

Hope and Despair: Understanding Change in Turkey-EU Relations

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Hope and Despair: Understanding Change in Turkey-EU Relations

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ABSTRACT

Joining the European Union has been a long-lasting priority in Turkish foreign policy and one which has fluctuated from relatively short episodes of hope to longer periods of frustration or even despair. The article reviews the intensity, drivers and justification of change during five critical periods: the 1959 application for association that led to the signature in 1963 of the Treaty of Ankara; the request for full membership in 1987 that led to the signature of the Customs Union in 1995; the Helsinki decision in 1999 to grant Turkey candidate status; the unenthusiastic opening of the accession negotiations in 2005; and the gradual evolution toward a transactional cooperation ever since, which coexists with signs of an increasingly adversarial relationship. Foreign policy changes in Turkey are one of the factors explaining the evolution of this relationship. This article emphasizes the need to take into consideration foreign policy changes in the EU and within some of its member states, as well as global and regional transformations. It also points out the extraordinary resilience of EU-Turkey relations, and how pragmatic, ideational and normative arguments have so far contributed to avoidance of an abrupt divorce.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Enlargement, Change, Europeanization, Customs Union

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Introduction

The centenary of the Republic of Turkey coincides with the 60th anniversary of its association with the European Union (EU). The bid to join the EU, or more broadly defined, to anchor Turkey in the European integration process, is one of the oldest and more frustrating priorities of Turkey's foreign policy. The idea of change is deeply rooted in Turkey-EU relations. Firstly, because 'Europeanizing' Turkey has often been framed as equivalent to democratization, modernization, and liberalization.. Secondly, because during these sixty years relations have experienced many ups and downs, periods of hope but also moments of despair, the eruption of many crises, and different attempts to overcome them. Thirdly, because changes in Turkey-EU relations must be placed in the context of broader patterns of change in Turkey's foreign policy, which is the overall aim of this special issue.

This article adopts Charles G. Hermann's categorization when assessing the intensity of foreign policy change, ranging from rare but far-reaching transformation of the international orientation of a country's foreign policy to almost continuous policy adjustments to accommo-

date new domestic or international realities.¹ In between, there are different degrees of change including the reassessment of goals as well as the means to achieve them, defined by Hermann as program change.

Before analyzing the drivers of change, it is useful to establish how those categories apply to Turkey-EU relations. Belonging to the West and being recognized as such is part of Turkey's international orientation. Aspiring to join the EU is the corollary of this orientation and stands as a foreign policy goal. The reforms introduced to achieve this goal are part of what Hermann referred to as "program changes", and the economic or organizational resources deployed in the implementation of those reforms would qualify as adjustments. When mapping those instances of change, it is also necessary to note those factors that may prevent change, if only because one of the peculiarities of the Turkey-EU relationship is its resilience to all sorts of shocks and Turkey's perseverance in keeping the goal of accession open and discarding alternative frameworks of relations.

As for the identification of the drivers of change, this article builds on Jakob Gustavsson's analytical framework.² This implies exploring which are the political and economic factors, at the international and the domestic level, that may have altered the preferences and strategies of individuals within Turkey's government, but also within the complex decision-making process of the EU. As I have pointed out elsewhere, "it takes two to tango".³ In other words, the actions or inactions of successive Turkish governments explain only partially the variations in EU-Turkey relations, and therefore an analysis of change in these relations must also contemplate the changes in the policies of the EU and its member states toward Turkey.

The literature on European integration and particularly on enlargement adds a third dimension to our analysis: How do both parties justify their decisions? Helen Sjursen suggests three Habermas-inspired categories that could be used to justify enlargement: 1) pragmatic arguments (decisions made on calculations of utility based on a given set of interests), 2) ethical-political arguments (referring to duties and responsibilities emerging because of belonging to a particular community), and 3) moral arguments (based on universal standards of justice).⁴ Applying these categories will provide a more sophisticated understanding of the patterns of change and continuity, by assessing whether critical decisions have been justified, and by whom, based on utility, identity, or fairness. Following the systematic analysis by Hague, Özbey, Eralp and Wessels, it is also useful to differentiate between the *goal* and the *plot* of the different narratives put forward both by the EU and Turkey.⁵

1 Charles F. Hermann, "Changing Course: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No 1, 1990, p. 3-21.

2 Jakob Gustavsson, "How Should We Study Foreign Policy Change?", *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 34, No 1, 1999, p. 73-95.

3 Eduard Soler i Lecha et al., "It Takes Two to Tango: Political Changes in Europe and their Impact on Turkey's EU Bid", *FEUTURE Online Paper* No. 17, 2018, https://future.uni-koeln.de/sites/future/user_upload/Online_Paper_No._17_D2.2.pdf (Accessed: 15 July 2022).

4 Helene Sjursen, "Why Expand?: The Question of Legitimacy and Justification in the EU's Enlargement Policy", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No 3, 2002, p. 494.

5 Hanna-Lisa Hauge et al., "Narratives of a Contested Relationship: Unravelling the Debates in the EU and Turkey", *FEUTURE Online Paper* No. 28, 2019, https://future.uni-koeln.de/sites/future/user_upload/Online_Paper_No_28.pdf (Accessed: 15 July 2022)

The article focuses on five critical periods in Turkey-EU relations: (1) the 1959 application to associate Turkey with the recently created European Economic Community (EEC),⁶ followed by the signature in 1963 of the Treaty of Ankara granting Turkey such a status; (2) the request by the Turkish government for full membership in 1987 which led to the negotiation and signature in 1995 of the Customs Union (CU); (3) The acceptance by the EU of Turkey as a candidate country in Helsinki in 1999, marking a considerable policy shift when taking into consideration that Turkey was denied such a status two years earlier; (4) the unenthusiastic opening of the accession negotiations in 2005; (5) the current state of relations, where transactional cooperation coexists with signs of an increasingly adversarial relationship. For each episode, the article assesses the intensity, drivers, justification, and impact of major decisions, while exploring why alternative routes were discarded. Therefore, this granular analysis will enrich the discussion on the current state and imminent challenges for Turkey-EU relations by placing the most recent signs of turbulence within a longer period of fluctuations, and by identifying those inhibitors that have so far buffered crises and contributed to keeping Turkey as the “longest standing applicant to the EU”, in Atila Eralp’s words.⁷

The Starting Point (1959-1963)

The Turkish government led by Adnan Menderes requested in 1959 to negotiate an associate status with the new-born EEC. Greece had done the same a month earlier. Negotiations started that September, but the process was temporarily interrupted after the coup d’état in 1960. Yet negotiations resumed one year later, leading to the signature of the Treaty of Ankara in 1963. This treaty had a predominantly economic character, as it focused on trade preferences and financial support, with the goal of preparing both parties for a CU. One of the peculiarities of this treaty is that, like the one with Greece and in contrast with other association agreements that were to be signed with Mediterranean countries, it foresees in its article 28 the possibility of Turkey’s accession to the community, once the provisions from the treaty would become operational. This politically meaningful commitment was further reinforced by political statements during the signature of the treaty. The then president of the European Commission, Walter Hallstein, repeatedly mentioned the idea that “Turkey is part of Europe.”⁸ Turkish Foreign Minister, Feridun Cemal Erkin, stated that even if the treaty was essentially an economic document, it “constitutes a turning point in the life of the Turkish nation as a political document” that “confirms and approves Turkey’s desire to be part of Europe.”⁹

6 The European Economic Community (EEC) became the European Union (EU) with the signature of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1991 and its entry into force in 1993. For the sake of simplicity, this article will refer to Turkey-EU relations when analyzing the whole period. Yet, it will use the acronym EEC when alluding to strictly institutional or legal matters during the pre-1993 years.

7 Atila Eralp, “Turkey and the European Union”, Leonore Martin and Dimitris Keridis (eds.), *The future of Turkish Foreign Policy*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2004, p. 69.

8 John Redmond, *The Next Mediterranean Enlargement of the European Community: Turkey, Cyprus and Malta*, Aldershot, Dartmouth Publishing, 1993, p. 23.

9 Yücel Bozdağlıoğlu, *Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkish Identity. A Constructivist Approach*, New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 70.

Beyond being a decisive turning point for Turkey-EU relations, the Treaty also confirmed and consolidated previous foreign policy choices regarding Turkey's engagement with the West and with Europe in particular. Thus, the signature of the Treaty of Ankara should be analyzed as part of a chain of decisions that include its membership of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) in 1948, the accession to the Council of Europe in 1949, a few months after its creation, and membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952.

The westernization of Turkey's foreign policy also entailed decisions such as involvement in the Korean War in 1950, and the signature of the Baghdad Pact in 1955, and it meant a departure from its previous policy of neutrality. This period, conceptualized by William Hale as "the engagement phase",¹⁰ reflected a change in Turkey's threat perception due to Stalin's revisionist policy. Some traumatic events in the early 1960s (the Turkey-for-Cuba deal to end the 1962 missile crisis, and the content of President Johnson's letter on Cyprus in 1964) prompted Ankara to consider that it could not solely rely on the US but had to balance this with more engagement with Western Europe.¹¹

Domestic changes in Turkey were a relevant factor too. Among those, the victory of Menderes' Democrat Party in the 1950 elections strengthened Turkey's Atlanticist turn in a way that marked a distance with the "isolationist policies" of previous Kemalist governments.¹² Haluk Kabaalioglu also notes that Menderes' political thought was aligned with that of the founding fathers of the EU, and that he had expressed preference for the EEC model over alternative regional cooperation processes such as the British-led European Free Trade Association (EFTA).¹³

However, partisan or personal modifications reinforced rather than triggered this foreign policy change. The goal of anchoring Turkey to the Western Alliance had already started with the Republicans in power. Interestingly, Ismet İnönü, leader of the opposition when the request for association took place, stated that "being a member of the western world and in view of our regime, from the start we were always enthusiastic about the EC. We want to join the Community".¹⁴ Additionally, after the abrupt end of the Menderes government in 1960, it took only a few months to restart the negotiations for the association agreement, and the terms of the agreement were accepted by Turkey's political forces "with little debate or dissent."¹⁵

Changes within the EEC also explain why the Ankara Treaty was signed. When Turkey applied to join, the leaders of the EEC could only rejoice to see both Turkey and Greece

10 William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774-2000*, London and Portland, Frank Cass, 2002, p. 109.

11 Feroz Ahmad, "The Historical Background of Turkish Foreign Policy", Lenore Martin and Dimitris Keridis (eds.), *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2004, p. 33.

12 Hasan Kösebalaban, "Turkey's EU membership: A Clash of Security Cultures", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 9, No 2, 2002, p.134.

13 Haluk Kabaalioglu, "The Relation between Turkey and the EU – A Turkish Perspective", Hüseyin Bağcı, Jackson Janes and Ludler Kühnhardt (eds.), *Parameters of Partnership: the US – Turkey – Europe*, Baden-Baden, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1999, p. 20-21.

14 Selim Ilkin, "A History of Turkey's Association with the European Community", Ahmet Evin and Geoffrey Denton (eds.), *Turkey and the European Community*, Opladen, Leske and Buldrich, 1990, p. 35

15 William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774-2000*, p. 175.

moving toward them rather than toward the EFTA. The lack of internal debate within the EEC on the convenience of having Turkey as an associate member is even more significant when compared with the resistance that Turkey's membership of the Council of Europe and NATO had raised some years before.

The Greek factor acted as a catalyst for both parties. The European leaders did not want to discriminate between Turkey and Greece.¹⁶ Greece's request also forced the Turkish government to take a final decision on whether to apply or not, and once Greece had negotiated its own agreement in 1961, Turkey could not afford to miss the boat.

Thus, the initial moment of Turkey's relationship with the EU represented a change of goal that was consistent with the overall international orientation of Turkey. Ever since, Turkey's governments have claimed that they want to get as close as possible to EU membership and have systematically refused offers that could imply giving up on the possibility. Despite such continuity of aspiration, with its accompanying Europeanization narrative, not all Turkish governments have been equally willing to take the measures that could advance this goal, and not all of them have faced equally favorable conditions to do so.

Doubling Down: Full Membership Request (1987) and Negotiation of the Customs Union (1995)

The implementation of the Ankara Treaty took longer than anticipated. Interestingly, the signing of the Additional Protocol marked the start of a decline in Turkey-European Community relations.¹⁷ This irony would repeat in 2005, as the initiation of accession negotiations paradoxically signified a deterioration of relations.

Several factors contributed to this decline. From the Turkish side, the most relevant ones were Turkey's intervention in Cyprus in 1974, political and bureaucratic reluctance toward the aims or the terms of the agreement, and the 1980 coup d'état. From the EU side, Greek membership in 1981 is the most relevant factor, as it 'Europeanized' bilateral disputes, and Athens was prepared to utilize its veto power as a potent weapon in its diplomatic arsenal when negotiating with Turkey. Although secondary in importance, it is worth mentioning that some member states, namely Germany, were no longer in need of Turkish workers in the 1980s. All this translated into decisions such as Turkey's demand in 1978 to postpone the commitments foreseen in the additional protocol of the Ankara Treaty signed in 1970, and the EEC decision in January 1982, at the request of the European Parliament, to suspend the agreement and freeze political dialogue and financial assistance due to the political situation. Aydın referred to the 1980 coup as a major factor of change, as it forced "the internationalisation of Turkish domestic political problems."¹⁸

16 Şaban H. Çalış, "Formative Years: A Key for Understanding..." p. 87.

17 Meltem Müftüler-Baç, *Turkey's Relations with a Changing Europe*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997, p. 60.

18 Mustafa Aydın, "Twenty Years Before, Twenty Years After: Turkish Foreign Policy at the Threshold of the 21st Century", Tareq Y Ismael and Mustafa Aydın (eds.), *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003, p. 5.

Whereas in 1982 relations between Turkey and the EEC had reached a new low, by April 14, 1987, the government of Turgut Özal had officially requested full membership of the European Common Market. This decision qualifies as a goal change. Turkey was no longer satisfied with the status of association but aspired to become a full member.

It is commonplace to associate this period in Turkey-EU relations with the end of the Cold War. While this factor is certainly relevant to understanding the response by the European Commission in December 1989, the development of relations in the early 1990s and the negotiation of the CU, Turkey's decision to apply for membership preceded the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Therefore, the drivers of Turkey's decision are to be found elsewhere.

One of those was Turkey's gradual democratization process, initiated in 1983 with the ending of military rule, and the tri-party parliamentary elections. The restoration of the multi-party and civilian system, as well as the economic reform package implemented by Turgut Özal's Anavatan Partisi (ANAP) was positively received by its European partners. In September 1986, the Turkey-EEC association council reconvened and relations resumed, facilitating the submission of the membership application a few months later.

The decision in April 1987 to apply for full membership should also be placed as an intersection with Özal's broader economic and foreign policies. Speaking to the Turkish parliament, Özal stated in 1987 that: "the aim of the economic liberalization programme and our reforms was to facilitate our integration into the European Community as a full member".¹⁹ In his book Özal argued that "Turkey has thus begun to integrate into the world economy through an outward-looking policy. What should have been done at the beginning of the Westernisation reforms was only done at the end."²⁰

The changes that the EEC was experiencing in the 1980s had an ambivalent effect on its relations with Turkey. The push for greater integration, epitomized by the signature in 1986 of the Single European Act (SEA), which set the objective of establishing a single market by 1992 and codified the European Political Cooperation – the embryo of the EU's foreign policy – together with the accession into the EEC of three Mediterranean countries (Greece in 1981 and Spain and Portugal in 1986) increased Turkey's anxiety of being left behind. Özal assessed the situation as follows:

"Our time is one of very large nations. Europe, as a group of countries, can only be a transitory phenomenon from nation states to a single European state (...) We believe that this process can be achieved in stages, starting with the Customs Union and economic integration, which should eventually lead to political integration (...). Turkey believes that the European Community will become the United States of Europe and, by entering it, it identifies its security with that of Europe."²¹

19 Meltem Müftüler, "Turkish Economic Liberalization and European Integration", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 31, No 1, 1995, p. 85.

20 Turgut Özal, *La Turquie en Europe*, Paris, Plon, 1988, p. 224.

21 *Ibid*, pp. 235-236.

The very transformation that made the EEC more attractive for Turkey also increased the cost of exclusion. The 1981-1986 Mediterranean enlargement meant the definite Europeanisation of Turkey-Greece disputes and increased the weight of political factors in the enlargement process, as the three Mediterranean countries being offered the prospect of membership was meant to illustrate the primacy of political considerations over economic ones, being framed as precipitated by their democratic consolidation.²²

In December 1989 the European Commission finally replied to the Turkish request confirming Turkey's eligibility. Yet, it did so with little enthusiasm, stating that accession talks could not be considered before 1993, and suggesting to explore other possibilities such as the CU.²³

This was not the response that Turkey had wished for but global and domestic factors contributed to accelerating the process that led to the signature of the CU in December 1995. The collapse of the Soviet system and the global push for trade liberalization contributed to an increase in the attractiveness of the CU for Turkey. The active mobilization of actors from Turkish civil society in favor of its signature, and the then Prime Minister Tansu Çiller warning that a rejection could lead to "strengthening the Islamic anti-western and anti-European forces in Turkey and thus contribute to the weakening of Turkey's bonds with the West", contributed to overcoming the resistance of those members of the European Parliament that were hesitant due to Turkey's human right's record.²⁴

Therefore, signing the CU was not a foreign policy goal in itself, but the corollary of two previous critical decisions: the signature of the Ankara Agreement in 1963 and the request to join the EEC in 1987. It was, in fact, a means to reach the very same goal: membership.²⁵ The 1987 decision, the Commission response in 1989, and the process that led to the signature of the CU also illustrate the extent to which political factors had become more relevant, formally confirmed with the criteria established at the European Council of Copenhagen in 1993 to assess future applications to join the EU.²⁶ Changes within the EU made Turkey's prospect of joining the common market a more arduous endeavor. The narrative of double standards gained traction. The seeds of grievance and discrimination had been planted on the Turkish side and would continue growing in the following years partly because Turkey's expectations had gone up; partly because the EU was about to prioritize the accession of the Central and Eastern European Countries, Malta and, problematically for Turkey, the Republic of Cyprus (RoC).

22 Sevilay Elgün Kahraman, "Rethinking Turkey-European Union Relations in the Light of Enlargement", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 1, No 1, 2000, p. 5.

23 European Commission, "Commission Opinion on Turkey's Request for Accession to the Community", 20 December 1989, <http://aei.pitt.edu/4475/1/4475.pdf> (Accessed 28 February 2022).

24 Heinz Kramer "The EU-Turkey Customs Union: Economic Integration amidst Political Turmoil", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 1, No 1, 1996, p. 61.

25 Ziya Öniş, "An Awkward Partnership: Turkey's Relations with the European Union in Comparative-Historical Perspective", *Journal of European Integration History*, Vol. 7, No 1, 2001, p. 105-120.

26 According to this criteria, candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. Membership presupposes the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership (*acquis communautaire*).

From Luxembourg (1997) to Helsinki (1999): What had Changed?

Precisely because Turkey perceived the CU as a means to start accession negotiations, disillusion was higher when, unlike other applicants, Turkey was not considered a candidate country by the EU in the Luxembourg European Council in December 1997. Unlike the formal candidates, Turkey could not benefit from the pre-accession strategy and related assistance.

The Council confirmed “Turkey’s eligibility for accession to the EU” and that the country was to “be judged on the basis of the same criteria as the other applicant States”. Yet, it suggested Turkey explore a different strategy which included its involvement in a “European Conference” meant to “enable the Member States of the EU and Turkey to step up their dialogue and cooperation in areas of common interest.”²⁷ Turkey felt discriminated against and that the EU’s offer harmed its national dignity.²⁸ The Luxembourg decision was a moment in which “EU expectations and Turkey’s expectations clearly diverged”, and both sides exhibited a credibility deficit.²⁹ The Turkish government thus not only refused to participate in the said European Conference, but also suspended political dialogue with the EU in 1998.

Disillusion and resentment gave way to hope, engagement and change two years later. The Helsinki European Council in 1999, with the decision to formally consider Turkey as a candidate country, became one of the most substantial turning points in Turkey-EU relations, and reflected a significant foreign policy shift on the part of the EU. In the Finnish capital, the leaders of the EU welcomed “recent positive developments (...) as well as its intention to continue its reforms towards complying with the Copenhagen criteria”. They also stated that “Turkey is a candidate State destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate States” which “like other candidate States, will benefit from a pre-accession strategy to stimulate and support its reforms.”³⁰

What had changed from 1997 to 1999? Why did the EU reconsider its strategy vis-à-vis Turkey’s membership application? And how did they justify it? There were neither major structural changes at the international level, nor sudden external crises significantly affecting EU-Turkey relations. The key drivers of change were to be found on the EU side with the first being the victory of the red-green coalition in the 1998 German elections. The previous chancellor, Helmut Köhl and his party, the Christian Democrats of the CDU-CSU, had been vocal in their opposition to giving Turkey candidate status. As several authors have argued, Turkey became a topic of domestic politics.³¹ Despite the efforts of the then Turkish Prime Minister,

27 European Union, “Luxembourg European Council, Presidency Conclusions”, 13 December 1997, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21114/luxembourg-european-council.pdf> (Accessed 28 February 2022).

28 Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War*, London, Hurst & Company, 2003, p. 109.

29 Atilla Eralp, “Turkey and the European Union”, p. 71-72; Mehmet Uğur, *The European Union and Turkey: An Anchor/Credibility Dilemma*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999.

30 European Union, “Helsinki European Council, Presidency Conclusions”, 11 December 1999, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21046/helsinki-european-council-presidency-conclusions.pdf> (Accessed 28 February 2022).

31 Stephan Martens, “L’Allemagne et l’Élargissement de l’Union Européenne. Le cas de la Turquie”, *Est-Ouest*, No. 6; Heinz Kramer, “German Policy towards Turkey under the Red-Green Coalition Government (1997-2003)”, *VVA, Contemporary Issues in International Politics, Essay in honour to Seyfi Tashan*, Ankara, Foreign

Mesut Yılmaz to persuade Helmut Köhl to soften his position on Turkey,³² the conviction of the Chancellor and his party that the EU was a “civilizational project”, a sort of “Christian club” in which Turkey could at most aspire to benefit from a *Zollunion plus*, a privileged CU, was a major obstacle for Turkey’s aspirations.³³

The replacement of Köhl and his party by Gerhard Schröder and the Red-Green coalition in 1998 was an opportunity for Turkey to relaunch its bid for candidacy. As pointed out by Müftüler-Baç and McLaren, Germany’s national preferences regarding EU-Turkey relations had changed, and this explains the “change of heart in the EU from Luxembourg to Helsinki.”³⁴ The change of government introduced a radically different conception of European and even German identity.³⁵ Schröder’s personal involvement as an advocate for a different approach toward Turkey, one in which Turkey would be treated like any other candidate, was also a relevant factor.³⁶ Moreover, the Greens’ foreign affairs minister, Joschka Fischer, also rejected religion as a condition to assess the merits of candidates for enlargement. The new German government tried to highlight this change in the European Council of Cologne during the first half of 1999, but the opposition of other member states, among them Greece, prevented it.

The lifting of the Greek veto at the Helsinki European Council of December 1999 was the second major driver. Greek-Turkish relations had deteriorated in the mid-90s, reaching their nadir with the 1996 Imia-Kardak crisis, but a series of factors reversed this trend during in 1999. Firstly, George Papandreou replaced Theodoros Pangalos as foreign affairs minister in February. Papandreou was keen to establish a more cooperative relationship with his Turkish counterpart, İsmail Cem, and espoused a different conception of Greek national security that viewed Turkey’s Europeanization favorably.³⁷ The political shift was facilitated once the diplomatic drift on Abdullah Öcalan’s capture in Nairobi came to an end, and it was further enabled by the effects of the earthquakes in Turkey in August and Greece in September 1999. These natural catastrophes triggered what was later referred to as “earthquake diplomacy”, favored greater social empathy, and contributed to strengthening the democratic civil society

Policy Institute, 2004, p. 89-103; Martin Grosse Hüttmann “Die Türkei ist anders als Europa: Die öffentliche Debatte um einen EU-Beitritt der Türkei in Deutschland”, Angelos Giannakopoulos and Konstadinos Maras (eds.), *Die Türkei-Debatte in Europa, ein vergleich*. Wiesbaden, VS Verlag, 2005, p. 35-47.

32 Hüseyin Bağcı, “Turkish-German Relations after the 1997 Luxemburg European Council”, Hüseyin Bağcı, Jackson Janes and Ludler Kühnhardt (eds.), *Parameters of Partnership: the U.S. – Turkey – Europe*, Baden-Baden, NomosVerlangsgelleschaft, 1999, p. 91.

33 William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774-2000*, p. 239; Gamze Avcı, “Putting the Turkish Candidacy into Context”, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 7, No 1, 2002, p. 94; Stephan Martens, “L’Allemagne et l’Élargissement...”.

34 Meltem Müftüler-Baç and Lauren McLaren, “Enlargement Preferences and Policy-Making in the European Union: Impacts on Turkey”, *Journal of European Integration*, Vol 25, No 1, 2003, p. 24.

35 It is worth recalling that this was during the second half of the period when the issue of German nationality for Turkish origin citizens was high on the domestic agenda.

36 “Soutenu par les Milieux D’affaires, le Chancelier Schröder s’est fait le Champion d’Ankara”, *Le Monde*, 7 October 2004, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2004/10/07/soutenu-par-les-milieux-d-affaires-le-chancelier-schroder-s-est-fait-le-champion-d-ankara_382029_1819218.html (Accessed 28 February 2022).

37 In an interview published by *Odysey* in March-April 2000, İsmail Cem described developments in bilateral relations as “mutually beneficial” and explained that Papandreou’s approach was different to that of his predecessor, “inspiring trust and displaying political courage”. Excerpts from this interview are compiled in İsmail Cem, *Turkey in the New Century*, Mersin, Rüstem Publishing, p. 181-186.

in Turkey. Its impact also reached EU-Turkey relations, as Greece lifted its long-standing veto on Turkey's candidacy for membership.³⁸

Other factors contributed to a more positive assessment of Turkey's bid in Helsinki but did not have as much impact as the change in the German government and the Greek-Turkish détente. Typifying these relevant but not determining factors was in Kosovo and the need for greater EU-NATO cooperation in the security field, for which Turkey's agreement was indispensable.³⁹ The not always subtle pressures by the US at the highest level may have persuaded some Atlanticist decision-makers within the EU, but had no impact or was even counterproductive among others, such as the then Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker, who considered it an interference in the EU's internal affairs. In contrast, the Finnish EU-term presidency helped Turkey's aspirations. Together with the newly appointed High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy and Secretary General of the Council, Javier Solana, the Finns embarked on intense and creative diplomacy to reach an agreement acceptable to all parties, finally making possible the family photo with Prime Minister Ecevit in the Finnish capital.

Thus, the Helsinki decision represented an unquestionable foreign policy shift on the part of the EU, thanks to a change in Greek and German policies toward Turkey, which was only possible due to new leaderships, visions and narratives in both countries. The impact of those changes was reinforced by an external shock – the earthquakes – and by a new international reality in which Turkey's cooperation with the West became more relevant.

Helsinki was not the result of a foreign policy change by Turkey but was rather the attainment of a life-long aspiration of Turkey's decision-makers, that of being treated like any other European country. The Helsinki decision would have major implications for Turkey in the following years, as it created the conditions for vast political and legislative reforms and the strengthening of the pro-EU civil society in Turkey which, in turn, favored a positive evolution of Turkey's progress in its path towards accession. As stated by Tocci, the accession process became a key anchor in supporting democratization and modernization in Turkey, and although change was largely driven by endogenous factors, the form and timing of domestic change was intricately linked with the launch of Turkey's accession process.⁴⁰

Another enduring impact of the Helsinki decision on EU-Turkey relations was a change in the way the EU approached the conflict in Cyprus. The European leaders had agreed that the settlement of the conflict in Cyprus would no longer be a precondition for its accession, following pressure from Greece.⁴¹ The impact of this decision would become even more visible once the RoC joined the EU in May 2004, as explained in the next section.

38 See, among others, Philip Robins, "Confusion at Home, Confusion Abroad", *International Affairs*, Vol. 79, No 3, 2003, p. 548; Paul Kubicek "The Earthquake, the European Union and Political Reform in Turkey", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 7, No 1, 2002, p. 6-10; Soli Özel, "After the Tsunami", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No 2, 2003, p. 88-91.

39 Atila Eralp, "Turkey and the European Union", p. 75-79.

40 Nathalie Tocci, "Europeanization in Turkey: Trigger or Anchor for Reform?", *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 10, No 1, 2005, p. 82.

41 Neil Nugent, "EU Enlargement and the Cyprus Problem", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 38, No 1, 2000, p. 134.

Yes, But: The Unenthusiastic Opening of Negotiations (2005)

A virtuous cycle opened after the Helsinki European Council which has also been referred to as Turkey's "golden age of Europeanization and democratization reforms".⁴² Incentives for change were strong. And the EU was ready to positively respond to changes in Turkey.

The tripartite government (ANAP-DSP-MHP), despite little internal cohesion, introduced major political and legislative reforms which included, among others, the abolition of the death penalty and more flexibility in the use of languages other than Turkish. In 2000, the government also instituted a Secretariat General for EU Affairs which, among other goals, was tasked with boosting reforms that could advance the negotiations with the EU. The major financial crisis of the years 2000-2001 in Turkey would only consolidate this reformist path.

The first AKP governments not only continued this reformist path but were able to accelerate it thanks to their comfortable majority in parliament. The inclusion in its ranks of liberal figures, and the realization that the reforms requested by the EU in areas such as civil-military relations were in line with the domestic priorities of the party, bolstered this process. Altunışık also contextualized these efforts in a shared attempt by Turkey's leaders and international partners to present Turkey as a model of democratization for other Muslim countries and political forces. This had domestic returns as it "brought the AKP support from the secularists, especially from those who were impressed by its promises to improve Turkey's relations with the EU."⁴³

These reforms, in any case, followed what the EU had requested from Turkey. The EU had tasked the European Commission with evaluating Turkey's progress, and the assessment was positive. In December 2004, the European Council, based on the report and recommendation from the Commission, concluded that Turkey fulfilled the Copenhagen political criteria and, consequently, accession negotiations could be opened. Therefore, Turkey's reforms then became the main driver of change, but other factors contributed to strengthen this virtuous cycle, and ultimately to the decision to open accession negotiations.

Globally, the September 11 attacks highlighted the need for dialogue between the West and the Muslim world, and "the incorporation of Turkey as a full member acquired a new meaning" as a message toward the Muslim countries but also toward the EU's own Muslim population.⁴⁴ Not everyone agreed. Right-wing politicians, ranging from far-right parties to mainstream figures such as Valéry Giscard d'Estaing,⁴⁵ then President of the European Convention, were vocal in their opposition to Turkey's eligibility, and openly contested its Europeanness. The politicization of the debate, and the rise of the civilizational narrative

42 Ziya Öniş, "Conservative Globalism at the Crossroads: The Justice and Development Party and the Thorny Path to Democratic Consolidation in Turkey", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 14, No 1, 2009, p. 34.

43 Meliha Benli Altunışık, "The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East", *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No 1/2, 2005, p. 50.

44 Ziya Öniş, "Turkish Modernisation and Challenges for the New Europe", *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 9, No 3, 2004, p. 21.

45 "Pour ou Contre l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union Européenne", *Le Monde*, 8 November 2002, https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2002/11/08/pour-ou-contre-l-adhesion-de-la-turquie-a-l-union-europeenne_297386_3214.html (Accessed 28 February 2022).

placed the Social Democrats and the Greens on the side of those favorable to starting negotiations, because of their rejection of the association of the EU with Christianity.⁴⁶ This was notable considering that just a few years earlier the main obstacle to the signing of the CU had come from the socialist group in the European Parliament. In Turkey, these dynamics also reinforced what Pinar Bilgin and Ali Bilgiç described as an AKP-led geographic imagination that toned down Turkey's belonging to the West, to prioritize its own "civilizational basin."⁴⁷

Other factors pushed in the opposite direction, helping explain why despite Turkey's fulfilment of a long-lasting foreign policy aspiration – opening negotiations – enthusiasm was lacking. In May 2004 the EU had continued the enlargement process, adding eight countries from Eastern and Southern Europe, Malta and RoC, and the EU showed little appetite for further enlargements. Two concepts became popular: "absorption capacity" and "enlargement fatigue". As for negotiations with Turkey, the December 2004 Council Conclusions foresaw "long transitional periods, derogations, specific arrangements or permanent safeguard clauses" and, more importantly, despite stating that the "shared objective of the negotiations is accession" the Council emphasized that "these negotiations are an open-ended process, the outcome of which cannot be guaranteed beforehand."⁴⁸

The accession of RoC into the EU added even more uncertainty. The EU had agreed in Helsinki that the settlement of the conflict would no longer be a pre-requisite for the accession. Yet, the EU had hoped for a solution, and backed without reservation the 'yes' vote in the referendum on the Annan Plan for reunification that took place on April 24, 2004. However, a large segment of the politicians of the RoC, including the President of the Republic, Tassos Papadopoulos, campaigned against it. The result was that the Greek Cypriots rejected the plan, while the Turkish Cypriots approved it. The RoC became a full member of the EU a few days later, complicating Turkey-EU relations further. Any major decision on Turkey had to be taken from then on with the assent of a government that had no diplomatic relations with Ankara. Although Nicosia did not block the decision to start negotiations or the opening of them in 2005, the effects of the absence of a settlement became evident very soon. Arguing that Turkey had refused to apply to RoC the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement, the Council decided in 2006 that eight chapters could not be considered for opening.

Political changes in the EU's largest member states also complicated Turkey's EU bid. In 2005, the Christian Democrats won the election in Germany. Angela Merkel's party had been one of the most outspoken opponents of Turkey's accession and had instead backed the

46 This fact was confirmed by several members of the European Parliament in confidential interviews with the author of this paper conducted in 2004 and 2005. These interviews fed, among others, this publication: Eduard Soler i Lecha, "Debating Turkey's Accession: National and Ideological Cleavages in the European Parliament", Esther Barbé and Anna Herranz (eds.), *The Role of Parliaments in European Foreign Policy*, Barcelona, Office of the European Parliament, 2005, p. 77-102. On the EP discussion, see also Paul T. Levin, *Turkey and the European Union, Christian and Secular Images of Islam*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 181-204.

47 Pinar Bilgin and Ali Bilgiç, "Turkey's "New" Foreign Policy towards Eurasia", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 52, No 2, 2011.

48 European Union, "Brussels European Council, Presidency Conclusions", 1 February 2005, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/83201.pdf (Accessed 28 February 2022).

idea of exploring a “privileged partnership”. Yet, the only option for Merkel to govern was to form a *grosse koalition* with the social democrats. This contributed to preventing a major policy shift toward Turkey, but it is also worth noting that the new chancellor systematically endorsed the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*, i.e., agreements must be respected.

The election of Nicolas Sarkozy as President of France in May 2007 was far more detrimental to Turkey’s European aspirations. France had become the epicenter of the political and social debate on Turkey’s Europeanness, and the Armenian diaspora was also extremely active against the prospects of membership. In that context, Nicolas Sarkozy used opposition to Turkey’s EU membership in a successful attempt to undermine the authority of his predecessor, Jacques Chirac, federating around him the traditionally atomized French right.⁴⁹ It took only a few weeks for Sarkozy, after being elected president, to announce a veto of the opening of major chapters such as economic and monetary policies, arguing that they were too closely linked to the prospect of full membership.

To sum up, the opening of the negotiations was a significant change in Turkey-EU relations, which was enabled by the political reforms introduced in Turkey which, in turn, favored a positive assessment of Turkey’s candidacy by the member states and European institutions. Yet, the way in which negotiations were opened and the early decision to freeze some of the chapters resulted from substantial political changes in the major EU states and the RoC’s accession. The narrative that the goal of the relationship was full membership was progressively replaced a Turkey as a “special case” one. Rhetorical entrapment and institutional inertia prevented a more radical shift.⁵⁰ This new reality gradually transformed the previous virtuous cycle into a vicious one. Negative signals from the EU were met in Turkey, once more, with mistrust and accusations of double standards. The negotiations entered a comatose stage by the 2010s, pro-Turkey enlargement voices in Europe lost influence, pro-EU and reformist sectors in Turkey lost leverage, and Europeanization in the form of political or legal reforms became increasingly selective.⁵¹

49 For further details on the French stance and its impact on Turkey-EU relations, particularly under Sarkozy, see: Eduard Soler i Lecha et al., “It Takes Two to Tango...”; Didier Billion, “France-Turquie: Entre Tensions et Normalisations... De la difficulté de Parvenir à une Relation Apaisée”, *Confluences Méditerranée*, No. 96, 2016/1, 2016, p. 71-83; Dorothee Schmid, *The Franco-Turkish Relationship in Turmoil*, Istanbul, EDAM, 2007.

50 Schimmelfennig argues that “the better a candidate state meets the membership norms of the EU, the more likely rhetorical entrapment is to occur, and the more likely the opponents of membership are compelled to accept enlargement against their national preferences” and that “thanks to rhetorical entrapment, however, the opponents of Turkish membership could not deny Turkey’s progress on its way toward liberal democracy and could not legitimately call into question the Commission’s report and recommendation to open accession negotiations”. Frank Schimmelfennig, “Rhetorical Entrapment in EU-Turkey Relations”, Reiners Wulf and Turhan Ebru (eds.), *EU-Turkey Relations*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, p. 139-156.

51 Gözde Yılmaz, “From Europeanization to de-Europeanization: The Europeanization Process of Turkey in 1999–2014”, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 24, No 1, 2016, p. 86–100; Başak Alpan, “Europeanization and EU–Turkey Relations: Three Domains, Four Periods”, Reiners Wulf and Turhan Ebru (eds.), *EU-Turkey Relations*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, p. 107-137; Senem Aydın-Düzgit, “De-Europeanisation through Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of AKP’s Election Speeches”, *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 21, No 1, 2016, p. 45–58.

Transactional or Adversarial Relations? The EU-Turkey Deal on Migration (2016) and the Sanctions Regime (2019)

The late 2010s ushered in further deterioration. Enlargement fatigue set in, as also did a specific “Turkey fatigue” in the EU.⁵² There was no appetite for drastic change, firstly because the EU did not have a better alternative to offer Turkey, at least not one which could be acceptable to the Turkish government. And secondly, because neither the EU nor Turkey wanted to be blamed for damaging the relationship, and both parties sought to maintain or even increase cooperation in certain areas.

Despite Turkey’s frustration and some provocative statements by its leaders, Ankara was not ready to abandon the goal of EU membership in favor of organizations.⁵³ At best, Turkey was willing to explore a more multidimensional and rhythmic foreign policy as defined by Ahmet Davutoğlu, in which the EU would remain *a* priority but not *the* priority.⁵⁴

Disagreements increased, but both parties sought to preserve some areas of cooperation. This was the rationale of the positive agenda proposed by the European Commission in 2012 and the driver behind the decision of the European Council in October 2020 “to launch a positive political EU-Turkey agenda with a specific emphasis on the modernisation of the Customs Union and trade facilitation, people to people contacts, high level dialogues, continued cooperation on migration issues”. This relationship has been described as one of “conflictual cooperation”, and the negotiations on migrations epitomize the increasingly transactional nature of EU-Turkey relations, and the willingness of both parties to preserve areas of cooperation despite deteriorated political relations.⁵⁵ The foreign policy goals shifted both for Turkey and the EU, as they were no longer aiming at convergence but were content to preserve cooperation.

The terms of the agreement on refugees reached in March 2016 by Turkey and the European countries created the illusion that the accession process could be reactivated, or that at least Turkish cooperation with the EU could intensify. The prospect of modernizing the CU was then depicted as a way to re-anchor Turkey to the EU, encouraging rules-based governance while maintaining EU engagement with Turkey, in the absence of a functional accession

52 Eduard Soler I Lecha et al., “It Takes Two to Tango...”.

53 One of those statements was made in a conversation with journalists after a foreign trip to Uzbekistan in 2016. According to daily *Hürriyet*, the president told reporters that Turkey “should first of all feel relaxed about the EU and not be fixated about joining it” and said that when people ask his opinion he wonders “why shouldn’t Turkey be in the Shanghai 5” referring to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. See “President Erdoğan: EU not everything, Turkey may join Shanghai Five”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 20 November 2016, <https://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/president-erdogan-eu-not-everything-turkey-may-join-shanghai-five-106321> (Accessed 28 February 2022).

54 Parts of this doctrine are written in Davutoğlu’s 2001 book: Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, İstanbul, Küre Yayınları, 2001. This book has been analyzed, among others, by Bülent Aras, “The Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, No 3, 2009; Şaban Kardaş, “Charting the New Turkish Foreign Policy”, *International Journal: Canada’s Journal of Global Policy Analysis*, Vol. 67, No 1, 2012, p. 1-6; and Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, “The Davutoğlu Doctrine and Turkish Foreign Policy”, Middle Eastern Studies Programme, Working Paper No. 8/2010, 2010.

55 Beken Saatçioğlu and Funda Tekin, *Turkey and the European Union, Key Dynamics and Future Scenarios*, Baden-Baden, Nomos, 2021.

process.⁵⁶ Hope soon dissipated as the EU stated that no new chapters were being considered for opening.⁵⁷ The 2018 report of the European Commission went further when it bluntly stated that the country had been “moving away from the European Union”.⁵⁸ In June 2018, the Council reached the same conclusion and, therefore, Turkey’s accession came to a standstill and no further chapters were to be considered for opening or closing.

In 2019 relations deteriorated even further. Reacting to Turkey’s drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean, EU ministers agreed in July 2019 to further downgrade relations with Turkey, endorsing the Commission’s proposal to reduce pre-accession assistance.⁵⁹ In November that year, the Council adopted a framework regime of restrictive measures – sanctions in the EU’s jargon – that could be activated to target natural and legal persons responsible for or involved in what the EU considers “illegal drilling for hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean.”⁶⁰ In these circumstances, both Turkey and the EU got close to fundamentally modifying the goal of the relationship, with rivalry overshadowing prospects of cooperation, and burying any hopes for convergence. Several incidents showed the risk of serious escalation. The migration crisis on the Greek border in February 2020, following Erdoğan’s warning that millions of refugees would head to the EU if Turkey was not helped to relocate some of them within parts of northern Syria, prompted a tough Greek response, fully backed by the other member states and the EU institutions.⁶¹ In July 2020, a spat over the Libyan arms embargo involving French and Turkish warships in the Mediterranean Sea also revealed the perils of sustained deterioration.

By the end of 2020, hostility had given way to a period of fragile de-escalation, and both parties seemed to recognize that an adversarial relationship was not profitable. Turkey halted the Oruç Reis explorations, and the perception in Ankara’s decision-making circles was that Turkey was fighting on too many fronts at the same time. The European Council decided not to expand the sanctions regime. Signs of goodwill and more cooperative statements were

56 Sinan Ülgen, “Trade as Turkey’s EU Anchor”, *Carnegie Europe*, December 2017; & Çiğdem Nas, “Turkey-EU Customs Union: Its Modernization and Potential for Turkey-EU Relations”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 20, No 3, 2018, p. 43-60. Yet, many in pro-EU circles did not express much enthusiasm for it and some analysts argued that it could even damage relations, transforming “a cooperation opportunity into a bargaining matter”. See, for instance, Özgehan Şenyuva and Çiğdem Üstün “A Deal to End “the” Deal: Why the Refugee Agreement is a Threat to Turkey-EU Relations”, *On Turkey*, GMFUS, 5 July 2016, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/deal-end-deal-why-refugee-agreement-threat-turkey-eu-relations> (Accessed, 28 February 2022)

57 European Council, “EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016”, 18 March 2016, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/> (Accessed 28 February 2022).

58 European Commission, “Commission Staff Working Document. Turkey 2018 Report”, 17 April 2018, <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2019-05/20180417-turkey-report.pdf> (Accessed 16 March 2022).

59 Council of the EU, “Turkish drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean: Council adopts conclusions”, 15 July 2019, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/07/15/turkish-drilling-activities-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-council-adopts-conclusions/> (Accessed 28 February 2022).

60 Council of the EU, “Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/1894 of 11 November 2019 concerning restrictive measures in view of Turkey’s unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean”, 12 November 2019, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32019D1894&from=GA> (Accessed 28 February 2022).

61 Selin Türkeş Kılıç, ““I thank Greece for Being our European Shield: Von der Leyen Commission’s Spatial Imaginations during the Turkish-Greek Border Crisis in March 2020”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 20, No 77, p. 109-125.

heard again in Greek-Turkish bilateral relations, and bilateral talks resumed in January 2021. Erdoğan stated that Turkey wanted to turn the page in its relations with the EU. In March 2021, the European Commission released another communication in which, after listing all the areas where disagreement persisted, it affirmed that “Turkey has shown a calmer, more constructive attitude on various issues, including in its bilateral relations with several EU Member States”. Revamping the idea of the “positive agenda”, this document also suggested that “the Union should put a number of possible areas of cooperation on the table to allow for a progressive, proportionate and reversible approach”.

In this period, EU-Turkey relations entered one of the most volatile periods of this roller coaster ride.⁶² Understanding the sudden changes in the relationship requires differentiating between those factors that contributed to increasing the adversarial nature of the relationship, and those that inhibited drastic decisions which would have terminated not only the hopes of convergence but even the preservation of cooperation.

Domestic changes in Turkey mainly favored the turn towards an adversarial relationship. Several processes and decisions, among them the abrupt ending of the peace process with the PKK in July 2015, the new alliance between the AKP and the nationalist MHP, paving the way for the constitutional reform and the establishment of a presidential system in 2017, the traumatic impact of the coup d'état attempt, and the demise of Ahmet Davutoğlu all negatively impacted Turkey's relations with the EU, as long as they implied a rebalance from soft to hard power, and fueled a more nationalistic narrative.⁶³

Foreign policy choices made by some of the EU member states also fueled tensions. Greece started pursuing a more assertive foreign policy, strengthening its relations with Egypt, Israel, France, and the Gulf states – all of which had their own bilateral issues with Turkey – which occasionally took the form of new multilateral fora from which Turkey felt excluded. The personalization of EU-Turkey relations, epitomized in the frequent clashes between the leaders of Turkey and France, also tarnished relations. International factors, namely the war in Syria or the rise of illiberal leaderships across the world, contributed but did not trigger by themselves the deterioration of the relations.

The counterforces that inhibited a more drastic deterioration are also diverse. Strong interdependencies between Turkey and the EU increased the cost of the divorce, particularly due to increased vulnerabilities experienced in Ankara, Brussels, and the other capitals. Interestingly, the decision to pragmatically cooperate in 2016 was due to both parties' frustration with the evolution of regional dynamics in the Middle East and North Africa and a shared feeling of vulnerability.⁶⁴ The EU's perception of vulnerability has been amplified ever since, as it deals

62 The author borrows the idea of a roller coaster ride from one of the two anonymous reviewers of this article.

63 See, among others, Meliha Benli Altunışık “The New Turn in Turkey's Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Regional and Domestic Insecurities” *IAI Papers*, No 20, July 2020. <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/new-turn-turkeys-foreign-policy-middle-east-regional-and-domestic-insecurities> (Accessed, 14 January 2022); Ilke Toygür et al., “Turkey's Foreign Policy and its Consequences for the EU”, February 2022, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2022/653662/EXPO_IDA\(2022\)653662_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2022/653662/EXPO_IDA(2022)653662_EN.pdf) (Accessed 16 March 2022).

64 The 2011 uprisings in several Arab states had given Turkey the impression that this could be an opportunity to expand its influence. Yet, these hopes started to fade away in 2013 with the removal of Morsi in Egypt, Al-

with several crises simultaneously. Under these circumstances, the costs of a bilateral crisis with Turkey are even higher. Turkey's challenges, which range from the economic crisis – aggravated by the effects of the pandemic – and the perception that in the foreign policy realm Turkey could not overstretch itself, also favored de-escalation attempts.

The fact that neither Turkey nor the EU were able to convincingly propose an alternative to the current accession negotiations, favored the preservation of the *status quo*.⁶⁵ The dilemmas and challenges that such a decision would produce also contributed. For Turkey, particularly among some segments of the elite, renouncing the aspiration of joining the EU could be seen as a defeat and it could be highly divisive, particularly if justified through civilizational narratives. For the EU, the demise of Turkey's enlargement process could also imply acknowledging the limits of its transformative capacity, and having to assume part of the responsibility for said demise. Therefore, ideational and normative arguments complemented and sustained interest-based justifications for the need to avoid a definitive rupture and preserve cooperation.

Conclusion

Remaining anchored in the European integration process has been a constant priority of Turkish foreign policy and part of its international orientation in the last 60 years. However, its foreign policy goals evolved over time. In the 1960s, the goal for Turkey was to be associated with the EEC. By the end of the 1980s, this was no longer satisfactory. Turkey aimed at being treated like any other European applicant country. The rhetorical confirmation of its eligibility was insufficient. Turkey aspired to be formally recognized as a candidate, to be able to start accession negotiations, and to receive pre-accession support. This required program changes such as becoming a signatory to the CU as an intermediate step. In 1999, Turkey was finally considered a candidate, and in 2005 accession negotiations started. By 2016, the goal of the relationship had clearly moved toward transactional cooperation, and by 2019 the risk of turning the relationship into an antagonistic one was apparent. A major rupture was nonetheless averted, partly because of institutional inertia, partly because neither Turkey nor the EU could afford the costs of an abrupt divorce, and they compromised their respective international orientations as a Western country (for Turkey), and as a transformative force (for the EU).

The drivers of change (and its inhibitors) emanating from Turkey are necessary but insufficient elements to understand the fluctuating nature of these relations. Changes within the

Assad's military victories, a new surge of migrants and refugees heading toward Turkey, and the temporary crisis with Moscow following the downing of a Russian jet that had allegedly entered Turkey's airspace. The EU's hopes that the Arab uprisings could be an opportunity to promote "deep democracy" and "shared prosperity" in its southern neighborhood also faded away rather quickly. In 2015, the review of the neighborhood policy focused instead on the idea of "stabilization".

65 The exploration of such alternatives has gained traction in expert communities, but not among officials. See, among other, Meltem Müftüler-Baç, "Turkey's Future with the European Union: An Alternative Model of Differentiated Integration", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 18, No 3, 2017, p. 416-438; Ilke Toygür, "A New Way Forward for EU-Turkey Relations", 26 January 2022, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/01/26/new-way-forward-for-eu-turkey-relations-pub-86264> (Accessed 16 March 2022); Ebru Turhan, "Thinking out of the Accession Box: The Potential and Limitations of Internal and External Differentiated Integration Between Turkey and the EU", *Centre International de formation européenne*, CIFE Policy Paper No. 58, 2017.

EU, including foreign policy changes in some member states, are a key factor. This article has highlighted instances in which major changes in EU-Turkey relations such as the 1999 decision on candidacy in the Helsinki European Council, resulted from changes in foreign policy goals in Brussels, Berlin, Paris, and Athens.

Global and regional transformations should be taken into consideration, as they have enabled change, accelerating or slowing down policy shifts in Turkey or the EU. As stated by Atila Eralp, “it is no longer useful to understand only the bilateral relationship but rather how the bilateral relationship fits into the global context.”⁶⁶ When writing these lines, the world is healing from the wounds of the COVID-19 pandemic, while wondering how wide and durable will be the effects of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. These two elements will combine with domestic drivers of change in Turkey and the EU, and will shape Turkey-EU relations in the years to come.

Finally, the article accounts for the different arguments used by Turkish and EU decision-makers to justify critical decisions, and how those arguments have fed the narratives, too. The utilitarian logic, that is, pragmatically alluding to the benefits and costs of certain decisions, played a large part in justifying why Turkey required special treatment or why a certain level of cooperation was to be preserved. In contrast, normative and ideational factors became particularly relevant when justifying more radical changes, be it in the form of a more ambitious relationship, but also for those advocating to end the accession process. Identity arguments have been used to justify both inclusion and exclusion, and the logic of appropriateness became a powerful argument employed by both sides.

Sixty years of Turkey-EU relations provide an excellent laboratory to study the intensity, the drivers, and the justifications of foreign policy changes. Neither the EU nor Turkey are satisfied with the current state of relations. This suggests that change is possible and necessary, but the direction of change cannot be taken for granted, and the modalities in which this could practically take shape are yet to be conceived.

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⁶⁶ Atila Eralp, “Multilateralism Matters...”

- Aydın-Düzgüt, Senem (2016). “De-Europeanisation through Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of AKP’s Election Speeches”, *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 21, No 1, p. 45–58.
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