagogical determination to bring back physical exercise as a means of building the character of the English elite. Sport became a fundamental discipline in English education.

The history of Galatasaray Lycee (high school), an institution in Turkey, shows us how much the country is attached to European modernity in all its dimensions, including the role of sport in education. Created in 1868 during the Tanzimat by Sultan Abdulaziz with the collaboration of Napoleon III, this French-speaking high school aimed to educate the new elite of a declining Empire. The new Turkish Republic continued to respect it, and its special aura remains even today. In the early days of the Galatasaray Lycee, sport occupied a singular place in the school’s educational and pedagogical project. It became the first high school to have modern sport equipment (1869), and many of Turkey’s first sports clubs and teams were created within it, including the Galatasaray Football Club. For its founder, Ali Sami Yen, who became the first President of the Turkish Football Federation in 1914 and President of the Turkish National Olympic Committee, the goal was to “play in a team like Englishmen, to wear the colours of the team and to beat non Turkish teams”.

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Although Galatasaray Lycee is now only symbolically linked with the Galatasary Sports Club, it does house the Galatasaray sports museum. The historiography of the High school stresses the importance of sport in student education. Turkey’s sporting history is inextricably linked with Galatasaray Lycee.

16 Among the main reforms of the first ten years of the Republic: abolition of the Califat (1924), deletion from the constitution of the reference “the state religion is Islam”; proclamation of laicism; abolition of religious schools, Muslim Courts; ban on religious uniforms; adoption of the Christian calendar; language reform and adoption of Latin alphabet; adoption of new civil codes inspired by European ones; to give women the vote (1934), etc.
18 Website of Galatasaray Fans Club (www.geocities.com/cimbomfrance/infosgenerales.html).
Thus, sport and education are perceived as a means of promoting the political modernization of the country. Within this meaning, the development of sport and its organization are completely integrated into Turkey’s political project, which is aimed at achieving a high level of development and western modernity that the EU today symbolizes.

2. Europe, an unachieved quest

The multiplication of sport candidacies in the 1980-90’s occurred in a striking period of economic and political development marked by the will to draw closer to Europe. In 1980, in order to break a situation of growing political violence leading to a civil war process, a military coup overthrew the government, froze the democratic institutions, and organized severe repression especially against the left. Then the army prepared a new democratic constitution adopted in 1982, which strengthened military control. However, in 1983, it gave back the power to the civilians after the elections were won by Turgut Özal, leader of the centre right party (Motherland party). This opened an outstanding era of increasing economic liberalization\(^\text{19}\). Turkey experienced important social changes with a rural exodus, urbanization and people longing for a more western style of consumption. New business men emerged, and some among them some tried to organize or support sporting events or teams, while sports fans and spectators increased. This process encouraged an increase in the number of sports candidacies put forward and helped the country learn how to manage such applications and events.

At the same time, the Turkish authorities tried to strengthen relations with Europe. After the signature of the association agreement (in 1963), Turkey went further, applying officially to be an EU member in 1987. Without actually saying no, the European countries postponed their answer. Since then, the issue of European membership has become the leitmotif of Turkish national political debates and has opened up the Turkey-EU relationship. In the history of European construction, “there is no country which has been so long pushed aside from the European project while it desires so deeply to be part of it”\(^\text{20}\).

From refusal to concessions, from acknowledgement of Turkey’s progress in respecting EU requirements to new European requests, Turkey’s EU candidacy has been a long and winding process which reveals the misunderstanding and ambiguities of both sides. While in 1995, the EU signed a Customs Union Agreement with Turkey, it then rejected the country’s


candidacy at the 1997 Copenhagen summit, provoking a strong feeling of bitterness in Turkey, especially as the other eastern countries were accepted. The principle of Turkey’s candidacy was accepted in 1999 at the Helsinki summit but the date for the start of negotiations was postponed until December 2004. Finally, in October 2005, the EU opened EU accession negotiations with Turkey; these negotiations may last for at least ten years.

Nowadays, EU membership is the main issue for Turkey. To be recognised as Europeans and be accepted in the EU is the main goal for this country which is striving to cope with modernity. European membership would sanction this deep-seated aspiration.

3. Sport as a parallel diplomatic channel

Turkey’s numerous bids to organize international sporting events are a means for Turkey to demonstrate its modernity, its organizational abilities and thus the legitimacy of its application for membership of the European Union. The image organizers want to portray of their country can be seen through their application files.

International Sports authorities (FIFA, UEFA, IOC) define the requirements for all applications; these include such things as the quality of sporting infrastructures, security, communication and media, financial guaranties, transport systems, accommodation, etc. Candidates try to highlight their assets in their applications. In addition to these more technical aspects, which do have some symbolic effect insofar as they are an indication of a country’s level of development, it is important for candidates to underline the specificity and particular assets of their own candidacy. For bidding cities, this is an opportunity to build an image with a strong identity relating to Olympic ideals.

While Turkey’s EU membership is still debated on the grounds of human and minority rights issues, it is interesting to note that Istanbul’s bid to host the Olympic Games stresses the multi-cultural and culturally diverse aspects of the city. Istanbul’s Olympic Bidding Committee, which is responsible for the city’s candidacy, tries to portray an image of a tolerant and generous country. All Istanbul application files point out the city’s unique geographical location. Since its first Olympic bid to host the 2000 Olympic Games (in 1994), Istanbul’s logo has depicted two interlinked rings with the slogan “The meeting of the continents”. These two rings represent the continents of Europe and Asia linked by the two bridges over the Bosphorus Straits and are reminiscent of the stylised Olympic rings. Istanbul is presented as a “bridge between the cultures and civilizations of Asia and Europe […] It is a city of culture where religions and languages have merged over thousands of years of co-existence”. It is claimed in the brochures that Istanbul “is home to 26 ethnic groups and its
people speak 10 different languages. The very existence of Olympist Istanbul is a challenge to prejudice and sectarian divide.21

It is interesting to note that these statements are quite different from the official state position towards ethnic groups or multiculturalism. The Republic of Turkey still remains firmly based on a unitary national conception which doesn’t recognize ethnic minorities; only religious groups are recognised as minorities. This means that Alevis and Kurds are not recognized as minorities because they are Muslims. Because of the strong fear of Turkey breaking up, the Turkish state fights not only all separatism and but also the claim of ethnic identity. The war in the south-east against the PKK (Worker’s Party of Kurdistan) between 1983 and 1997 led to thousands people being killed (fighters and civilians), and the deportation of a million people from the fighting zone. In spite of the fact that Turkey has had to make strong concessions on this issue in order to fulfil European requirements,22 it is still at the core of the contention between the EU and Turkey. By insisting on diversity and pluralism, the authors of the Istanbul bid to host the Olympic Game are striving to portray an image of a peaceful and tolerant country. They draw on the image of the Ottoman Empire, which is represented as a multicultural state.

Bids to host sporting events are also an opportunity to portray the image of a peaceful country at one not only with its own citizens but also with its neighbours. This was the goal of Turkey and Greece’s joint bid to host the 2008 European Football Championship (Euro 2008). Although the historical conflict between these two countries remains (even if things are improving), this joint bid initiated by Turks has been presented as the sign of a new era for peaceful cooperation and “greater mutual understanding”23 between them. Following the example of the 2002 Football World Cup in Japan and Korea, Senes Erzik, (member of the executive committee of the Football International Federation Association (FIFA), member of the Korea-Japan World Cup Organization Committee and Vice-President of UEFA), considered that this event “would help to build a better relationship between Turks and Greeks”24. The Turkish Football Federation’s proposal was made to Greece in February 2000, was enthusiastically accepted by the Greek Football Federation and was supported by the two Foreign ministers. In less than eighteen months, a joint bid committee was created and prepared the official bid to be registered by UEFA in November 2001. The change of majority

22 In March 2006, the first private Kurdish channel was allowed to broadcast four hours per week of programs in Kurdish language.
in the Turkish Parliament following the victory of the AKP (Justice and Development Party – Islamic moderate) in the November 2002 elections did not change the strong political support for this project. On the contrary, R. T. Erdogan, AKP leader, future Prime minister (and a former professional football player) recorded a speech in favour of the joint bid which was delivered in front of UEFA decision-makers on the day the host country for Euro 2008 was chosen.

From a more technical perspective, even if bids are a means of putting forward the Country or city’s assets, the various bidding committees do not try to avoid the difficulties that Istanbul may face in hosting the Olympic Games. Transportation, security, environmental issues and so on are not denied but rather are consciously analysed in order to be overcome. This aspect shows us that the bid committees take into account the criticisms made by the International Olympic Committee Evaluation Committee in relation to previous bids. The experience of the members of the National Olympic Committee of Turkey (NOCT) and especially of its president at this time, a member of the International Olympic Committee, is important in helping the bid for each new Olympiad to be improved. The library at Olympic House in Ataköy, headquarters of the NOCT, contains every bid document filed by rival cities over the last forty years as well as the IOC’s reports and evaluations of those bids.

The IOBC is aware that the information they give in the bidding document has to be credible and reliable if it is to be taken seriously by the IOC. This is why the bidding document is prepared and written by sociologists and economists at a research centre who carry out specific studies in order to produce it. This approach shows a will for transparency and realism.

Finally, the promoters of Turkish sports bids try to portray the image of a European country on the verge of becoming an EU member: “At present, Istanbul is the largest city in a country that is preparing for membership of the European Union” (bid document for 2008 OG).

Thus, hosting an international sporting event or even the victories of Turkish teams in international events are presented as true national successes and a further step forward to

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25 Interview with Cenap Nurat, Director of the Social research (SAM) and Ferhat Kentel, sociologist, January 2003. SAM carried out studies and produced the Istanbul Olympic bids (OG candidatures for 2000, 2004, 2008).

26 We can put in parallel this effort for transparency with the one accomplished by the Turkish governmental authorities toward the European requirements. According to the head of the “Turkey” desk at the European Commission, the most notable change in relations with new Turkish government after the November 2002 elections was a more shared perception of issues for the Turkey membership. Interview, Brussels, June 2003.
Europe. When the Galatasaray Football Club won the UEFA cup in 2000, Turkey’s former President, S. Demirel claimed, “Now, we are Europeans!”  

These victories are all the more celebrated in that they are achieved on the sports field. According to the writer A. Ehrenberg, the sports field is a condensation of the democratic society ideal in which competition is equal and the winner the best. In other words, sport establishes a hierarchy based on merit rather than on human ranking or categorisation. Through sport victories, Turkey can achieve the European recognition that European politics refuse to grant it.

II. WHEN SPORT EXPLOITS THE POLITICISATION TO WHICH IT IS SUBJECTED

If we consider sport only as a means of diplomatic action, or as an instrument serving political strategies or ideologies, then we are forgetting the complex relationship that exists between sport and politics in Turkey. Of course, political actors have to refer to sport: sport is a valuable resource. Sport can glorify youth (which is one of the most popular themes in speeches on the Republic of Turkey) and patriotism. The political authorities in Turkey have always supported bids and tried to draw benefits from victories (whether sporting victories or victories in hosting sporting events). However, sport is not used in this way in Turkey to the same extent as it was in former USSR or in China. Even if the relationship between sport and politics is particularly close in Turkey, we cannot reduce it to mere political exploitation. The sport elites are close to the political elite, share the same republican values, and know that they can withdraw support from them. We have now to underline the process by which the sporting sphere exploits the politicisation of sport for its own benefit. This phenomenon blurs the borderline between sport and politics in Turkey.

1. Sport managers: a specialised elite expecting political support

Although it is obvious that politicians support sports bids, sport organizations are managed by specialised elites and sport federations. These managers acknowledge that they

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29 In Turkey, the 19th of May is a national day for “sport and youth”. Ceremonies are organized in stadiums full of children, where poems are read and speeches are made to the glory of young people, the Republic and Atatürk. Cf. YURDSEVER ATES N., “19 Mayis nasil bayram oldu”, Toplumsal Tarih, n°113, mai 2003, p. 34-37.
want to see their teams winning competitions, but also that they want Turkey to become a member of the European Union. After a traditional Turkish dinner (fish and *raki*), during a visit of IOC members to Istanbul in 2000, the president of NOCT declared to his guests: “now, I hope you understand that we are Europeans!”

However these elites also aim to support other specific goals, such as the development of sport in Turkey. Istanbul’s bidding efforts are also a means of building the sporting infrastructure that Turkey really needs. Keenly aware of this need, the IOBC, the General Directorate of Youth and Sports, and the Greater Istanbul Municipality, as well as private bodies, are investing heavily in the city’s sporting infrastructure. Through this urban policy, Turkey is also able to fulfil European standards in infrastructure terms and to justify expenditure in this area.

The sport elites also want to promote sport among young people, not only from a health perspective but also because future champions may thus emerge from the masses.

Finally, even if the sport elites think that their sport project may help Turkey’s application for EU membership, they are convinced that the opposite is more likely. Barcelona or Athens hosted the Olympic Games after their countries had been accepted into the EU (6 years later for Spain, 22 years later for Greece).

Thus the sport elites are out in front, using sport to build the image of a modern Turkey in order to receive vital support from the political elites in preparing serious bids to host international sport competitions.

Furthermore, the sports sector draws important benefits from the support of political elites. An astonishing example of this goodwill is the Turkish Olympic Law. Istanbul’s bid is endorsed by a special law, passed quasi-unanimously by the parliament in April 1992, making Turkey the first and only country to have enacted such a legal instrument. The Turkish Olympic Law (No. 3796) established the Istanbul Olympic Games Preparation and Organisation Council, also known as the Istanbul Olympic Bidding Committee (IOBC), and authorised it to take all necessary action in the pursuit and organisation of the Games. It recognises and respects the supremacy of the IOC in all Olympic matters. The law requires that all public institutions and agencies, as well as all local government bodies, give priority to the requests of the IOBC in relation to the pursuit and organisation of the Games. The Olympic Law guarantees a continuous flow of funds, both for the pursuit and the organisation of the Games. These include:

1) one percent of football betting revenue;
2) five percent of the preceding year’s net income of the National Lottery;
3) one percent of the Housing Fund receipts;
4) an annual appropriation from the Consolidated Budget, the amount left to the discretion of the legislature;
5) one percent of the budget of the Greater Istanbul Municipality;
6) one percent of the Horse Racing Joint Wagers ticket sales.

Thus, thanks to the political stakes of sport, the sport elites have received continuing political support for their project, which has given rise to a greater accumulation of experience and further developed the country’s ability to ready itself to host international sporting events.

2. Political and sport elites: a close family

Even if the sport elites work at their own projects, they are nevertheless very close to political elites. They were educated in the same high schools or universities and thus have shared the same socialization. This closeness between both elites reinforces the confusion between sport and politics. Almost all NOCT members graduated from high schools such as the Galatasaray Lycee.

The biography of Sinan Erdem, the last president of NOCT and a member of the IOC, is a significant example of this kind of sport elite career\(^{30}\). He was educated at Galatasaray Lycee where he played volleyball. He then became a member of the national volleyball team and took part in the OG. Afterwards, he chaired the Turkish Volleyball federation and worked at NOCT, of which he became President in 1987 until his death in 2005. The bid to host the Olympic Games in Istanbul was his dearest dream, and bid by bid, he made it more and more plausible. Galastasaray’s alumni club gave invaluable help to his project. An important social network of Galatasaray’s former students works throughout the world and of course in Turkey. They share the same view of the Republic of Turkey, its modern project, and its European future and are all convinced that sport may help Turkey to improve its image in the world.

Sinan Erdem’s dream needed strong and continuing state support. Thanks to his contacts within the political sphere, he was able to suggest the adoption of an Olympic Law. This law was prepared by Professor E. Tesić, a former student of Galatasaray Lycee, who played volleyball in the national team coached by Sinan Erdem. Afterwards, he became director of

\(^{30}\) This trajectory is common. For instance, Senes Erzic, initiator of the joint bid with Greece for the Euro 2008 is a business man who was educated in the English-speaking University of Bosphorus. He is also the former president of the Turkish Football Federation and Vice-president of UEFA. Interview, January 2002. The Turkish coordinator of this project was also educated in a French-speaking High School (Saint Joseph). Interview, July 2001.
the Galatasaray Lycee, and then Rector of Galatasaray University (created in 1992). He is also a member of the NOCT 31.

This unique law, the only one of its kind in the world, shows us that the will to host the OI is shared by all the elites in Turkey. Hosting the OI would be an outstanding opportunity to demonstrate in front of billions of viewers the organizational abilities of Turkey and its level of development, i.e. the modernity of Turkey.

The confusion between the interests of these elites is patently obvious. Sport may serve to promote national and international political strategies, but on the other hand, sport elites know how to exploit this political use of sport in return to gain more support. Furthermore, the shared conception of a common political project to modernize the country gives both elites the conviction that they are working towards the same aim, only by different means. The borderline between sport and politics is thin and even vague. Sport lies within the political modernization process that the elites have been trying to achieve for decades.

III. SPORT AS REVEALING A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP WITH EUROPE

Sport as a social practice also bears a symbolic dimension and political meaning which reveals the confusion of interests that exists between sport and politics. If we consider sport as a “Non-identified Political Object” 32, we can observe the ambiguity of this relation. Indeed sport in Turkey seems to be a reflection of the country’s passionate relationship with Europe. The links between sport, Turkey and the EU, create the stage for the sometimes ambiguous relationship Turkey has with Europe. Becoming an EU member is all the more fundamental for Turkey in that it is based on the complex issue of the Turkish identity.

The hazardous route taken by the negotiation process and the still unfavorable prejudices of Europeans toward Turkey reinforces Turkey’s ambiguous feelings towards Europe. Sport appears as a domain where success and failure affect the image that the Turks want to portray.

31 Interview, Rennes, June 2003. In 2004, he was appointed as President of the YÖK (Council of Higher Education).
32 According to D.-C. Martin, the study of “Non identified Political Objects” is a way to grasp the ambiguities and multidimensional nature of politics: “L’ambiguïté est un attribut fondamental du pouvoir […] Le pouvoir est toujours l’instrument d’une domination dont les formes sont plus ou moins crues […] Il suscite en retour des attitudes ambivalentes : non seulement variées, ambiguës, mais partagées, contradictoires ; des attitudes où se mêlent en un même temps la fascination, la crainte, la contestation et le rejet du pouvoir ; des attitudes qui peuvent entraîner des comportements apparemment opposés et illogiques, des balancements, des retournements imprévus ”. Cf. MARTIN D.-C. (dir.), Sur la piste des OPNI (Objets politiques non identifiés), Paris, Karthala, 2002, p. 22
on the outside but also the one they have of themselves. The resentment varies in intensity and formalization with respect to the social origin of the groups.

1. Bitter setbacks for the sport elites

We have seen above how Turkish victories in European competitions have been perceived by the political and sporting authorities as giving greater weight to Turkey’s EU candidacy. On the other hand, defeats or failures are felt as a rebuff which echoes European reluctance to admit Turkey to the EU. After the defeat of the Turkish football team by Latvia in a Euro 2004 qualifying match, the President of the Turkish Football Federation, criticizing a biased referee claimed: “the Europeans do not want us”. Of course this kind of statement is rare because sporting authorities generally control their tongues. Yet failures are perceived with strong bitterness.

In December 2002, UEFA’s decision to grant the organization of the Euro 2008 event to Austria and Switzerland, in preference to the Turkish-Greece bid, fostered deep disappointment and frustration. This feeling was made all the more acute by the fact that during the same period, the 15 European member states taking part in the Copenhagen summit postponed Turkey’s request for a date to be set for the start of negotiations on its possible admission to the EU. The Turkish coordinator of the bid committee, who was very disappointed by the final vote (the Turkish-Greek bid lost in the last ballot), underlined the amazing political dimension of this candidacy. According to him, the success of their rivals could be explained by the fact that both countries were better integrated into Europe, either from a sport perspective (the president of the International Football Federation is Swiss), or from a political perspective: Austria is already an EU member, but Switzerland does not wish to be. In addition, he suggested that while these countries’ teams were neither competitive (argument of sport as a “regulated” field of confrontation / “regulated” battlefield), nor strongly supported by fans, they offered the reassuring financial guarantees of rich countries. On the other hand, Turkey and Greece, in spite of the strong symbolism of this joint bid and in spite of the sporting and technical qualities of the file, were relegated by the UEFA decision to the ranks of secondary zone countries, to the periphery of Europe. In other terms, if Turkey had been an EU member, the decision might have been different.

33 He added that the relationships between the Turks and Greeks within the bid committee were excellent. Nonetheless he got the impression that the Turks were more involved in the project than the Greeks. Interview, Istanbul, December 2002.
The failures of Turkey on the sports field echo its failure in the political arena. Both reinforce the feeling of marginalization of a country which is already on the European edge.

2. Sport as sign revealing political frustration: the nationalism of Turkish fans

Certain Turkish football fans and articles printed in sports papers express the true ambiguity of Turks towards Europe through the glorifying of nationalism.

While 75% of Turks claim that they are in favour of Turkey’s membership of the EU, football matches between Turkish teams and teams from other countries are frequently the scene of tough demonstrations of nationalism. The stadium often offers a large array of slogans and nationalist symbols, sung or written on banners such as: “Avrupa Fatihi” (the Conquerors of Europe); “Tremble in fear Europe, we have arisen!”; “Hail our country, the Turk is coming” etc. This attitude is particularly widespread when Turkish teams play against foreign teams from the former Ottoman Empire. Very often, matches against Greek teams are an opportunity for the most radical fans to remember the domination of the Ottoman Empire over Greece. In 2002, the Turkish Football Club of Fernebahce played against the Greek Panathinaikos club. Turkish fans raised the provocative banner, “Greek, can you hear the steps of the Sultan Merhmet conqueror warriors?” These aggressive slogans and the violent behaviour of fans reinforce the already negative opinion Europeans have of the Turks, who are perceived as violent and extremist.

This ambiguous relationship with Europe is also perceived in the media and especially in two sports dailies, Fanatik and Fotomaç which altogether have about half a million of readers every day. The logo of the daily Fanatic (the meaning of the word is more to do with passion and exaltation than religious fanaticism) represents a Turkish flag with the sentence: “This land is ours”. According to Tanil Bora, writer and journalist, nationalism on the Turkish football scene increased in the 1980s and 1990s, when nationalism was thrust onto the political stage: “Following the military coup of 12 September [1980] attention paid to national and international football games focused and grew around the goals of national unity. During the transition from the 1980s into the 1990s, the purportedly reflexive growth of Turkish

36 Several similar events occurred last ten years. In 1999, two English provocative fans were deadly stabbed in Istanbul before a match between Turkish and English teams. Last November 2005, violent incidents took place after a football match between the Turkish and Swiss national football teams. In February 2006, FIFA Disciplinary Committee took sanction against the two teams, players and executives.
nationalism in responding to the Kurdish national movement, brought to the stadiums a nationalist agitation of until then unparalleled proportions.”

Nowadays, sport nationalism expresses frustration and humiliation at being repelled by an arrogant Europe, to which Turkey would still like to belong. For the leader of the Ultra Aslan (a Galatasaray fan club), the organization of an international event or Turkish sport victories would not really do anything to help Turkey’s EU candidacy because “they don’t want us anyway, because we are Muslims.”

Unlike sports executives, who have to control what they say in public, sports fans express their social and political frustration. The stadium remains “one of those rare areas where the display of collective emotion is tolerated, within certain limits.” But sporting and political authorities are aware that the images of violence in and around the fields harm Turkey’s image in Europe. In December 2002, the University of Galatasaray organized with NOCT a symposium on “Violence, sport, and fan.”

However this kind of effort is far too be sufficient. In 2002, during a match between Turkish and Greek football teams, the two foreign ministers of Turkey and Greece wanted to turn this game into a symbol of reconciliation and friendship between the two nations in order to support the joint bid to host Euro 2008. But football fans threw objects and plastic bottles at them while they were entering the stadium. This kind of event shows us the limits of the potential power of sport as an instrument serving governmental strategies. However, it demonstrates that sport is highly revealing of social and political frustrations. It allows symbolic revenge on the real world of social relations.

For Can Kozanoglu, the ambiguity of Turkey’s relationship with Europe reveals a kind of social schizophrenia in Turkey, which is going through an identity crisis, between nationalism and Islamism thrusts on the one hand, and the desire for Europe on the other. Indeed, despite the denunciations and warlike declarations, Europe remains the supreme reference. During a Turkish Championship match, Galatasaray fans raised banners against the rival team reminding them that the Galatasaray Football Club was the only one to be playing in the European cup: “We are Europeans, we are playing in the Champion’s League! And you, where do you play?” This ironic provocation testifies once again to the fact that Europe

37 Tanil Bora, op. cit., p. 378.
38 Interview with a responsible of Galatasaray “Ultra Aslan” Fan Club, July 2002.
remains synonymous with superiority in Turkey and that it is important to be recognized as Europeans. It also shows the uneasy concern with “not existing beyond Edirne”\textsuperscript{42}.

Thus, Europe appears as a remote horizon which can be criticized and defied, but that is still the high standard everyone would like to reach. In reflecting the ambiguous relations that exist between Turkey and Europe, the sporting arena confuses even further the line between sport and politics.

The multiple overlaps between sport and the Turkish political dimension make it difficult to delimit the borderline between sport and politics. We have considered the relationship between sport and politics from two angles. Primarily, we have shown that the political exploitation of sport might also be analysed symmetrically, in that the sport elites use the exploitation of sport to achieve their own goals, thanks to their ideological proximity with political elites. Secondly, beyond this mutual exploitation, we have seen that sport bears another stake in Turkey, which is based on the political meaning of sport in the country: to be recognized as Europeans. This main goal shared by both elites fades the lines hemming in their respective activities.

Thus, sport appears as a political message sent to Europe; one that can produce huge hopes or bitter disillusion. Depends on the answer… Turkish bids to host events have to cope with a variety of political stakes that we can certainly analyse, but whose understanding has to be sought in the dynamic interpenetration of this reasoning and in the historical relationship between Turkey and Europe.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibidem, p.188. Edirne, former capital of the Ottoman Empire (XIVc.) is the western-most city of Turkey, just 10km from the Bulgarian and Greek borders.
Appendix: a full bloom of sports bids and event hosting

In the 1980s, Turkey multiplied its bids to host international sports competitions. I have recorded more than 20 major official competitions i.e. European or World Championships (I put aside regional or youth competitions). Previous to this time, Turkey had only hosted wrestling competitions (in 1974 and 1977). These bids became more and more frequent at the end of the 1990s. The first successful bids were in sporting disciplines that are part of traditional Turkish sport practices and in which Turkish athletes have always been successful (wrestling, weightlifting). In recent years, we can observe increasing diversity in the sports for which bids are made; sports which have a strong international and media impact and in which Turkey has begun to have some success (football, basketball) but also in other disciplines (swimming, motor racing, archery, etc.). Of course, the most prestigious applications are still its bids for the Olympic Games.

Table of international sporting events held in Turkey and principal bids (in B, the major senior competitions. Between brackets, the events and categories)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>World Championship</th>
<th>European Championship</th>
<th>Bids</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Wrestling</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wrestling</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Taekwando</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Wrestling</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Judo (teams)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Skis (on grass)</td>
<td>Wrestling (juniors)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling (young men)</td>
<td>Basket (club)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Archery</td>
<td>Freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling</td>
<td>OG 2000 bid</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>Weightlifting</td>
<td>Sailing (optimist)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td></td>
<td>Athletics, Nations Cup</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>Equestrian World Cup</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Equestrian World Cup</td>
<td>Wrestling (junior)</td>
<td>OG 2004 bid</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Offshore 4th Stage</td>
<td>Sailing (470)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Freestyle wrestling</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tennis (teams, men and ladies)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Weightlifting</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>OG 2008 bid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td></td>
<td>Greco-Roman wrestling</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Turkey rally</td>
<td>Taekwando</td>
<td>Football Euro 2008 bid</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Windsurfing</td>
<td>Volleyball (ladies' champions league)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Istanbul Formula 1 Grand Prix</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Istanbul Formula 1 Grand Prix</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

30 Olympic gold medals out of 33 were obtained in these disciplines (26 for wrestling alone).

I didn’t mention other championships of sports with a few practising and with less media covers such as parachuting, stunt piloting, palm-swimming, football-tennis, etc.).