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The interplay of national states' interests in Turkey's EU Accession negotiations: an historical perspective

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Abstract

This thesis explores the historical and strategic dimensions of Turkey's accession negotiations with the European Union (EU). Since Turkey's application for association in 1959, Turkey and the European Union have witnessed decades of complex diplomatic relations, influenced by both regional geopolitical shifts and the evolution of the European identity. The study traces these interactions across three distinct periods: Turkey's early ties with the European Economic Community (EEC) during the Cold War, the transformative post-Cold War era, and the contemporary challenges in EU-Turkey relations. It highlights how Turkey's strategic importance, economic concerns, and cultural differences have shaped its candidacy and analyzes the impact of internal EU developments on Turkey's potential membership. The work highlights the continuing relevance of national interests within EU Member States, but also of Turkey itself, which have contributed to the stagnation of accession talks, particularly after 2015, as issues of democratic backsliding in Turkey increased. This historical analysis provides insight into the interplay of identity, strategic relevance, and national interests in Turkey-EU relations, framing Turkey as both a strategic partner and a candidate in a process fraught with uncertainty.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Ever since the European Community's inception, Turkey and the European Union have been bound by an odd romantic entanglement. Intertwined by centuries of history, their geographical and cultural proximity and prosperous economic trade, the two have enjoyed structured relations since 1959, and have aimed, at least publicly, at cultivating a closer relationship. The root problem with Turkey's accession is strictly connected with the impossibility to find a broad consensus, both within Turkey and European Member states, in how their relationship should evolve. Turkey's place in Europe not only poses a diverse range of questions for the definition of what is "European", and if Turkey fits the given interpretation, but its membership would also imply the recognition of a new concept of a "strategic" Europe, involved with the events happening in its broader neighborhood, such as the Middle East. Never have relations between two entities so geographically near, been so dependent on these many variables, most of which fall outside of their control. Civil wars, geopolitical shifts, superpowers' politics and energetic problematics have shaped the direction of the diplomatic relationship between Turkey and European institutions far more considerably than anticipated. And conversely, their relationship is of fundamental importance not only in itself and for its regional consequences, but also because it has constructed the political form and identity of both Turkey and the European Union.

Turkey's relationship with the EU is unique due to the complex interplay of national interests, historical legacies, and changing international dynamics. Its status as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East, its membership in NATO, and its role in post-Cold War geopolitics have positioned Turkey as a critical strategic partner for Europe, even as persistent issues related to human rights, democratic governance, and cultural identity have plagued their interactions. This thesis examines Turkey's EU accession negotiations from a historical and strategic perspective, with a focus on how national interests have shaped and constrained this process: Turkey's accession cannot be understood merely as matter of meeting technical benchmarks, but rather a reflection of deep-seated national interests, geopolitical shifts, and cultural dynamics on both sides. The interplay of these factors has led to periods of progress, such as Turkey's recognition as an official candidate for membership in 1999, as well as significant setbacks, including the stalling of negotiations after 2015. By tracing Turkey-EU relations from the Cold War through to contemporary developments, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors that have influenced Turkey's accession path, and in particular, it addresses the evolving interests

of both Turkey and key EU Member States, and how these have shaped the trajectory of negotiations over the past several decades. Despite its longstanding application and the strategic importance of its relationship with Europe, Turkey's accession has indeed stalled, particularly after 2015, as concerns over democratic backsliding and human rights abuses have intensified. This thesis contends that understanding Turkey's EU candidacy and its failed accession require not only a look at current political dynamics but also an appreciation of the deeper historical forces and strategic calculations that continue to shape the relationship.

Chapter I. – Turkey and the Economic Community during the Cold War

The desire for Turkey to be accepted in the European balance of powers is the venerable quest gripping the minds of Turkish political leaders at least since the Congress of Vienna of 1815, first under the name of Ottoman Empire and then as the Turkish state, (Inalcik, 1997). With the institutionalization of the European order in 1951 with the Treaty of Paris and the birth of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)[1], Turkey viewed the newly formed institution as a possibility not only to enter permanently its balance of powers but also to reap the economic benefits resulting from the progressively shared market. Strategic interests played a critical role during the Cold War year in the development of EEC – Turkey relations. Since joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952, Turkey has represented the cornerstone of American strategy in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East, and an asset due its geographical proximity to the Soviet Union (Bölme, 2022). The tight rope walked by European institutions in the development of its relations with Turkey always had to consider the strategic relevance of the Anatolic country in the chessboard of the Cold War: the necessity to keep Turkey close during the acute phases of the conflict reflect the United States' vital interests.

The following chapter provides a historical framework for Turkey-EC relations from the 1950s to the 1980s, dividing it into three phases: first, the establishment of the premises for future relations from the 1950s to the Additional Protocol of the Ankara Agreement, signed in 1970; secondly, the unstable 1970s where EC-Turkey relations suffered abrupt setbacks; and finally, the rapprochement of the 1980s, serving as the roots for its accession's negotiations of the early 2000s.

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[1] The Treaty of Paris of 1951 establishing the European Coal and Steel Community represented the first step of European integration: the plan to pool coal and steel resources, the underlining cause of bitter conflicts between European states for over a century, was a profound novelty in the development of relations between countries and served as a factor of diplomatic and economic stability in Western Europe (Rittberger, 2013).

1. From the Second World War to the Ankara Agreement and its Additional Protocol

After the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1958 with the Treaty of Rome[2], Turkey applied for association only one year later in 1959. The political considerations that brought to the decision to apply to the EEC already contain characterizing elements that would accompany the relationship between the two over the next fifty years: they can be roughly divided into two categories. The first is closely linked with Turkey's goal of "Westernization" or assimilation to the West: the process is not only central to the understanding of the different phases of the relationship between the European institutions and the Turkish state, but also explains the political thrusts in place since the early twentieth century. With the birth of the modern Turkish state from the Ottoman Empire's ashes in 1923, its founding president Mustafa Kemal Atatürk began a radical reorganization of the political, social and economic systems by setting the Western civilization as a definite criterion (Yurdsever Ates, 2003). The desire to be perceived as a sovereign state equal to its Western counterparts was the driving force behind the implementation of reforms resembling other European states: the Ottoman Caliphate was abolished, a secular state was established, and among others, women were granted the right to vote and a specific law concerning the compulsory usage of surnames was passed. Radical reforms were applied to education: Arabic script was replaced by the Latin script in 1928, and the Turkish language was progressively "purified" from Arabic and Persian influences, while "foreign" languages except for Western ones were forbidden from national education (Gole, 1997). With the establishment of the Turkish Republic, Islam was successfully driven from the political and social sphere, and its representatives who constituted a danger to Kemalist secularism were marginalized (Hemmati, 2013). The institutionalization of Western practices became the norm in a country that throughout the 1930s and 1940s, well beyond the death of its founder in 1938, wished to become part of the Western world. If put into perspective, the possibility to become an associate member of the EEC demonstrated the success of the implemented reforms beyond any doubt: by joining the club of European powers as a full member, Turkey would not be a mere spectator as it was during the

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[2] Following the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, further European integration resulted in the formalization of two treaties, creating the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), signed in Rome in 1958 by the 6 founding members (the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg) (Gilbert, 2012).

Congress of Vienna[3]. In many ways, the Cold War and Kemal Atatürk's Westernization project profoundly shaped Turkish foreign policy for the majority of the 20th century. Through the strategic alignment with the West and following the joining of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1952, Turkey also served as a deterrent to Soviet expansionism on NATO's southern flank, by providing military bases and monitoring installation for the verification of Soviet compliance with arms-control agreements. During the Cold War, with the exception of few isolated events directly related to Turkish national security, Turkey's foreign policy was primarily determined by its membership in NATO, as part of the ideological framework that wished to make Turkey part of the West, not only its Middle Eastern ally (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 3: Turkey as a Neighbour, 2015).

The second category of considerations that motivated Turkey to apply to become an associate to EEC in 1959 is motivated by a set of political and economic factors. While the possibility to access the profitable European shared market was certainly desirable, Turkish political leaders, concerned by Greece's filing a similar request to the EEC, sped up their application to prevent potential unequal treatment from the Community. The complex and unstable relationship between the two neighbors is in fact fundamental to grasp the relevancy of the unresolved matters that mounted up during the 1950s, and that would foreshadow future crises. Rooted in historical memories and traumas, both real and imagined, their national narratives and collective identities had, and still has to this day, been built upon the slighting and demonizing of the "Other" living across the Aegean Sea (Heraclides, 2011). Three main issues contributed to the progressive deterioration in their bilateral relations (Colibasanu, 2021). Firstly, after European's defeat in the Second World War, the long-standing sovereignty issue over the Dodecanese archipelago, contentious since the Venizelos–Tittoni agreement of 1919[4] between Greece and European, was resolved in Greece's favor in 1946. The altered balance of powers in the Aegean unsettled Turkey's stance and became a central security issue due to the archipelago proximity to the Turkish mainland. Concerns over

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[3] While the Ottoman Empire had been invited to the conference held in Vienna in 1815, the Anatolic Sultan had no influence in the rearrangement of European borders and in the design of its collective security system, essentially being relegated as a spectator (Ozavci, 2021).

[4] The Venizelos-Tittoni agreement was a secret agreement signed in July 1919 by the Prime Minister of Greece, Venizelos, and the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tittoni: it aimed at settling border disputes between the two countries and exchanged the Greek support for the Italian protectorate in Albania, with the transfer of the Dodecanese to Greece (Stavridis, 2022).

the Dodecanese were later aggravated by a second cause of deterioration in their relations: starting in 1958 and then expanded in 1982 to address territorial waters, the United Nations' Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) had in fact replaced the older concept of freedom of the seas, dating back to the 17th century. The new concept limited national rights to a specified belt of water extending from a nation's coastlines, typically 3 nautical miles (5.6 km; 3.5 mi) (Valparaiso University Law School, 1972), which further reduced Turkey's potential ability to act in the Aegean. The issue of the Dodecanese islands is also strictly linked with the policies of *enosis*[5] strongly advocated by Greece during the 1950s: the tensions that would escalate in the 1974 military coup find their roots in the 1959 Zürich and London Agreements and the subsequent 1960 Cypriot independence from English rule (Camp, 1980). The loss of influence over the Eastern Mediterranean in favor of Greece resulted in a lack of room for maneuver that, in the eyes of the Turkish elite, would only be worsened if Cyprus would succumb to Greek plans of *enosis* (Eitan Y. Alimi, 2015). The instability experienced by Turkey in the Mediterranean quickly turned the associate status to the European Economic Community as an imperative, rather than a potential path forward. If Greece had been able to consolidate its relationship with the European communities, the imbalance of the Eastern Mediterranean would be exported to Western capitals, places already more inclined to support the Greek nation, presented as the cradle of classical and Western civilization by the Romantic tradition of the nineteenth century.

The Community welcomed Turkey's 1959 application to the EEC for several reasons. Firstly, the Anatolic country represented a strategic axle for the Western alliance during the Cold War: located in soft belly of the Soviet Union and equipped with the critical passages of the Turkish Straits,

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[5] *Enosis* (in Greek Ένωσις, "union") is generally understood as the political and social movement of various Greek communities living outside of Greece to integrate the regions inhabited by them into the Greek state. When applied to Cyprus, the term has been used since 1950 when Greek Cypriots, around 78% of the population, requested to the British rule governing Cyprus for *enosis* with Greece. The political movement rapidly spiraled into the Greek Cypriot Armed Revolt lasting from 1955 to 1959 and led by EOKA (National Organization of Cypriot Fighters). At the same time, the Turkish population of Cyprus, around 12% of the population, supported by the Turkish government, opted for the partition of the island, also known as *taksim*. It was during this time of hard political violence that Ankara and Athens agreed to the establishment of an independent Cyprus in 1959 in Zürich, later endorsed by the British government during the London conference. The Zürich and London Agreements, also known as the Treaty of Guarantee, excluded both *enosis* and *taksim*, establishing Cyprus as an independent state whose constitutional and territorial integrity were guaranteed by Britain, Greece and Turkey. In December 1959, Archbishop Makarios was elected as the first Greek Cypriot President and Fazil Küçük as the Turkish Cypriot Vice-President of the Republic (Hatzivassiliou, 2005).

Turkey was the only country that stood in way for the Soviet Union to have access to a warm water port, and a secure and non-hostile access to the Mediterranean. Through a deeper long-term commitment to the Western Alliance at the EEC level, Turkey would be bound to Western powers even tighter, without being able to find Soviet support in alternative ways. The strategic reasoning is also closely related to the desire to treat Greece and Turkey on equal footing: to maximise the potential support to the Western bloc in the Eastern Mediterranean, both applications were accepted at the same time. Finally, Turkey's association with the EEC meant a victory for the Community in the 1950s competition with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)[6] for new members (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015).

Consequently, Turkey's application to be an associate of the EEC was accepted, and official negotiations began on September 29, 1959. While negotiations with Greece on an Association Agreement took only two years and were concluded in 1961 with the Athens Agreement, talks with Turkey lasted four years. The primary reason for the prolonged negotiations was the Community's concern about the potential socio-economic burden of an agreement with a large country whose economic development was significantly lower than the Community's average[7] (Görmez & Yiğit, 2009). The delay in the process was also due to the EEC's lack of experience in developing a model suitable for a country with a significantly lower level of development than the original Six members, combined with the almost complete absence of preparatory studies on the matter (Ilkin, 1990). Finally, a third reason for the delay is strictly connected with the military coup of May 27th, 1960, in Turkey: after the elimination of the government, deemed undemocratic by the military junta who had taken power, the restoration of the democratic government was perceived as a success for the Turkish population, but it uncovered the strong grip of the military

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[6] Established in 1960 by Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, EFTA aimed to foster economic cooperation and trade liberalization without the deeper political integration required by the EC. While the EC's broader ambitions to integrate its members both economically and politically were more attractive to some countries, others preferred the looser economic cooperation model of EFTA (Almlid, 2020). This competitive dynamic was particularly evident as both organizations sought to expand their influence in Europe, leading to negotiations and adjustments in their strategies to attract new member states.

[7] Following the Second World War, strong subsidies were allocated to support the joint ownership model of public and private enterprises (Görmez & Yiğit, 2009), emulating the system that was emerging in continental Europe. The economic performance was however poor if compared to Western European states: Turkey's economy was still largely based on agriculture and did not possess the heavy industry that characterized the economy of central Europe.

on state matters, which would constitute a problem for the following decades (Surid, 2019). The restoration of the government stalled the negotiations for almost a year, as the military junta retained power. At that time, opposition to association with Turkey based on ideological and identity-driven reasons was, instead, less relevant: among the European countries, only European, under General Charles de Gaulle, hesitated to sign an agreement with Turkey on identity grounds. These concerns were eventually overridden by European, which instead insisted that geostrategic factors should be the primary determinants of the Community's relations with Turkey, a stance maintained until the end of the Cold War (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015). Thus, negotiations were concluded in 1963 with the signing of the EEC–Turkey Association Agreement, known as the Ankara Agreement, on September 12th, 1963, marking the first contractual relationship between the two parties. The Turkish press referred to the agreement as historical, defining it as "*the most permanent and productive step in Turkey's efforts of the last 150 years to westernise and become an equal member to the Western world*" (Birand, 1963).

The Ankara agreement aimed at promoting a continuous and balanced strengthening of trade and economic relations between the EEC and Turkey, and to progressively establish a customs union consisting on three stages: first, a preparatory stage (five years), then a transitional stage involving the establishment of a customs union (twelve years), and a final stage where a full customs union would be inaugurated (European Parliament, 1963). Through the creation of an Association Council where top-level officials from both sides would regularly meet, and a Joint Parliamentary Committee where Turkish parliamentarians and members of the European Parliament[8] would meet (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015), the establishment of a customs union would be smoothed by the frequent meetings of government officials. Despite the tight deadline, the preparatory stage was not concluded until 1970 due to Turkey's complex financial situation[9]. Following the end of the preparatory stage, the Additional

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[8] The European Parliament Assembly created in 1958 under the Treaty of Rome changed its name on March 30th,1962 and became the European Parliament. Up until the first direct elections in 1979, Members of the European Parliament were appointed by national parliaments, and thus enjoyed a dual mandate (European Parliament, 2024).

[9] The dependance on foreign investments, and especially the American recovery plans such as the 1948 Marshall Plan that had characterized Western allies' economies in the 1950s, began to diminish during the 1960s, thus showing the first cracks in lesser developed economic frameworks and in their current accounts and domestic debts, as in Turkey's case (Görmez & Yiğit, 2009).

Protocol was signed in November 1970, marking the beginning of the transitional stage: a roadmap for trade liberalization was developed, which was meant to culminate with a full customs union by 1994 when a full membership of Turkey would be considered.

2. The 1970s: turbulent times for the EC and Turkey

During the 1970s, EC – Turkey relations suffered a harsh deterioration: several political, economic and broader global developments resulted in a convoluted scenario for the deepening of bilateral ties. Firstly, the Turkish government was forced to resign following the 1971 coup, known as the "coup by memorandum": following years of political unrest and the strengthening of the Islamist party "National Order Party"[10], the military stepped in by handing an ultimatum in the form of a memorandum to the elected government. The requirements of the March 12th memorandum entailed the formation of a stable government pursuing reforms inspired by Atatürk's Westernization policies. The coup was able to restore a pro-Western coalition that would precariously govern Turkey for the following years (Esen, 2021), but the growing uneasiness with the Kemalist ideology that had administered the country for the past fifty years began to unravel itself. With a political scenario in turmoil, Turkey experienced its economy cripple following the 1973 oil crisis[11]: its dependence on energy imports was abruptly uncovered as oil prices increased sharply (Görmez & Yiğit, 2009) and its economy failed to adapt to high-energy costs. Turkey was forced to look West for the EC support, but failed to receive the anticipated assistance. With the

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[10] The Islamist movement, which then became a party, "National Order Party" openly rejected Atatürk's Westernization policies, proposing instead *Millî Görüş* ("National Vision"), a religious and political ideology developed by Necmettin Erbakan. The movement argued that Turkey should develop its own human and economic capital protecting its core Islamic values and without bowing to Western policies and manners. *Millî Görüş* is the name of the manifesto published in 1969 by Erbakan, Turkish politician and Prime Minister of Turkey between 1996 and 1997. The ideology developed in the 60s will have far-reaching implications for Turkey's political development in the following decades, and can be considered the core dogma of the "Justice and Development Party" in power in Turkey since 2002 under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Ozzano, 2009).

[11] The 1973 oil crisis began in October 1973 when the members of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) imposed an oil embargo on nations perceived as supporting Israel during the Yom Kippur War, particularly the U.S. and several Western European countries. The embargo caused a sharp spike in oil prices, quadrupling them from $3 to nearly $12 per barrel by early 1974.

collapse of the Bretton-Woods system of exchange to gold in 1972[12], the European Economic Community itself had experienced a difficult time and was struggling in maintaining European currencies anchored to a restricted gap of fluctuations[13]. Economic uncertainty was further complicated by the effects of the oil shock and brought the EEC to sign several free trade agreements, and to develop its Generalized System of Preferences, both of which eroded the trade-related privileges granted to Turkey under the Additional Protocol (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015). The EEC refused to grant further concession to the government in Ankara also because of the severe human rights violations against Kurdish communities reported in the Eastern regions of Turkey in 1970s and throughout the 80s, which prompted a reaction at European level (Buzan & Diez, 1999).

Relations suffered a further deterioration following Turkey's intervention in Cyprus in 1974. As the shaky equilibrium reached after the 1959 Zürich and London Agreements failed to establish a unitary, centralized state with minority rights granted to Turkish Cypriots, the internal turmoil was further exacerbated by Greek efforts to destabilize the government in Cyprus. The final escalation occurred on July 15th, 1974, when the Greek National Guard staged a coup to overthrow the Makarios government in power at the time. Only five days later, on July 20th, 1974, Turkey acted militarily, claiming its rights as a guarantor under the Treaty of Guarantee. A conference was promptly organized in Geneva in August 1974, where a bi-zonal federal structure was proposed by the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot parties as a take-it-or-leave-it option (Camp, 1980). Following a Greek appeal for a 36–48-hour delay for internal deliberations, Turkey launched a second offensive and seized about 37% of the island. The aggression had far-reaching implications for the Eastern Mediterranean stability and Turkey's relations with the Economic Community: despite internal European divides had prevented the creation of a united front at EEC level, Member states criticized sharply Turkey's second incursion on the island. Additionally, following the disintegration of the junta governing Greece in 1974, the new premier of the democratic government, Constantine Karamanlis, applied for EC membership in 1975, and Greece joined the

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[12] US President Richard Nixon ended in 1972 the dollar's convertibility into gold, established in 1944 during the Bretton Woods Conference: the system guaranteed a fixed exchange between the dollar and gold, essentially providing fixed exchange rates between currencies.

[13] On March 7th, 1972, the EEC's members and Great Britain sought to restrict the fluctuations between their currency to 1.125% above or below their central value, to counter the effects of the end of the Bretton Woods system and its fixed exchange rate regime.

Community in 1981 (Kalaitzidis & Zahariadis, 2015) as part of the so-called Mediterranean enlargement[14]. Greek entrance to the EC resulted in a turning point for bilateral relations between European institutions and Turkey: although the Council had specified in 1979 that Greece's membership would not impact relations with Ankara, Greece began using the EC as its main platform for gaining political leverage over Turkey after it joined (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015).

Concurrently, another area of friction between Turkey and the Community concerned the rights of Turkish workers to free movement inside the European Community. While the Additional Protocol's Article 36 allowed Turkish workers to enter the Community freely between 1976 and 1986, Germany asked for this clause to be repealed in 1975, but Ankara denied their request in the Association Council. Turkey's insistence on the matter can be associated with the country's troubled economic performance of the late 70s. The complex financial framework, combined with a bitter climate of political violence, deteriorated rapidly and precipitated in the 1980 coup d'état, carried out by the military led by General Kenan Evren. The coup aimed at restoring the ordered principles of Kemal Atatürk's policies in the increasingly chaotic Republic (Bekaroğlu & Barnes, 2021), theatre of the clash between the far-left, far-right, Islamist militant groups and the state. The Community reacted cautiously to the military intervention: economic support was halted only two years later in 1982, following firm criticism by the European Parliament for the continued disbursement of the financial protocols destined to Turkey under the Additional Protocol. Later, in 1982, the European Parliament additionally adopted a resolution suspending the Association Council sessions and the joint EC-Turkey Parliamentary Committee until general elections and the establishment of a democratically elected parliament, essentially suspending formal relations.

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[14] The 1980s witnessed a Mediterranean enlargement for the European Communities: as Greece, Spain and Portugal emerged from dictatorships during the 1970s, the newly democratic states wished to consolidate their democratic governments through becoming members of the EEC. Greece joined in 1981, with Spain and Portugal following in 1986.

3. Mending ties: the rapprochement of the 1980s

The turmoil of the 1970s brought to an abrupt setback of the friendly relations established after the Second World War. Several critical issues manifested themselves as sources of disruption for the development of an association agreement that would have culminated with Turkey's membership: among them, its relatively low level of economic development and high inflation, its strong authoritarian political traditions, weak civil society, and problematic relations with its neighbors seriously constrained a potential closer kinship. Similarly, European institutions harshly criticized the democratic deficits and human rights violations of Turkish institutions: between 1980 and 1985, the European Parliament issued eleven resolution condemning death penalty, use of torture, and mass trials against demonstrators (Balfe, 1985). The late 1980s, instead, matured into the direct causes of Turkey's future relationship with the European Union and the roots of its accession's negotiations of the early 2000s.

The European Communities were, at the same time, undergoing a period of profound reform that would concretize into the Single European Act (SEA), signed in 1986 as the first significant formal transformation of the 1958 Treaties of Rome. The SEA did not only promote the implementation of the Community's single market program, but also modified the decision-making procedures, allowing for majority voting on key internal market matters and extending the powers and responsibilities of the Community (Cowles, 2012). The treaty marks the formalization of European political cooperation, relaunching the European project after a decade of "Eurosclerosis"[15], also composed of national strategies to address economic issues. The new impetus in European integration can be related to the growing dissatisfaction and concern experienced by the Atlantic allies with the United States: the growing US budget and trade deficits, and the wavering American security guarantee in NATO following US-Soviet Treaties on the limitation of atomic arsenals[16]

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[15] *Eurosclerosis* is a term generally associated with the 1970s when the European project suffered a time of stagnation: many member states of the European Community turned their attention to internal economic matters and promoted "national champions" as a result of the 1973 oil crisis and the stagnation of European economies (Cowles, 2012).

[16] SALT I & II (Strategic Arms Limitations Talks) and Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty represent the three agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union, concerning the limitation of the number of strategic and nuclear weapons by the two superpowers and the ban of short-range and intermediate-range missiles. While the three round of bilateral conferences were successful in limiting the volume of offensive and defensive systems, the agreements posed problems for the American security guarantee in Europe. With the INF Treaty particularly, the European security system, based on the US guarantee of protection in case of a Soviet strike with short- or intermediate- range missiles, lost its credibility.

prompted the EEC to expand its scope to compensate the instability of the relations across the Atlantic. The decision affected the Community's relationship with Turkey, a NATO ally itself.

As a democratically elected parliament took power in 1983, the new Turkish government implemented several policies in the direction of economic and political liberalization in order to stabilize the dramatic financial situation. Driven by the necessity to receive foreign economic assistance and to support its export-oriented economic model (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015), Özal's government looked west and submitted Ankara's application for full EEC membership in April 1987. The decision was also motivated by the need to compensate for the strategic disadvantage caused by Greece's membership to the Community: as the Greek government persistently obstructed Turkey's relations with the EEC pursuing its national objectives, Turkey had been heavily weakened in their bilateral disputes. While, already in 1986, Greece had vetoed the disbursement of the fourth financial protocol, establishing that the evacuation of Turkish forces from Cyprus was a requirement for their approval, its obstructionism was further fuelled following a confrontation in March 1987 over oil exploration rights in the Aegean Sea.

In December 1989, the Community responded to Turkey's request for full membership, rejecting its application. While reasons included the Community's internal work of finishing the single market following the Single European Act, the complex state of the Turkish economy and democracy following the 1980 coup made Turkey's application premature. The question of minority rights and protection constituted an obstacle as well: until 1991, the Turkish government did not acknowledge the Kurdish minority, accounting of more than 12 million individuals, essentially leaving it rights-less and limiting its action in suppressing the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorist campaign (Balfe, 1985). Despite the application's rejection, however the Commission recognized Turkey's eligibility for membership, and suggested the establishment of a customs union to foster closer ties (European Commission, 1989). In accordance with the Commission's opinion, the Council agreed in 1990 to the Matutes Package, which included the completion of the customs union, the implementation of the fourth financial protocol, the support of industrial and technological cooperation with Turkey, and the enhancement of political and cultural engagement.

Table 1. Chronology of Turkey-EEC relations during the Cold War

1958	Establishment of the European Economic Community
1959	Turkey applies to EEC for Association
1960	First military coup in Turkey
1963	The EEC and Turkey sign the Ankara Agreement
1970	The two sign the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement
1971	Second military coup in Turkey
1974	Beginning of the Cyprus crisis: Turkey intervenes on the island following the Greek coup
1980	Third military coup in Turkey
1982	Following the military coup, relations are suspended between the EEC and Turkey
1986	The Single European Act is signed
1987	Turkey applies for full EC membership
1989	The EC rejects Turkey's application

Chapter II. Turkey and the European Union

The 1990s inaugurate a decade of profound transformations in the relations between Turkey and European institutions, both regarding the nature of the parties considered, and the rapid change of geopolitical and strategic contingencies. The profound shift in relations is closely related with the disintegration of the bipolar order in place since the end of the Second World War: after the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the strategic premises holding up the European balance of powers for fifty years broke. The questions of German unification and of the future of the former Soviet republics as integrated members of Europe, posed several issues requiring rapid solutions. The signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 answered these urgent needs and established in 1993 a reformed institution, the European Union, now in charge with the relations with potential new members, and equipped with a definite set of principles and conditions that needed to be fulfilled by candidate countries, known as the Copenhagen Criteria. Contemporarily, the shifting international scenario is characterized by the profound changes in relations between the strategic partners of the Cold War: Turkey, a country then an outpost of NATO, was now thrown at the center of the new international chessboard and was put in a difficult position by its resulting instability. At the same time, Western states were challenged by the disappearance of their nemesis and the necessity to build a new security framework for the previously disputed areas. The changed paradigm for the interactions between Turkey and the European Union is reflected in a decade that would culminate with Turkey's first Accession Partnership document drafted by the Commission in 2001 and the start of accession negotiations shortly after.

Redefined interests and identities can be considered as the center of the developments of the 1990s in Turkey and EU relations. The following chapter delves into the understanding of what the redefined identities and interests consist of: firstly, through an analysis of the birth of the European Union and the unfolding of Turkish internal politics, and secondly by comprehending what the changed strategic interests meant for Turkey-EU relations in three key areas of interaction, the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East. A final paragraph will be devoted to the understanding of how redefined identities and interests have interacted for the future of EU-Turkey relations.

1. Redefined identities: the European Union and Turkish "Westernization" challenge

Driven by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the resulting shifts in geopolitical and strategic dynamics, the actors operating after the end of the Cold War underwent several transformations to keep the pace of the changing international environment. More specifically, this paragraph will firstly analyze the effects of the Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1992, which catalyzed the formation of the European Union (EU), introduced new criteria for membership, and set the stage for Turkey's evolving relationship with Europe. This paragraph will then provide an overview of Turkey's internal debates about its identity and political direction amidst a changing European landscape.

The birth of the European Union and the Copenhagen Criteria

The Treaty on the European Union, commonly known as the Treaty of Maastricht, was signed on February 7th, 1992, by the twelve members of the European Communities, and entered into force on November 1st, 1993. It laid the foundation for the European Union and provided the basis for a common European citizenship, the eventual introduction of a single currency, and various modifications to the institutions and their decision-making processes, including bolstering the authority of the European Parliament and increasing majority voting on the Council of Ministers (Laursen, 2013). Against the backdrop of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the development of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) pillar was brought to the negotiation table in Maastricht. Without representing a significant divergence from the existing course of foreign policy cooperation, the EU's role was defined to develop systematic collaboration, define common positions, and implement coordinated actions. The development of the *pillar* structure and the expansion of the Union's competences reflect an unprecedented voluntary cession of national sovereignty by the Member states, and established areas of policy directly under the competence of the EU. The Treaty of Maastricht inaugurates a period of fervid negotiations that brought to the signing of three Treaties between 1991 and 2000, namely Treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam, and Nice. It is not by happenstance that there have been so many revisions in just a single decade: the new European order, no longer divided by the iron curtain, required the codification of new rules to deal with its drastically altered conditions, that could not be addressed all at once at Maastricht.

Different policy debates had to be tackled throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, thus motivating the number of intergovernmental conferences.

The transformed international scenario also explains the need to establish a series of criteria that needed to be fulfilled in order to become a member of the newly formed Union. As Central and Eastern European countries were released from Soviet oppression, the new republics made clear their wish to join the new European asset. After the events of 1989, the Community received several letters of application from different Central and Eastern European countries, and, as the Community never welcomed more than three new members at once in prior enlargement rounds, a critical decision had to be taken (Marktler, 2006). While the conditions (Article 49)[17] and principles (Article 6(1))[18] to which any country wishing to become a member of the European Union (EU) must conform, were laid out in the Treaty on European Union, the European Council of 1993 meeting in Copenhagen was dedicated to the enlargement to countries of Central and Eastern Europe, explicitly formalizing the criteria in place before 1993[19]:

"Accession [of the associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe] will take place as soon as an associated country is able to assume the obligations of membership by satisfying the economic and political conditions required."[20]

The conditions that an applicant country must fulfil are the following:

- The stability of institutions consisting of democracy, rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities, also known as the *political criterion*,

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[17] "*Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union. […] The conditions of eligibility agreed upon by the European Council shall be considered. The conditions of admission and the adjustments to the Treaties on which the Union is founded, which such admission entails, shall be the subject of an agreement between the Member States and the applicant State. This agreement shall be submitted for ratification by all the contracting States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements.*" - Treaty on European Union, Title VI, Article 49

[18] "*The Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, principles which are common to the Member States*." - Treaty on European Union, Title I: Common provisions - Article 6

[19] A precursor to the Copenhagen Criteria is the report produced by Willi Birkelbach, a member of the European Assembly, in 1961 that outlined the political and economic criteria for future members (Assemblée parlementaire européenne, 1962) and served as the basis for the rejection of Francoist Spain as a candidate member of the EEC.

[20] European Council in Copenhagen, Conclusions of the Presidency, (21-22 June 1993, SN 180/1/93) 13.

- A functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU, meaning the *economic criterion*,

- The ability to take on the obligations of membership, including the capacity to effectively implement the rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law (the *acquis*), or the *legislative criterion*. As Community law is not only to be adopted, but also applied and enforced (Marktler, 2006), the Madrid European Council in December 1995 added that the applicant state must demonstrate the expansion of administrative structures for effective adoption of the acquis.

Besides the applicants, the European Union itself must be able to "*[…] absorb new members, while maintaining the momentum of European integration […]*" (European Union, 1993). The codification of previous institutional practice expanded entrance requirements, gradually turning them into more objective benchmarks governed by an institutionalized framework (Hillion, 2014), that could be assessed by EU institutions. The criteria formalized in Copenhagen represent the standards that were applied to Eastern and Central European candidate countries and that would pave the way for their accession between 2004 and 2007[21], and to Turkey's subsequent accession negotiations.

The establishment of definite criteria was concomitant to the first internal debate regarding the cultural identity of newborn European Union. The progressively supranational decision-making adopted with the Treaty of Maastricht led to fears of an erosion of the input provided by citizens to policies with a direct effect on their lives (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 9: Culture and Identity, 2015), and the growing awareness of its so-called democratic deficit and the absence of a cohesive European polity and identity posed serious issues that would become at the forefront of the institutions' agenda in the following decade. Enlargement itself can be understood as a part of the identity formation process (Sjursen, 2002): framing the Eastern enlargement as to "overcome the division" and "fulfil 'the aspiration of the peoples of central and eastern Europe to "rejoin Europe"'" (Andriessen, 1991) is in itself an answer to identity dilemma experienced by the EU institutions at the beginning of the 1990s. Through the perceived duty to include Central and

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[21] Association Agreements were signed between the EU and, Hungary and Poland in 1991, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania and Slovakia in 1993, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 1995, leading to their accession in 2004 (for Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and 2007 (for Bulgaria and Romania).

Eastern Europeans into the European project, prioritizing Eastern enlargement over Turkey's membership, the EU in the 1990s sought to solidify its identity and address the cultural and political anxieties that accompanied its transformation into a more integrated and supranational entity.

Turkey's social debate on Westernization and the Islamist current

As the profound institutional changes unfolded in Western Europe, Turkey itself was experiencing a lively debate regarding its political, social and economic management as well. Because throughout the 1980s, the neoliberal model adopted by Turkish elites had been plagued by relentless issues; questions regarding the survival and continuity of the "secularist" and "Western-looking" regime were at the center of the political debate (Cizre-Sakallioglu & Yeldan, 2000). In previous decades, proponents of Kemalist and Westernization policies defended their agenda partly on the grounds that it was a route toward ultimate EC membership, and simultaneously, arguing that membership was a prerequisite for Westernization (Buzan & Diez, 1999). Turkish politicians frequently wished to differentiate Turkey's ambition from their Middle Eastern counterparts to join the EEC, by making an appeal that "*Our country is 'European,' our neighbours are not.*" (Neumann, 1998). It can be concluded that in Turkey, a realistic chance of joining the EU had been crucial to the legitimacy of the Kemalist process of Westernization carried out by the political and military elite also through undemocratic means in past decades. Contemporarily, at European level, it was widely believed that if Turkey stayed outside of European institutions, it would become vulnerable to Islamist movements, move away from Europe and toward the Middle East, and ultimately cause instability and pose a threat to Europe's southern border (Buzan & Diez, 1999). The problem with the Kemalist project can be linked with the fusion of different perspective under the surface name of "Westernization": while certain Turkish liberals possessed a democratic, pluralist outlook essentially consistent with the cornerstones of Western thought, other Kemalists retained a vision more rooted in authoritarian and nationalist traditions from the late 19th and early 20th centuries than in liberal ones from the second half of the 20th century.

Discordant understandings of the West are mirrored in the different relationship with the European integration project and with the Atlantic Alliance. Turkey's membership with NATO was essentially unaffected by internal concerns regarding the state of Turkish democracy or minority

rights, and functioned smoothly because it fulfilled the strategic demands of both the Western bloc during the Cold War and of the Kemalist elite. On the other hand, Turkey's relationship with the EC/EU has been strongly impacted by domestic matters that would undermine the basic principles of European institutions. Instead of Westernization, membership in the European Union requires a certain degree of Europeanization, a concept that can be defined according to Radaelli as: "*a process of construction, diffusion and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ways of doing things, and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourses, identities, political structures and public policies*." (Radaelli, 2003). In the case of EC/EU – Turkey relations, Europeanization can be understood as a force able to change Turkish institutions and policies in a direction that ensures convergence with European standards. The Copenhagen criteria represent the formalization of the process of Europeanization requested by the EU to access its institutions: through the achievement of political, social and economic benchmarks, candidate countries must construct procedures that will ensure their smooth inclusion to the European system. The frustration displayed by Turkish society in developing a closer bond with Western European institutions – a bond further complicated by Greek meddling since the 1980s – can be attributed to Turkey's incapacity of establishing the underlying points for further Europeanization, the central request of the EU integration process.

Turkish societal dissatisfaction was the cause of delegitimization of the Westernization project advocated by Kemalist elite, which had placed the source of its authority in establishment of stronger ties with the European Union even despite a disappointing economic framework. The growing tension between the unmet targets of the Western elite and the Islamic-Turkish identity which had remained buried for half a century, was expressed politically by the increased consensus to Islamist parties (Gole, 1997). The Islamist political movement argued that Turkey should develop its own human and economic capital protecting its core Islamic values without submitting to Western policies, and was the cause of the political instability ended with military interventions in 1971 and 1980 (Sunar & Toprak, 1983). Political Islamism challenged the core of Kemalist principles: aiming at the construction of a "national Islamic order", they wished to further link Turkey's identity and future with the Muslim world, rather than with the West. With the birth of the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi* – RP) in 1983, a clone of the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi* – MSP) outlawed in 1980 following the coup, political Islamism witnessed a strong

resurgence in 1990s. During the local elections held in March 1994, the Welfare Party secured 19% of the vote, winning the mayor's office in 28 municipalities, which included Istanbul and Ankara, the two biggest cities in Turkey. Welfare won 21.6 percent of the vote in the 1995 national elections, forming the new government and choosing the prime minister (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008). The reason for the rapid success of the Welfare Party can be traced on an effective internal organization of the party through a network to support the poor, but also on the strong anti-Western sentiment matured after the 1989 EEC's rejection of Turkey's membership application. Once in office, the Welfare Party failed to address economic and social problems. Further constrained by the interests of the secular establishment and by a series of ill-fated foreign policy initiative in the Middle East as part of a "Islamist" strategy, the RP government was forced to resign though subtle and indirect means by the military in 1997. While its government only lasted for two years, the Welfare Party's experience proved to be a turning point for the Islamist political movement: it demonstrated that an overt Islamic agenda would be strongly opposed by secularists and especially the military, and it widened the rift between the *traditionalists* and the *reformists* of the Islamic movement. If *traditionalists* opposed any major change in its approach and policy, *reformists* argued that minimizing the religious agenda and avoiding a direct confrontation with secularists was the only way for political Islamism to prosper.

Four years later, the two ideological currents formally split: the *traditionalists* established the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi* – SP), the *reformists* formed the party that still dominates the Turkish political scenario. The Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP) was founded in August 2001 by the Mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and his close associate Abdullah Gül: at its origins, the AKP described itself as a conservative democratic party, which wanted to resemble Christian democratic parties in Western Europe. The AKP was interested in projecting softened image in its references to religion, and in permitting a broader expression of individual civil and political rights, portraying itself as less patriotic and Islamist and more pro-business and pro-EU (Yeşilada, 2023). Its founders were also willing to work with the secular elite, thus not representing a challenge for Kemalist military corps (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008). Strong in its solid and popular principles, Erdoğan's party became the absolute center of Turkish political life: with 34% of the vote, the AKP defeated the secularist party, which received 19% of the vote, and won the elections held in November 2002, forming the new government with Erdoğan as Prime Minister. The reinterpretation of the Islamist ideology successfully brought to a stable

victory for an Islamist party for the first time, politically redefining Turkish society for the years to come. Yet, the real concern was represented by the authenticity of the AKP's rhetoric and the denial of its Islamist leanings (Yeşilada, 2023): while Erdoğan's authoritarian turn is easily discernible especially in recent years, its traces are latent during its first mandate, which promoted EU harmonization reforms and democratic political pluralism. The implications of the AKP takeover have far-reaching effects in Turkey relations with the European Union: in the early 2000s, Erdoğan government promoted notable reforms and the shared goal of accelerating Turkey's EU admission process, which generally improved relations between the EU and Turkey. However, as underlying issues and a growing amount of mistrust on both sides surfaced, the groundwork for a more complicated relationships was laid (Yavuz & Öztürk, 2019). Through the employment of measures influenced by the EU, the military's hold on politics was progressively loosened, and Turkey's struggle with the Westernization project advocated by Kemalist elites was overcome in favor of the Islamic movement, essentially opening a gash difficult to fill.

2. Redefined interests: Turkey's strategic relevance for the EU after the Cold War

With the end of the Cold War, the world entered a period of historic changes: the disintegration of the Soviet sphere of influence implied a security gap emerging across the globe, and while the developments in Eastern Europe cemented the stability of the region in favor of the Atlantic Alliance, new threats emerged from the hushes of the Soviet Union in the Middle East, in the Caucasus and in the Balkans. In Western Europe, the disappearance of the Russian menace meant the United States and Europe were no longer forced to coordinate their military and political affairs with a constant eye on Moscow. With the disappearing of a credible danger, a high degree of US military involvement in Europe became harder to justify and to maintain, but, despite the premises of American and European interests shifting after 1989, the existence of common institutions, such as NATO or the regular summits between the EU Presidency and the US Administration established in the 1970s, facilitated and generated strong incentives for continued cooperation (Duffield, 2001). While the Atlantic scenario expanded eastward, remaining formally unchanged, the turmoil of Soviet disappearance drifted outside Central Europe. In the changed framework, Turkey moved from a remote NATO outpost on the European periphery to the center of the

complex post-Cold War international politics. The radical transformation of its neighborhood allowed Turkey to develop a more multilateral and varied foreign policy, both benefiting from the enormous opportunities available in the Caucasus and Central Asia, but also troubled by the adjacent Middle Eastern tensions. Turkey's geopolitical importance was therefore accentuated as Cold War tensions faded: its strategic geography, on the cusp of three conflict zones, namely the Middle East, the Caucasus, and the Balkans, equips it with a mixed blessing. While it provides a considerable leverage in relations with other regional powers, Turkey suffers the risk of getting involved in conflicts in more than one front, an unsustainable task for a country in a dire political and economic situation, and often relegates diplomatic efforts to the promotion of stability (Buzan & Diez, 1999). During the 1990s, redefined interests between European countries and Turkey displayed their scope in three distinct geographical areas, contiguous and sometimes related, but generally distinct: the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East.

The EU and Turkey in the Balkans

The strategic importance of the Balkans has underpinned the Atlantic Alliance's engagement in the region: the historically connecting point between Europe, the Middle East and the Caucasus functions as fundamental energy link and trade route, significantly contributing to the security and compactness of the Euro-Atlantic front as a whole (Panero, 2023). In the late 1980s, as the multiethnic Yugoslavia began to be dismembered by secessionist forces[22], the Yugoslav government reacted military against its former republics: ethnic tensions, nationalism, and political upheaval brought to the declaration of independence of Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, and of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, all three resulting in military engagements and significant ethnic violence. As European countries witnessed war at their backdoors, European response was initially hampered by internal divisions and a lack of cohesive strategy, which limited the effectiveness of their early peacekeeping efforts (Arikan, 2013). Subsequent humanitarian crises and the evidence of human rights abuse sparked a decisive action from European institutions, which acted in

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[22] While the dissolution of the Soviet Union was largely peaceful, years of civil conflict in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were only ended by Western involvement. The Serb minorities in Croatia, Bosnia, and Macedonia were to be a part of the "Greater Serbia" that the Republic of Serbia declared its desire to establish in 1989. The Yugoslav federal army, which was predominately made up of Serbs, violently suppressed the 1991 independence declarations of Slovenia and Croatia.

cooperation with other international actors, such as NATO and the United Nations. European reluctance to act independently can be considered as part of its inability to take meaningful action in security matters: despite having used diplomatic power and financial incentives, the EU proved to be incapable to persuade the parties to avoid conflict, essentially indicating the embryonic phase still experienced on Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Turkey, instead, began preoccupying itself with the conflict in the Balkans early in the 1990s: in 1993, Turkish diplomats facilitated the reconciliation between Muslim Bosnians and Croats, which resulted in the Washington Agreement of 1994[23] (Harxhi, 2017). The move had the dual effect of supporting the growing domestic front that wanted a demonstration of the government's protection to the Muslim minority in the Balkans, and the need to confirm its pro-Western stance in the post-Cold War era. Turkish activity in the Balkans was further expanded by its military role, that entailed the participation in NATO missions and in the training of Bosnian officers during the US train-and-equip program, emphasizing its commitment even from the military point of view in Western initiatives (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 3: Turkey as a Neighbour, 2015). In the Balkans, Turkish and European interests converged in several key areas: firstly, they both wished to restore a regional stability and spent considerable efforts in both peacekeeping and diplomatic efforts for this reason and similarly, humanitarian concerns were a priority for both, thus the host of large numbers of refugees fleeing conflict zones and human rights abuses (Tüncel, 2014). Secondly, economic considerations were also at the center of Turkish and European concerns: the stabilization of the Balkans was perceived as essential for the promotion of trade and investment for both economies and represented a convergence point for their diplomatic efforts.

The EU and Turkey in the Caucasus

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Caucasus region experienced a serious security vacuum: with the 1991 declaration of independence of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, the recently independent states resembled failed states and showed high degrees of criminality, corruption, terrorism, and waning pledges to democratic and economic reforms. The framework

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[23] The ceasefire agreement signed in Washington was instrumental in reducing the hostilities between Bosnians and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina and provided a framework for further peace negotiations, represented by the 1995 Dayton Accords that effectively ended the Bosnian War.

in the Caucasus differs radically from the Balkans because of its geography: Western influence remained secondary in an asset where Russian authority prevailed well into the 1990s and long-lasting ceasefires were signed thanks to the diplomatic involvement of the Russian Federation. In the Caucasus, Western security concerns focused heavily on the management of potential threats, such as Islamic terrorism and weapons of mass destruction (Demir, Eminoglu, & Aslantürk, 2018), and also on the opportunities offered by a region rich in natural resources, such as energy reserves, and central for international trade. The conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh[24] and South Ossetia[25], the two main hotbeds of crisis between the newly independent states, were sedated by Moscow's prominent role, and, while some national efforts were advanced, European action flourished only after the end of military interventions, mainly reflecting the economic and trade partnership would be built between the two (Helly, 2002). To support the unstable political climates of Caucasian states, undermined by corruption, political violence and weak rule of law, European countries welcomed changes that would ensure their Council of Europe membership between 1999 for Georgia, and 2001 for Armenia and Azerbaijan did the same, fully backed by the EU.

The newly found independence of Caucasian states represents a dramatic change for Turkish diplomacy: naturally bound by ethnic and geographical ties, Turkey was the first nation to recognize their independence after the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991. Until 1993, Turkish foreign policy entailed a more active and independent thinking, often disregarding Russian concerns in the region and building upon similar ethnic identities. However, in the late 1990s, Turkey was forced to adopt a more realistic, balanced approach toward the region due to its economic weaknesses, the unwillingness of the Turkish republics to forge stronger alliances, the decline in Western support, and Russia's growing influence in the region (Demir, Eminoglu, & Aslantürk, 2018). In the case of the South Caucasus, the collective identity has nevertheless

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[24] The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh is a long-standing territorial and ethnic dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan but has a majority ethnic Armenian population. The first Nagorno-Karabakh war started in 1988, and was ended in 1994 with a Russian-brokered ceasefire, which left Nagorno-Karabakh under Armenian control but without a formal peace agreement. Intense fighting broke out again in 2020.

[25] The South Ossetian conflict is a territorial and ethnic dispute mainly between Georgia and the separatist region of South Ossetia, which has pursued either independence or unification with Russia. While the First South Ossetian war was contained with a ceasefire that established a tripartite peacekeeping force (comprising Georgian, Russian, and South Ossetian troops), a full-scale war broke out in 2008 between Russia and Georgia, but the conflict remains unresolved, with Georgia insisting on its territorial integrity and Russia backing South Ossetia's claims to independence.

influenced their respective foreign policy: while the relations with Armenia were further complicated by the genocide carried out against the Armenian population during World War I and the denialism by the Turkish state[26], relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan were much simpler. Other than sharing a similar identity of being countries with a secular but Muslim-majority conception, and ethnic Turks, the two countries are also geographically very close. The sum of these factors has contributed to the creation of the "special" friendship relations between Ankara and Baku, further expanded by Turkey's dependence on external energy sources, abundant in Azerbaijan (Khairunisa, 2022).

Relations between the Caucasus and the EU primarily revolve around economic and trade partnerships, with European intervention focusing on supporting political stability and fostering democratic reforms. Conversely, Turkey's approach to the Caucasus is also deeply influenced by ethnic and geographical ties. While EU-Caucasus relations are more institutionally driven, Turkey's ties, especially with Azerbaijan, are bolstered by shared ethnic identities and energy dependencies, highlighting a blend of strategic and cultural connections. Additionally, Turkey's different identity, often perceived as non-European, coupled with its close ethnic ties to Caucasian states, will prove to be a difficult point for Turkish membership in the negotiations for EU accession, worrying European countries about potential biases and conflicts of interest (Buzan & Diez, 1999). Moreover, Turkey's reluctance to acknowledge the Armenian genocide and its relative human rights issues further complicate its relationship with European institutions, adding another layer of tension to its EU accession prospects.

The EU and Turkey in the Middle East

The Middle East represents an area of active involvement for both European and Turkish interests throughout the 1990s: their actions were shaped by regional conflicts, evolving international dynamics and the shifted strategic interests following the reduction of the Soviet zone of influence.

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[26] The Armenian Genocide refers to the systematic mass killings and expulsion of 1.5 million ethnic Armenians carried out by the Ottoman Empire during World War I, from 1915 to 1917: the Ottoman authorities implemented these acts under the guise of relocating the Armenian population away from war zones, but the true intention was to eliminate the Armenian presence in the region. Armenians were subjected to mass deportations, forced marches, and widespread atrocities including massacres, starvation, and abuse. The Armenian Genocide is widely recognized as one of the first modern genocides, although Turkey has historically denied the events constituted genocide.

As Turkey became a more active player in the regional politics of the Middle East, its diplomatic and military efforts were inevitably colliding with American and European interests, already established in the region to manage crucial energy supplies. Control over or access to the abundant Middle Eastern oil reserves became a critical concern for global powers since the demonstration of the fragility of energy trade routes during the 1973 oil crisis, making the Middle East a priority for Western strategic interests. Its underlying instability and the rise of the dangerous Islamic terrorism highlighted its standpoint as a major security concern, and subsequent interventions by the United States and by European states are largely motivated by the latter reasons (Halliday, 2005). For example, although the military intervention of the coalition led by US forces following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, had different explicit reasons, most of its implicit reasons can be traced to the aforementioned strategic interests of Western powers. With the first Gulf War, European and American interests largely matched: the protection of oil reserves, economic interests, the wish to prevent regional instability, to reinforce their political stance in the region and to uphold international law, were the driving forces behind the participation to the military coalition composed by American, British, and French personnel. European partners were further motivated by their desire to prove their commitment and maintain their transatlantic relations in times when the strategic premises of the Atlantic Alliance broke following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Wessely, 2002). The successful liberation of Kuwait solidified the strategic partnerships between Western powers and Arab states in the Gulf, and established a stable presence in the region.

Turkey's foreign policy in the Middle East in the 1990s was instead characterized by a significant break from the past. Since the 1950s, Turkey had consistently adopted a cautious and low-key stance toward its southern neighbors due to several concerns: while Turkish officials were wary of being entangled in regional conflicts, their primary focus was on the perceived Soviet threat from the north, and the former Soviet Union's strong ties with countries like Syria limited potential Turkish actions in the region (Sayari, 2000). With the dissolution of the USSR, Turkey's desires to reframe its foreign policy to a more assertive tone, and to reaffirm its strategic significance to the transatlantic community is best exemplified by its stance towards the Middle East and by its

participation in the first Gulf War (1990–1991)[27] (Sayari, 1997). Turkey was quick to declare its support to the Western coalition following the eruption of war in the Gulf not only to secure the flow of oil exports through the Iraqi pipelines, but also to limit the political violence and terrorism perpetrated by Kurdish separatist organization, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)[28], emerged following the weakening of the Iraqi state in the north of the country. Since the early 1990s, Turkey has periodically launched military interventions on Iraqi soil to flush out PKK members, with incursions lasting weeks (Sayari, Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era: The Challenges of Multi-Regionalism, 2000). Syrian support to the Kurdish cause had strained the relations between the two neighbors, and only in 1998, threatening to use military action, Ankara managed to get PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, a lifelong resident of Damascus, expelled, demonstrating Turkey's pursuit of a more assertive foreign policy. The complex relationship with Syria and the Kurdish issue contributed to the decision to establish a new security cooperation agreement with Israel (Altunisik, 2000); and the two militarily strongest powers in the region formed a new alliance in 1996, signing a military training and education agreement. The security cooperation agreement paved the way for Turkey's diplomatic engagement during the Arab – Israeli peace process during the 1990s[29] (Inbar, 2001), when Turkey played a key facilitator role, leveraging its position as a predominantly Muslim country with strong ties to both the West and Israel. The diplomatic

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[27] The first Gulf War began following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait of August 2nd, 1990: Iraq, governed by President Sadam Hussein, invaded its neighbor, fully occupying it, because of disputes regarding Kuwait's alleged slant drilling in Iraq's Rumaila oil field and to cancel Iraq's debt to Kuwait from the Iraq-Iran War. The invasion was immediately met with international condemnation, and an international coalition was formed to enforce international law and restore Kuwaiti sovereignty. The US-led coalition was successful and on February 28th, 1991, Kuwait was liberated.

[28] The Kurds are an Iranic ethnic minority native to the mountainous region of Kurdistan in Western Asia, and are currently divided among Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. They represent one-fifth of Turkey's population of 84 million and the largest non-Turkic ethnic minority in Turkey: due to its entity, the potential united Kurdish political force has been recognized as a destabilizing force for the Ankara government since its modern institutionalization in 1923 with the Treaty of Lausanne, and the Turkish state has attempted to defuse centrifugal impulses through an imposed assimilation of Kurdish communities in the country. The unresolved tension and desperation of the Kurdish population rapidly spilled over into violence: with the founding in 1978 of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), an organization recognized as terrorist by Turkey, the United States, and the European Union, suicide bombings with civilian victims have profoundly shaken the security of Turkey itself. Violence by members of the Kurdish minority only aggravates the reaction of host states, exacerbating the vicious and violent cycle year after year.

[29] During the 1990s, considerable effort was addressed towards the pacification of the long-lasting conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors: diplomatic negotiations included several landmark agreements and conferences such as the Madrid Conference (1991), the Oslo Accords (1993), Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty (1994), Wye River Memorandum (1998), that culminated with the Camp David Summit (2000). While the peace process market significant progress, it failed to provide a final resolution on critical issues, that eventually led to renewed violence.

engagement demonstrated by Turkey during the peace process showed a shared interest with European and transatlantic partners: through the employment of diplomacy as a tool to foster regional stability, Ankara prove its role as a valued ally for Western policies and reaffirmed its commitment to the Atlantic alliance.

The realignment of Turkish and European interests in the Middle East was particularly beneficial to both sides: the solidity of their partnership was fortified by the convergence of economic profits, and especially energy resources, and of stability and security concerns, even though they have different historical, cultural and geopolitical contexts. It could be argued that the 1990s saw European institutions and countries, and Turkey play distinct but complementary roles in the Middle East: while the EU focused on peace-building and humanitarian efforts, Turkey's efforts, given its geographical proximity, were shaped by its security concerns and regional influence, leading to a more assertive stance in regional conflicts, as shown as in the case of Turkey-Syria relations. Throughout the 1990s, discrepancies in their approaches remained largely latent: for example, cultural and ideological influences, stemming from different ties with the Middle East, were not yet as cumbersome as they would become in the 2000s (Robins, 2003). Other points of friction include the divergence between the EU's critical stance towards authoritarian regimes opposed to Turkey's pragmatic relations with such regimes because of security and economic interests (Brewin, 2000), and the multilateral approach to regional alliances adopted by Europe, in stark opposition to the more bilateral approach, focused on forming strategic alliances with key regional players and based on its own national interests adopted by Turkey (Aras, 2000).

The redefined interests of the 1990s demonstrate how the relationship between the EU and Turkey matured into a mutually favorable relationship: while Turkey played a stabilizing force in the Balkans and a security buffer against Middle Eastern tensions for the EU, European institutions were a vital link for Turkish economy, society and internal stability (Buzan & Diez, 1999). Turkey's aspiration to reemphasize its strategic importance in the Western world also plays a decisive role in its push towards European integration: through an active engagement in political and military initiatives brought forward by the West, Turkish leaders wished to be perceived as a valuable and reliable partners that could bring substantial support to the European project. At the same time, it could be argued that its strengthened action in turbulent regions, such as the Middle

East and Caucasus, harmed Turkey's chances of joining the EU, as it instilled apprehension regarding a potential EU entanglement in their crisis though Turkish membership (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015). Similarly, Turkey's renewed focus on its foreign policy highlighted other thorny issues for its potential accession, such as Turkey's respect for human and minority rights, as shown in the case of the Kurdish minority within its borders, but also vis-à-vis its own historical responsibility, as in the failure to recognize the Armenian genocide. While the redefined interests of the 1990s did not negatively impact Turkey – EU relations in the short term and instead became convergence factors, the decisions to play a more assertive role in Middle Eastern politics and to develop closer ties with Turkic countries in the Caucasus, will prove to be friction points for future negotiations.

3. The interplay of redefined identities and interests

The changed international environment, its geopolitical shifts, and the institutional transformations of European institutions and Turkish domestic politics resulted in a pivotal decade for EU-Turkey relations, characterized both by significant progress and persistent challenges. The intricate interplay between redefined interests and identities shaped not only the trajectory of Turkey-EU relations during this pivotal decade but also laid the groundwork for future engagements. Ankara's willingness to become fully included in the newly established European Union remained continuously obstructed by Greece well into the 1990s: not only Greek officials vetoed closer engagement between the Union and Turkey, but they actively also promoted the Republic of Cyprus for EU membership. Cyprus accession to the EU was advocated because it could have induced a settlement serving Greek interests and protected Greek Cypriot security by raising the costs associated with Turkish expansionism. Despite the Member states' initial reluctance to conduct accession negotiations with the Republic of Cyprus without a political settlement on the island, the Greek government was adamant in its project, holding both the Turkey-EU customs union agreement and, later, the EU's eastern enlargement hostage (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015). The Commission advised the Council to begin accession talks with Nicosia in its 1993 Opinion on Cyprus's bid for membership. Cyprus' membership to the EU also signified that the resolution of its conflict became a necessary

condition for progressing with Turkey's accession negotiation, and effectively resulting in a significant roadblock for further negotiations.

The Greece's negative influence on Turkey-EU relations was counterbalanced with the active support of the Clinton administration to the Turkish cause: Bill Clinton, in office as President of the United States since 2003, considered the Anatolic country as a vital strategic NATO ally due to its geography, between Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. Turkey's EU membership was perceived as a way to anchor its place into the alliance, and thus promoting stability under the new security framework (Onis & Yilmaz, The Turkey-EU-US Triangle in Perspective: Transformation or Continuity?, 2005). To this end, the Clinton administration actively engaged with European leaders, advocating for Turkey's membership by emphasizing its geopolitical and economic advantages, also in light of the diplomatic and military support offered by Turkey in the Balkans and in the Middle East (Kirac, Kisman, Sofronie, & Orha, 2014). The European Union yielded, and negotiations for a Turkey – EU Custom Union Agreement (CUA) were finalized in 1995. On December 31st, 1995, the agreement came into effect: the Custom Union represents a compromise between a more encompassing agreement, unacceptable for Greek counterparts, and a closer association, desired overseas. The decision to expand respective economic benefits without engaging in humanitarian or minority-related issues also reflects the determination not to have to deal with thorny issues at a time when geopolitical interests converged in other regions. As of January 1, 1996, Turkey was required by the Customs Agreement of 1995 to remove all customs taxes, quantitative limits, charges that had the same impact as customs duties in the trade of industrial goods with the EU. Moreover, by January 1, 1996, Turkey had to ratify the EU's Common Customs Tariff against imports from third nations as well as all of the advantageous arrangements the EU had with third parties: due to these regulations, all industrial commodities meeting EC standards were free to move between Turkey and the EU. Subsequently, in July 1996, Turkey and the EU inked a free trade agreement and consequently, since 1999, there has been no duty applied on ECSC products between the parties (Togan, 2012). The Custom Union Agreement did however exclude agricultural goods and free circulation of agricultural products until Turkey aligned its policies to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. In the CUA framework, Turkey consented to the Community mechanisms including its standards on quality and accreditation, and to consolidate its laws governing governmental assistance, administrative cooperation, intellectual and industrial property rights, competition laws, and the Customs code. Due to its broad

encompassing scope, the Agreement cannot be viewed as a single adjustment to the tariff structure, but rather as a set of adjustments that have gradually affected the volume and nature of trade between the EU and Turkey (Neyaptı, Taskin, & Ungör, 2007). Trade between the two economies had indeed benefited from the progressive reduction in duties and similar instruments: Turkish exports have been positively affected by the Customs Union, resulting in a stabilization of its GDP and paving the way for the role assumed by the EU as a driver of Turkey's future economic reforms (Akman & Çekin, 2021).

The positive atmosphere reached after the Customs Union Agreement rapidly deteriorated after Turkey was not included in accession countries selected at the 1997 Luxembourg Summit: the decision was heavily influenced by Turkey's internal shortcomings, that included deep-rooted economic and political issues, incompatible with the Copenhagen Criteria. Despite continuous pressure by the Clinton administration, long-standing concerns regarding the stability of Turkish democratic institutions remained at the center for EU officials, and the state of the country's public finances, rising inflation, and erratic monetary policy left the economic criterion unsatisfied. To address financial issues, following the European Council taking place in Cardiff in June 1998, the Commission began its evaluations of Turkey's economy using the Maastricht criteria in its routine country reports (Akman & Çekin, 2021). The failed inclusion, granted instead to Eastern and Central European countries, to Cyprus and Malta, was perceived by Ankara officials as a clear case of discrimination (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015), since the ex-Soviet states were in an unstable economic condition as well. The 1997 decision also mentions for the first time an explicit remark to the cultural differences between the European project and Turkey: the identity debate faced by European institutions following the Treaty of Maastricht posed the foundation for a heated controversy regarding Turkey's stance with respect to European culture and identity. Turkey presented a significant obstacle to Europe's identity building due its stance as a sizable nation with a Muslim majority population, and a migrant community dispersed among EU member states, and a long history of being Europe's cultural "Other" (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 9: Culture and Identity, 2015). The discussions sparked by the European Council in Luxembourg revealed that Turkey was not really seen as a part of the newly unified and redefined Europe as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Throughout debates, contentious remarks were pronounced by members of European People's Party (EPP) during the June 1997 party Summit: EPP's chairman Wilfred Martens stated in its

conclusive speech that '*Turkey is not a candidate to become a member of the EU, short-term or long-term. We wish to have a very close cooperation with Turkey, but the European Union is a civilization project and within this project, Turkey has no place*' (Laçiner, 1999). Similar statements were also later pronounced by Italy's Prime Minister Romano Prodi and by German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Klaus Kinkel. These remarks, together with the decisions of the European Council in December 1997, were widely perceived in Turkey as an act of overt animosity and discrimination based on religion and culture, and in response, Ankara officials froze its dialogue with the Union, essentially breaking off political contact. The objective of full membership was however not abandoned and remained in Turkey's agenda: the Turkish establishment started to show a dualistic attitude toward the Union, then solidified in the coming years (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015).

Despite the frictions in EU-Turkey relations, the Balkan Wars highlighted the need for EU institutions to integrate and collaborate with Turkey within the framework of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Turkey's efforts in the Balkans had a significant impact on the stabilization of the European continent, and lent credibility to the claims made by European players in think tanks, big enterprises, foreign ministries and governments, emphasizing the benefits Turkey's security and defence capabilities would provide to the nascent CSDP (Emerson & Tocci, 2004). The Turkish case was, again, further supported by the Clinton administration, who had spent a considerable effort in lobbying for Turkey's EU candidacy, given Ankara's strategic significance as a major actor in the larger Mediterranean neighborhood (Onis & Yilmaz, The Turkey-EU-US Triangle in Perspective: Transformation or Continuity?, 2005). This set of motivations brought to an historic decision by the Helsinki European Council of December 1999 that recognized Turkey as an official candidate for EU membership. The decision was also the result of significant political changes in the internal landscapes of Member states: in Germany, for example, the Christian Democrats, largely opposed to Turkish membership, were replaced by a coalition formed by Social Democrats and Greens, supportive of its accession. Most importantly, however, Greece reversed its position on Turkey's membership, viewing it as a way to guarantee its interests by anchoring Turkey in the EU decision making, and de-escalating the dangerous tension reached in past years. The period between 1996 and 1999 indeed witnessed new strains between Turkey and Greece: the disputed sovereignty over

the uninhabited islands of Imia/Kardak in the Aegean, the acquisition of Russian S-300 missiles by Cyprus, and the capture by Turkish officials of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in the Greek embassy in Kenya highlighted the need to re-establish diplomatic communication and to stabilize their relations (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015). The seeds of rapprochement were subsequently sown during the spring of 1999 when George Papandreou, then Foreign Minister of Greece, engaged in a constructive dialogue with Turkish counterparts. The humanitarian crises following the earthquakes hitting Greece and Turkey in August and September 1999, provided the pretext for a major policy shift for both countries, that resulted in Greek support for Turkey's EU candidacy in December 1999 (Tocci & Adamson, 2005).

With the recognition of Turkey as an official candidate for EU membership by the Helsinki European Council in December 1999, a significant turning point for Turkey-EU relations is marked. Despite the challenges and frictions of the preceding years, the decision demonstrated a renewed commitment on both sides to pursue closer integration, driven by both strategic considerations and a shift in the political landscape. The decision also reflects the significance of European Member states internal politics in the EU's relations with Turkey, as demonstrated with the cases of Germany and Greece among others. The Helsinki decision not only acknowledged Turkey's strategic significance as a bridge between Europe and the broader Mediterranean region but also reflected the recognition within the EU of the potential long-term benefits of Turkey's inclusion. This pivotal moment set the stage for a new chapter in Turkey's complex and ongoing journey towards full EU membership, symbolizing both a diplomatic success and the beginning of a more profound and challenging integration process.

Table 2. Chronology of Turkey-EU relations during the 1990s

1989	Fall of the Berlin Wall
1990	Start of the First Gulf War
1991	Turkey is the first country to recognize the independence of Caucasic countries
1992	Signing of the Maastricht Treaty establishing the European Union
1993	Establishment of the Copenhagen Criteria following the European Council Summit Bill Clinton takes office as President of the United States
1994	Signing of the Washington Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina
1995	Turkish national elections, resulting with a victory for the Welfare Party
1996	Turkey enters the EU Customs Union Israel and Turkey sign a military training and education agreement
1997	Turkey is not included as a candidate country at the European Council in Luxembourg The Welfare Party is forced out of government
1999	Turkey is recognized as a candidate country at the European Council in Helsinki
2002	Erdogan's AKP wins Turkish national elections

Chapter III. Accession negotiations: the evolution of national interests

The start of the new millennium marked a crossroad for Turkey-EU relations: the European Commission adopted the first Accession Partnership for Turkey in November 2000, and it was swiftly followed by Turkey's National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis in March 2001, that set the stage for further political and economic reforms aimed at aligning with European standards. With the European Union recognizing Turkey's candidate status, a favorable time for Turkish-European relations appeared to be ahead; and despite geopolitical challenges, particularly with regard to the Cyprus issue and the war in Iraq, Turkey's initial reforms fostered optimism for its prospect accession to the EU. Underlying tensions, both within Turkey and across European member states, would later complicate the favorable trajectory. This chapter will analyze the unfolding of Turkey's access negotiations: the first paragraph will offer an overview of structural challenges troubling Turkey-EU relations since the 1950s, then the following paragraphs will provide a historical framework from 1999 to recent years, in order to understand how different national interests intertwined during the negotiations.

1. Untangling the skein: structural problems with Turkey's accession

Previous chapters have highlighted how Turkey's accession to the European Union has been a long-standing and complex endeavor, fraught with numerous structural challenges and stymieing progress for decades. As it has been demonstrated in the description of their relations, a closer union between the EU and Turkey has been complicated by a tangled skein of strategic, ideological, economic, and migratory issues, each presenting its own set of difficulties. Understanding the interplay of different interests becomes even more intricate as similar arguments are used by proponents of different parties, Member states, and political groups in the comparable manners, but for different objectives. This paragraph will provide a summary for each of these challenges, analyzing how they intertwine and exploring their broader implications.

The ideological and institutional questions

Differences in political values, particularly on democratic governance, human rights, and the rule of law, created significant friction, casting doubts on Turkey's compatibility with the EU's foundational principles. Additionally, Turkey's Islamic religious and cultural identity is essentially different from the loosely defined "*esprit communautaire*" motivating the closer association formed by the European Union (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 2: Turkey as an Enlargement Country, 2015). The past role of the military in the country's politics and the subsequent rise of political Islam, particularly under Erdoğan's leadership of its Justice and Development Party, created further concerns regarding Turkey's commitment to the EU's core values of democracy and human rights. Their differences in identity have been a recurring theme in their relations: the management of Turkish minorities, as in the case of Kurds, or the denialism of the Turkish state regarding the Armenian genocide, signaled European institutions a degree of incompatibility between the two, souring the debate regarding Turkey's place in European institutions.

The debate around Turkey's conformity with the EU's central tenets also implies a more definite vision of what the European project should include, and divergent perspectives on the currency and future of the EU are highlighted by different responses to Turkey's potential membership. The situation is further complicated by the fact that several conceptions of Europe and definitions of the "European identity" coexist, enabling the same arguments to support or refute Turkey's membership (Grigoriadis, 2006). For instance, Turkey's Islamic identity may be taken into consideration when discussing how to address religion in the context of a unified European identity. Turkey's admission is strongly supported by proponents of multiculturalism, who contend that liberal democratic values and cultural variety should form the foundation of the EU identity (Nicolaidis, 2004), but also by Member states, especially the United Kingdom, that have maintained their long-held preference for an EU consisting of little more than an integrated internal market with various forms of intergovernmental cooperation "tacked on" (Nugent, 2007). Turkey's Islamic character then becomes a valuable trait for such groups, but it also represents the strongest argument for the opposing team consisting of European conservatives. By diverting from the EU's identity grounded on its Greco-Roman political and Judeo-Christian religious roots, Turkey is deemed to be unfit for membership because it lacks its legacy. A "special relationship" between

the EU and Turkey is however encouraged as it would be advantageous for both geopolitical and commercial reasons (Schauble, 2004).

The debate around Turkey's membership is further complicated by its demographic size: its entry would cause the large and medium-sized member states to lose their significant presence in the European Parliament and their proportionate voting strengths in the Council of Ministers. Due to its larger size, Turkey's bargaining strength and expectedly strong positions on a wide range of topics, from civil freedoms to geographic vicinity, are considered as having the potential to seriously hinder efficiency in decision-making inside European institutions (Nugent, 2007). For the same reason, a European Union that is less effective in its broader policymaking following Turkey's accession, is particularly desired by proponents of an intergovernmental EU, such as the UK.

The strategic question

Turkey's unique geographic position and its role as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East raise questions about its alignment with EU foreign policy goals and security priorities: the potential advantages offered by its location, logistics, and resources span the surrounding regions including Russia, the Balkans, the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East. For this reason, enlargement towards Turkey is, at its core, a strategic project as well, whose implications span from bolstering the Common Foreign and Security Policy, to promoting reform at Europe's periphery, and European energy security itself. With the AKP administration further projecting its presence in those areas, Turkey's membership would have not implied an increased responsibility in those fragile areas, but also increased influence for the EU to spend (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 2: Turkey as an Enlargement Country, 2015). The enhanced role of the European Union would have also potentially resulted in the need to successfully develop a common foreign and security policy, a task that has so far proved unsuccessful, but could also have implied a difficulty to coordinate an effective foreign action, given the different stances across the Union. Diverging views regarding hotspots as Israel, Iran and Syria among others, could have led to the incapacity to forge a common European response, thus leaving the EU unable to spend the increased influence gained from the Eastern expansion. On the other hand, Turkey's membership brings a strategic premium due to its role as a vital energy transit nation and its potential as an energy hub: two

groups of players have placed emphasis on its possibility to support the EU's efforts to achieve energy security through the diversification of energy sources. Firstly, European energy firms like British Petroleum and the Italian ENI have identified Turkey as a central hub in addition to a growing and profitable energy market; and secondly, those member states, particularly those in Central and Eastern Europe, who have experienced negative consequences from an excessive reliance on Russian gas supplies, see Turkey as a potential transit country for energy resources arriving from the Middle East (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 2: Turkey as an Enlargement Country, 2015).

Incompatible views are not only a critical point for potential common foreign policy efforts, but also represent a crucial domestic policy issue for the EU: Member states Greece and Cyprus keep at the heart of their national security a balanced and cautious approach towards Turkey, the result of tensions that has led to armed conflict in the past. Greece's strategy has mounted to use its membership in the European Union to exert its leverage on its Turkish counterparts over the maritime border dispute in the Aegean and the Cyprus question, their two main points of contention. While, as previously highlighted, developments in the late 1990s brought to a change in relations, Greek support to Turkish appeals for membership had remained conditional on the protection of their interests on certain questions regarding the Aegean and Cyprus. A similar argument can be brought forward regarding Cyprus, who joined the EU in 2004: the insular state had relied on European support to counterbalance the greater influence of Turkey in the neighborhood, then leveraging its membership in the EU to stop any unwanted action from Turkey.

The economic question

Economically, Turkey has faced the dual challenge of aligning its economic policies with EU standards while addressing internal economic instability, inflation, and necessary structural reforms. Even though Turkey currently represents 15% of the EU's total population, its GDP only makes up 2% of the GDP of the EU-25, making its GDP per capita less than 30% of the same EU figure. The resulting income inequality could have had the unintended consequence of encouraging many Turks to relocate to wealthier EU member states in pursuit of better-paying jobs, a problematic that will be further analysed in the following paragraph. While labor inflow from Turkey has the potential to boost economies in EU members, it also carries some economic risks,

such as resident workers' discontent over downward wage pressures and stress on social welfare programs. Moreover, the complex financial situation experienced by the Turkish economy in past decades clashed with the economic criterion set as part of the Copenhagen Criteria. Only in 2001, Turkey again experienced a severe economic crisis that resulted in rapidly declining GDP, uncontrollably high inflation, and the requirement for an International Monetary Fund loan of US$16 billion (Nugent, 2007). While Turkey would have been a net beneficiary from EU funding programs for accession, its size and economic underdevelopment could have led to serious budgetary issues. If analysing the two main areas of EU funding, as of 2004, meaning CAP and cohesion policy, Turkey would have been eligible for support in both areas under the EU's Objective 1 Structural Fund. Turkey's GDP per capita was well below 75% of EU average, with agriculture employing slightly over one-third of its labour force and generating 12.2% of its GDP (compared to 5.2 and 5% for the EU). Based on the former acquis and assuming a ten-year phase-in of direct payments, the Commission had estimated that Turkish membership would have costed approximately €30 billion annually at 2004 prices, almost one quarter of the EU budget at the time: the estimate served as an indicator of the magnitude of the budgetary issues that needed to be addressed with regard to Turkey (European Commission, 2005). The diversion of structural funds away from current recipients in Southern and Eastern Europe also represented a problematic factor for net recipients of EU funds that would have seen inflows redirected towards Turkey, thus lowering their premium in case of Turkish membership (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 2: Turkey as an Enlargement Country, 2015).

The migratory question

Migratory issues present another layer of complexity: Turkey's position as a key transit country for refugees and migrants has placed an additional strain on its relationship with the EU, raising concerns about border security and humanitarian obligations. Moreover, many EU Member states, especially already hosting sizable Turkish communities as Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands, have demonstrated various concerns regarding the possibility that Turkey's admission would encourage more Turkish immigration to the European continent. When discussing Turkey's influence on the member states, Turkey's size and population are typically viewed as threats rather than opportunities, and concerns over immigration from Eastern Europe had been replaced by

economic anxieties fueled by populism about a Turkish "invasion" of Western European markets and labor markets (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 2: Turkey as an Enlargement Country, 2015).

2. The road from candidacy to negotiations: from 2000 to 2005

The historic decision taken in Helsinki in 1999 brought to the adoption by the European Commission of the first Accession Partnership for Turkey in November 2000, and was quickly followed by the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis published by the Turkish government in March 2001. The National Programme outlined the political and economic reforms that Turkey was prepared to undertake, and it immediately broke Turkey's impasse over political reform, when 34 constitutional amendments were made in October 2001. The comprehensive legal harmonization package included key reforms such the recognition of the property rights of religious minorities, the abolition of the death penalty, the permission to broadcast and teach in languages other than Turkish, and the liberalization of the freedoms of speech, association, and assembly. Three "harmonization packages" were also adopted in December 2002 as part of the follow-up to the Copenhagen European Council (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015). The implemented reforms, in line with the requests of the European Union, prompted the decisive upgrade in EU-Turkey relations at the 2002 Copenhagen European Council when the deadline of December 2004 Brussels European Council meeting was set to decide whether and when to officially open access negotiations. Further financial and technical assistance was also made available to Turkey (Dervis, Gros, Öztrak, & Isık, 2002), with the planned amount of pre-accession funding amounting at €250 million in 2004, €300 million in 2005, and €500 million in 2006. The Conclusions of the 2002 Copenhagen European Council did not however fail to remark 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'* (Hillion, 2014), a statement that propelled the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, elected in November 2002, to schedule the constitutional reform agenda. During this time, the Turkish parliament approved two sets of constitutional changes and four more packages of democratic reforms, in addition to institutional measures to put the new laws into effect.

The diplomatic momentum was not only the result of the renewed commitment of European institutions and Turkey, but also of geopolitical contingencies leading to a similarity of views and a convergence of interests. Most importantly, Greek-Turkish rapprochement continued well into the 2000s: the former hostile countries signed multiple bilateral agreements concerning lower-political matters and collaborative task teams, exploring how Greek expertise could assist Turkey's alignment with the acquis. The improved diplomatic communications were so effective that, in March 2002, the two parties agreed to begin formal discussions regarding the continental shelf of the Aegean (Tocci, 2004). Another crucial breakthrough regarded the Cyprus question and the introduction of the UN Plan, the so-called "Annan Plan"[30], in November 2002. Given the significant obstacle represented by the Cyprus to Turkey's path to full membership, the Annan Plan offered for the first time hope for a mutually agreeable settlement for the protracted dispute (Onis & Yilmaz, The Turkey-EU-US Triangle in Perspective: Transformation or Continuity?, 2005). The Greek and Cypriot support for Turkey's bid for membership eliminated the most explicit causes of friction between the EU and Turkey, and Turkish willingness to diplomacy momentarily quieted the doubts regarding the compatibility of Islam and Western values, arisen after the traumatic attacks by Islamic terrorists against the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001[31]. The attacks marked a shift in perspective and the progressive identification of Islamism as a structural threat to the Western world, the so-defined "Other" that was represented by the Soviet Union only until two decades prior. The complex international framework that would seriously affect EU-Turkey relations in future years, was somewhat contained in the beginning of the 2000s. While the AKP did not demonstrate the Islamic features that would display in the subsequent reforms, Turkey's efforts during the 2003 war in Iraq[32] in containing the destabilization in Europe's

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[30] The Annan Plan was a United Nations proposal to resolve the Cyprus dispute, by creating a "United Republic of Cyprus", a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with two politically equal constituent states. The plan included provisions for power-sharing, territorial adjustments, and the return of some displaced persons. The final version, known as Annan Plan V, was put to separate referendums on April 24, 2004: it was approved by a majority of Turkish Cypriots but overwhelmingly rejected by Greek Cypriots, and as a result, the plan was not implemented, with Cyprus remaining divided to this day.

[31] The World Trade Centre (WTC) complex, situated in Lower Manhattan, New York City, was most known for its two iconic towers known as the Twin Towers, completely destroyed following the planned terrorist attack by the extremist organization al-Qaeda launched on September 11th, 2001. The attack marked a turning point in global history, leading to significant changes in US and international security policies and prompting the launch of the War on Terror by the United States and its allies on Islamic terrorist associations, especially in the Middle East.

[32] The 2003 war in Iraq, commonly known as the Iraq War or the Second Gulf War, began on March 20th, 2003, when a coalition led by the United States and the United Kingdom invaded Iraq: allegations that the Iraqi government, under

neighborhood, were viewed as the demonstration of its role as a valuable partner for the promotion of European goals and principles. A certain degree of uneasiness was, however, exhibited by more conservative voices inside European and Member states institutions: those who opposed Turkey's admission emphasized how Islam and Western principles demonstrated to be incompatible, and how the Anatolic country could be the promoter of instability for the wider EU neighborhood. The two contraposing arguments explain why, even if Turkey was effectively selected as a candidate country in 1999, the debate inside the European Union in the following years kept focusing on whether Turkey should join the EU, rather than how the procedure should proceed (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 2: Turkey as an Enlargement Country, 2015).

In the Anatolic peninsula, instead, while the explicit political and economic benefits motivated Turkey's continued interest in joining the European Union, a certain discomfort became progressively more evident. As previously highlighted, the success of Islamist parties in political elections had already underscored the growing tension between the unmet targets of the Kemalist elite and the Islamic-Turkish identity, Turkey found itself in a particularly vulnerable position when the American-led military campaign was launched against Iraq. Turkish authorities, and especially the military, were indeed eager to maintain and strengthen their relations with the Western coalition, especially as Turkey found itself in need of the IMF and US funds as stringent economic program were implemented following its worst economic crisis in 2001. However, top voices in the Turkish government did not shy away from expressing their opposition to the prospect of an American military campaign against Iraq (Candar, 2002). When Iraq's invasion began, relations with the United States were further complicated following the Turkish parliament decision to forbid the deployment of American troops in Turkish, that would had had enabled the opening of a second front in Northern Iraq. The decision was largely motivated by domestic issues such as the management of the Kurdish minority and the complex political scenario following the

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the leadership of Saddam Hussein, possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and had links to terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda, the group responsible of the September 11th 2001. Despite intense debate and opposition from some members of the international community, the invasion proceeded without explicit authorization from the United Nations Security Council, and the coalition forces quickly overthrew Saddam Hussein's regime, capturing Baghdad, by early April 2003. However, no significant stockpiles of WMDs were found, leading to widespread criticism and controversy regarding the justification for the war. The aftermath of the invasion led to a prolonged and bloody insurgency, severe sectarian violence, and instability that lasted for years: the conflict also contributed to regional instability, the rise of other extremist groups like ISIS, and significant loss of life and displacement among the Iraqi population.

AKP's victory in 2002, but essentially showed the progressive rift in the allies' policies for the Middle East (Kaya, 2011). Later on, Turkish airspace was nonetheless opened to US and British warplanes and missiles, and logistical support was provided throughout the conflict (Aksoy, 2018), essentially in line with the continued interest to remain within the Western coalition. Turkish disappointment with the US attitude in Iraq, however, reinforced the efforts to solve the Cyprus question, not only to counterbalance the destabilizing action of the Western coalition in its Southern neighborhood, but also to develop a closer association with the European Union. The reform process on the economic and democratization fronts were accelerated following the war in Iraq (Onis & Yilmaz, 2005). Conversely, the EU, particularly Germany and France that had previously opposed the US invasion of Iraq, acknowledged Turkey's response to the US invasion and, as a result, began to see Turkey's membership with favor (Gozen, 2006).

The early 2000s certainly marked a crucial period in EU-Turkey relations: the initial optimism and collaborative spirit provided the correct diplomatic momentum for the achievement of full membership, even though if underlying tensions and ideological differences, both within Turkey and among EU member states, were still present. While Turkey's strategic alignment with European interests initially strengthened its candidacy, diverging views on issues such as Islam, Western values, and regional stability signaled incompatible views. This complex interplay of political, economic, and ideological factors laid the groundwork for the ongoing debate over Turkey's place within the European Union for the following years. Diplomatic efforts, Turkish economic and constitutional reforms, and geopolitical maneuvering all constituted significant reasons for the progress in EU-Turkey relations. Due to Turkey's reform achievements during the first AKP government, Turkey was deemed to have "sufficiently" satisfied the political requirements for entry into the European Union, and accession talks were set to start in October 2005 by both the European Council in December 2004 and the European Commission's Annual Progress Report in 2004 (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015).

3. The height of negotiations: from 2005 to 2015

As the negotiations officially started in October 2005, the European Union was still witnessing intense debates on whether, rather than how, Turkey should in principle become a member state. Only days prior to the opening of accession negotiations, the Austrian government stated that, while the possibility of eventual membership could not be ruled out, the goal should not to welcome Turkey as a full Member (Grigoriadis, 2006). The Austrian crisis was resolved only on the day accession negotiations were opened, in return for the start of Croatia's EU accession negotiations. Similarly, Angela Merkel, the leader of the Christian Democrats in Germany, stressed in a letter to the conservative heads of state in the EU only one month prior to her victory in the election, that accession talks with Turkey should result in a "privileged partnership" rather than membership. Merkel's view was also consistent with France's intention to reverse its earlier position and commitments and impose the recognition of Cyprus as a basic requirement in order to start accession negotiations before October 3, 2005. Throughout 2005, the European Parliament's Conservative and Christian Democrat groups also waged a fierce campaign to codify the idea of a "privileged partnership" with Turkey. They succeeded in forcing a secret vote on the Turkey report in the European Parliament for the first time in the history of EU enlargement, in spite of protests from the Socialists, Liberals, and Greens that stated that such a vote went against openness (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015).

The internal debate demonstrates a stark contrast to previous accession rounds: during the Eastern enlargement, for example, debates included similar themes, such as economic disparity between Western and Eastern European countries, fears of mass migration, and the potential political and social instability that could arise from rapid enlargement (Vachudova, 2005). Similarly, the Southern enlargement in the 1970s also implied a certain degree of controversy inside European institutions due to concerns about the political stability of these countries, their economic underdevelopment relative to existing EU members, and the potential strain on EU resources (Preston, 1997). In these cases, however, internal debates did not hinder the integration process and were resolved through a combination of compromise, conditionality, and phased integration measures, which addressed the concerns of both proponents and skeptics of enlargement. The substantial difference is the result of the set of ideological and institutional questions at the core of

European debates: influential figures in France, for example, expressed concerns over the potential undermining of the EU's already loosely defined *esprit communautaire* as a result of Turkey's accession, jeopardizing the deepening of European integration (Nugent, 2007). Key actors in German and Austrian politics also objected full membership not only on the cultural grounds, but also due to migratory concerns. The complex debate between Member states made the role of the two intergovernmental institutions of the European Union, the European Council and the Council, of central importance for Turkey's accession negotiations: already in 2005, the European Council anticipated that the EU will continue to influence Turkey's reform agenda through updated accession partnerships, monitor compliance through progress reports from the Commission, and threaten to halt talks should the reform process regress (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, Chapter 1: History: The ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations, 2015). The internal struggle is clearly visible in the Negotiating Framework, which would serve as the foundation for future developments in Turkey-EU ties, agreed by the two parties before the start of the real discussions. The framework defines Turkey's accession process as an uncertain and flexible path: while the document highlights that the ultimate goal that all parties share is for Turkey to become a member of the Union, the agreement also highlights that its achievement is not guaranteed, not only in case Turkey persistently breaches the EU's core principles, but also if the EU is not able to maintain its current rate of integration. The EU, therefore, had ensured that there were exit strategies in place, even if Turkey fully met their accession standards (Konings, 2018).

As European discussions on the merits of Turkey's membership grew louder, more contentious, and disengaged from unbiased evaluations of Turkey's reform process, Turkish incentives to reform in line with EU norms decreased. At the same time, the diplomatic momentum that motivated the developments until 2004 collapsed: with Cyprus joining the EU in May 2004, and with the failure of the Annan Plan after the Greek Cypriots refusal of the referendum in September[33], Turkey-EU relations suffered heavily. The failure of the Annan Plan, for example, exacerbated skepticism among certain EU member states, such as France and Germany, regarding

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[33] The failure of the Annan Plan resulted from the overwhelming rejection by the Greek Cypriots of the proposal to create a "United Republic of Cyprus". Turkey had supported the Annan Plan and actively encouraged the Turkish Cypriot community to vote in favor of it, and the Turkish minority approved the plan with 65% voting in favor. The failure further complicated Turkey's obligations under the EU-Turkey Customs Union Agreement, as in 2005, Turkey signed the Additional Protocol to extend the customs union to new EU member states, including Cyprus, but Turkey refused to open its ports and airports to Cypriot vessels, citing the ongoing political division.

Turkey's candidacy and its capacity to compromise. Cyprus EU membership also equipped the island with veto power in Turkey-EU negotiations, a power that would be used extensively to block a number of chapters (see Table 3). Turkey's dissatisfaction with the EU's methods and the perceived mistreatment on ideological grounds inversely impacted its motivation with gaining full membership. If EU conditionality, a sort of "carrots and sticks" game, was effective between 1999 and 2005, as Turkey made significant reforms in pursuit of candidate status and saw clear incentives to do so; when the EU granted candidate status, European Member states lost much of its leverage. With no guarantee of a reward at the end of the accession process, meaning full EU membership, the AKP, led by an increasingly autocratic Erdoğan, did not feel pressured to act decisively (Chislett, 2015).

After a promising beginning, during which the screening process for all 35 chapters was completed in 2005–06, actual negotiations initially progressed at a slow but steady pace. From 2006 to 2008, ten chapters were opened, with just one provisionally closed (see Table 3): the Science and Research chapter was opened and provisionally closed on June 12th 2006; Enterprise and Industrial Policy was opened on March 29th 2007; Financial Control and Statistics chapters were opened on June 26th 2007; Trans-European Network and Consumer and Health Protection chapters were opened on December 19th 2007; Company Law and Intellectual Property Law chapters were opened on June 17th 2008; Free Movement of Capital and Information Society and Media were opened on December 19th 2008 (European Commission, 2018). Until 2009 and except the Science and Research chapter provisionally closed, the chapters opened mostly concerned economic matters: the decision to tackle the economic question first could be directly linked with the possibility to objectively evaluate Turkey's capacity to align with European standard and practices, without ideological or strategic issues directly affecting negotiations. Turkey's unstable economic performance and complex financial framework as a consequence of the 2001 crisis resulted in the approach becoming unsuccessful, as almost all chapters remained opened. While the Council of Ministers often deliberated on when and under what conditions to open chapters with Turkey, the accession process stalled from 2008 to 2014: only four more chapters were opened, and none were closed. In those six years, the Taxation chapter was opened on 30 June 2009; and the Environment chapter was opened on 21 December 2009. The EU Council of Ministers was unable to reach a consensus on a common position for the chapters on Education and Culture (for over three and a half years) and Economic and Monetary Policy (for approximately three years). The Republic of

Cyprus and France, respectively, blocked these chapters for political reasons, even though Turkey's performance in these areas was deemed satisfactory for the commencement of negotiations (Arısan & Eralp, 2017).

While in certain areas, Turkey demonstrated promising progress (in chapters such as Financial control, Company law, and Science and research), other areas are marked by stability (as in Taxation, Transport policy, and Public procurement chapters), and some sectors appear to be regressing (chapters as Fisheries, Statistics, and Economic and monetary union). The progressive backslide is highlighted in the Commission's reports: if in 2005, the Commission found five out of 33 chapters sufficiently aligned with the acquis (European Commission, 2005), this number rose to twelve by 2010, but then decreased to eleven in 2015 (European Commission, 2015) and further dropped to eight in 2017 (European Commission, 2018)[34]. The deterioration cannot only be imputed to diverging views inside European institutions or to the blocking of 17 chapters by the Council (2006), France (2007) and Cyprus (2009), but also to a turning point marked by anti-democratic reforms, authoritarian inclinations, and widespread disregard for human rights inside the Turkish political landscape. While implemented reforms have included positive developments such as the reduced influence of the armed forces in political and societal issues and a downward trend in torture and ill-treatment cases among others (Konings, 2018), EU-inspired policies aimed at progressively loosen the military's hold on politics also enabled AKP representatives to infiltrate in lower echelons of the military, the judiciary, and other important state institutions (Yeşilada, 2023). After winning his second election in 2007, Erdoğan started to progressively undo political reforms, eliminating liberals from AKP leadership roles and replacing his rivals in the rank and file with loyal Milli Görüş supporters close to him. Policy initiatives were progressively placing civilian control over the military forces and reducing the once-dominant National Security Council to an advising position. Additionally, Erdoğan reorganized the division of powers between the Turkish government and judiciary, consolidating authority within the former, which he commanded (Tansel, 2018). Of course, such reforms were not in line with the policies requested by European institutions or to the Copenhagen Criteria's core principles, and represented a considerable limitation to further chapters negotiations. In 2012, the EU launched the Positive

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[34] In 2017, the Commission did not issue a report but released a progress report in April 2018, covering Turkey's progress throughout 2017 and the first three months of 2018. Consequently, any reference to Turkish progress in 2017 is based on information from the 2018 progress report.

Agenda to revive Turkey's reform efforts through cooperation in areas of mutual interest. Hoping to prompt a shift in Turkey's approach, the Council decided to unblock one chapter and open negotiations the following year (Karakas, 2013). However, Turkey's continued lack of substantial reforms and persistence in its de-Europeanization trend further eroded the EU's confidence in Turkey's accession prospects. The autocratic downturn experienced by Turkish institutions was also heavily criticized by the European Commission, who denounced the disproportionate use of force by the police against protestors, the limitations on minorities' rights, the widespread corruption, and the public skepticism about the independence, impartiality, and transparency of the judiciary. Other issues include media self-censorship as a result of government pressure and journalist prosecution, a lack of political will to address the Kurdish issue, and the mistreatment of women in the form of forced marriages, honour killings, and domestic abuse cases (Konings, 2018). The rejection of EU-inspired reforms demonstrates how Turkish politics and society progressively lost Europe as its normative reference, along a process, opposite to Europeanization that could be defined as De-Europeanization (Aydın-Düzgit & Kaliber, 2016).

The failure of the Annan Plan, coupled with growing internal debates within the EU about Turkey's membership, significantly hindered the progress of Turkey's accession negotiations, and despite initial progress in opening chapters, negotiations stalled as political disagreements, particularly over Cyprus and concerns about Turkey's authoritarian turn, deepened. Turkey's diminishing commitment to EU-inspired reforms and the EU's reluctance to offer a clear path to membership further strained relations caused the accession process to remain largely stagnant.

Table 3. State of play of acquis chapters, as of 2019

Negotiations chapters	Description	Opened	Prov. closed	Status
1. **Free movement of goods**	It concerns on removing trade barriers, requiring Turkey to adopt EU product standards and regulatory norms.			Blocked (**EU Council decision**, December 2006)
2. **Free movement of workers**	It creates conditions for Turkish nationals to work and move freely within EU, in compliance with EU law.			Blocked (**Cyprus veto**, December 2009)
3. **Right of establishment and freedom to provide services**	Alignment Turkey's legal framework to allow businesses and professionals from EU countries to establish themselves and offer services freely in Turkey, and vice versa.			Blocked (**EU Council decision**, December 2006)
4. **Free movement of capital**	It concerns the free flow of capital between Turkey and EU member states, including issues related to money laundering, financial controls.	December 19th 2008		Opening of negotiations
5. **Public procurement**	Alignment on EU rules on the transparency, competitiveness, and fairness of public sector purchasing of goods, and services.			Screening completion (November 2005)
6. **Company law**	Alignment on EU regulations regarding company operations, accounting, and auditing.	June 17th 2008		Opening of negotiations
7. **Intellectual property law**	Harmonization to EU standards on copyright, patents, trademarks, and enforcement mechanisms.	June 17th 2008		Opening of negotiations
8. **Competition policy**	Adoption of EU rules on anti-trust regulations, mergers, and state aid.			Screening completion (November 2005)
9. **Financial services**	Adoption of EU regulations governing banking, insurance, and financial markets.			Blocked (**EU Council decision**, December 2006)

10. Information society and media	Alignment on EU standards concerning electronic communications and the regulation of digital services ensuring free speech.	December 19th 2008		Opening of negotiations
11. Agricultural and rural development	Implementation of EU agricultural standards, rural development policies, and subsidies, improving food safety, animal health, and environmental practices.			Blocked (**EU Council decision**, December 2006)
12. Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy	Alignment on EU food safety standards and practices, including veterinary and plant health regulations.	June 30th 2010		Opening of negotiations
13. Fisheries	Implementation of EU fisheries policies, focusing on sustainable management of fishing resources and control, and protection of marine environments.			Blocked (**EU Council decision**, December 2006)
14. Transport policy	Alignment Turkey's laws in road, rail, maritime, and air transport with EU standards.			Blocked (**EU Council decision**, December 2006)
15. Energy	Adoption of EU energy policies on issues like market liberalization, energy efficiency, renewable energy, and nuclear safety.			Blocked (**Cyprus veto**, December 2009)
16. Taxation	Harmonization the taxation system, particularly VAT and excise duties, with EU tax rules to ensure fair taxation and prevent tax evasion.	June 30th 2010		Opening of negotiations
17. Economic and monetary policy	Alignment with EU policies on economic stability, fiscal discipline, and preparation for participation in the European Monetary Union.	December 14th 2015		Blocked (**France veto**, June 2007)
18. Statistics	Upgrade the statistical systems to meet EU standards for producing reliable and comparable data.	June 26th 2007		Opening of negotiations
19. Social policy and employment	Alignment of labor laws, employment policies, and social protection systems with EU standards.			Screening completion (March 2006)

20. **Enterprise and industrial policy**	The chapter concerns the fostering a competitive industrial environment in Turkey.	March 29th 2007		Opening of negotiations
21. **Trans-European networks**	Turkey needs to integrate into the EU's Networks for energy, transport, and telecommunications.	December 19th 2007		Opening of negotiations
22. **Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments**	Development of effective regional development strategies to manage EU funds aimed at reducing regional disparities and promoting cohesion.	November 5th 2013		Opening of negotiations
23. **Judiciary and fundamental rights**	Alignment with EU standards on human rights, minority rights, and anti-corruption by ensuring the independence of its judiciary, enhancing the rule of law, and protecting fundamental rights.			Blocked (**Cyprus veto**, December 2009)
24. **Justice, freedom and security**	Alignment with EU standards on border management, immigration, asylum policies, and cooperation in combating terrorism and organized crime.			Blocked (**Cyprus veto**, December 2009)
25. **Science and research**	Integration research institutions and systems with the EU's research and innovation networks.	June 12th 2006	June 12th 2006	Provisional closure of negotiations
26. **Education and culture**	Alignment its educational systems, cultural policies, and youth programs with EU standards.			Blocked (**Cyprus veto**, December 2009)
27. **Environment**	Adoption EU environmental regulations covering air and water quality, waste management, nature protection, industrial pollution, and climate change mitigation.	December 21st 2009		Opening of negotiations
28. **Consumer and health protection**	Alignment its consumer protection and public health policies with EU standards.	December 19th 2007		Opening of negotiations
29. **Customs union**	Integration customs regulations with the EU's Customs Union framework, facilitating trade and protecting the internal market from fraud and smuggling.			Blocked (**EU Council decision**, December 2006)

30. External relations	Alignment its foreign, security, and defense policies with those of the EU, including participation in EU trade agreements and international treaties.			Blocked (**EU Council decision**, December 2006)
31. Foreign, security and defence policy	Harmonization of foreign, security, and defense policies with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and participate in related missions.			Blocked (**Cyprus veto**, December 2009)
32. Financial control	Integration of EU rules on auditing, internal financial control, and anti-fraud measures to ensure proper use of EU funds and financial transparency.	June 26th 2007		Opening of negotiations
33. Financial and budgetary provisions	This chapter deals the preparation to contribute to and benefit from the EU budget, ensuring it can manage EU financial resources and participate in budgetary processes.	June 30th 2016		Blocked (**France veto**, June 2007)
34. Institutions	It concerns with Turkey's integration into EU institutions, preparing it to take part in EU decision-making processes, once membership is achieved.			Blocked (**France veto**, June 2007)
35. Other issues	This chapter addresses miscellaneous issues that arise during the accession process, including final arrangements for transitional periods and dispute settlement mechanisms.			No negotiations required

4. The progressive abandonment of negotiations: from 2015 onwards

Progressive disengagement arrived more as a slow realization than an abrupt epiphany: European waning motivation, the lack of political will inside the Turkish establishment, and the downturn in Turkish democracy caused negotiations to be abandoned, and since December 14th, 2015, no chapters were opened. The sharp deterioration can be directly attributable to consequences of the military coup attempt against the Turkish government in July 2016[35]. The coup was quickly suppressed, and the Justice and Development Party responded forcefully, declaring a state of emergency. Both the Council of Europe and European institutions condemned the coup and acknowledged Turkey's decision to implement strong emergency measures, but recognized that the AKP government had implemented excessive measures for an extended period (European Parliament, 2016). During this time, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law were largely ignored, and within just three months of the coup, 31,844 individuals were detained, and 1,477 were held in police custody (Council of Europe: Commissioner for Human Rights, 2016, October). It is notable how the Turkish government disregarded demands from the Council of Europe and the Commission to address the situation and chose to move forward instead.

The international scenario exacerbated the unstable relations between Turkey and the European Union: with the onset of the Syrian civil war[36], Turkey began a reorientation of its foreign policy. The shift from prioritizing EU accession to focusing on regional security and strategic partnerships was motivated by the need to balance its stance between overthrowing Assad and addressing immediate security concerns, such as Kurdish forces along its border. (Kanat & Ustun, 2015). The progressive abandonment of earlier EU integration policies, and the strategic alignment with the

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[35] The military coup attempt against the Turkish government on July 15, 2016, was a failed effort by a faction within the Turkish Armed Forces to overthrow President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government. However, the attempt was swiftly suppressed by loyal military forces, police, and civilians who responded to Erdoğan's call to resist. The coup left over 250 people dead and thousands injured.

[36] The Syrian Civil War began in 2011, arising from widespread protests against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in the context of the Arab Spring. The civil war began with peaceful protests demanding political reforms, but the Syrian government's violent crackdown led to an armed rebellion, that called for the overthrow of Assad. The conflict rapidly attracted significant international attention, with United States, European countries, and Gulf states providing varying levels of support to opposition groups, and Russia and Iran becoming key allies of Assad. The chaos of the war also left a power vacuum that allowed extremist groups, notably ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), to seize large territories in Syria and Iraq, further complicating its framework.

United States in the fight against ISIS[37] gave Erdogan little incentive to develop a closer political union with the European Union, and vice versa. Further points of friction were represented by Turkish progressive divergence from traditional EU positions, as it formed alliances with Russia and Iran. The EU's support for Kurdish militias fighting ISIS drew Turkey further away, as Erdogan perceived the EU as undermining its own security: the dynamic widened the gap between Turkey's policies and the EU's expectations for regional stability, adding another layer of complexity to the stalled accession talks (Weiss, 2016).

The situation was aggravated by the migratory crisis, intensified after the start of the Syrian war in 2011, and that transformed Turkey into a country of reception and transit. During the peak of the migration crisis between 2015 and 2018, the impact of the Syrian war, the rise of ISIS in border regions, and the potential terrorist threat posed by the PKK significantly influenced Turkey's internal concerns about border management. The migratory crisis also had direct effects for Europe: despite Turkey's efforts to limit incoming migration, it could not stop the massive flow already set in motion toward European countries. The migration wave became a full-blown crisis for the European Union due to the ineffective mechanisms for managing and sharing asylum requests, disproportionately burdening southern and eastern member states. To address the issue, in March 2016, the EU signed a historic agreement with Turkey: irregular migrants attempting to enter Greece would be returned to Turkey, and Ankara would take measures to prevent new migration routes from opening. In exchange, the EU agreed to resettle Syrian refugees from Turkey on an individual basis, ease visa restrictions for Turkish citizens, provide six billion euros in aid for Syrian refugee communities in Turkey, update the customs union, and revive stalled EU membership talks with Turkey (Terry, 2018). The pragmatic compromise behind this agreement was driven by common interests: halting migration to Europe, improving living conditions for refugees in Turkey, and promoting legal migration. The centrality of the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan was reaffirmed in the spring of 2020, when Ankara threatened to open the borders for hundreds of thousands of migrants to move toward Greece. The EU's accommodating response demonstrated its reliance on Turkey as a bulwark against migration from the Middle East.

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[37] ISIS, or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, emerged from the remnants of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI): the group declared a caliphate in June 2014, seizing large territories in Iraq and Syria, and became known for its brutal tactics. In response to its expansion, the US launched international coalition, including countries like the UK, France, and others, conducted airstrikes targeting ISIS positions and infrastructure starting in August 2014. By late 2017, ISIS had lost much of its territorial control in Iraq, with major cities like Mosul falling back into the hands of Iraqi forces.

Moreover, the 2020 standoff highlighted the uneasy partnership between the EU and Turkey (Fox, 2020): while the agreement placed significant responsibility on Turkey for managing European migration, it also left the EU vulnerable to pressure from its eastern neighbor. The instrumentalization of migration flows allows Turkey to leverage its large refugee population to gain strategic or economic advantages. While the migrant crisis has highlighted Turkey's role as a substantial leverage over its EU accession process, the deal also demonstrated that Turkish EU membership prospects are conditional on several key issues, such as democratic reforms and its cooperation on migration (Heck & Hess, 2017). The 2016 migrant plan signaled a shift in the relationship that reframed the partnership away from Turkey's EU full membership aspirations toward a more pragmatic, transactional relationship: while the 2016 agreement included provisions for re-energizing accession talks, it primarily underscored Turkey's strategic importance to the EU in managing migration flows from Syria and the broader Middle East (De Albuquerque, 2019). Turkey was treated as a strategic partner rather than a full member, with their alignment moving from a normative to a more pragmatic partnership.

From 2015 onwards, the halt in negotiations has been less intertwined with the ideological and strategic debate between EU Member states on whether Turkey is a suitable Member, and more linked with the clear incompatibility between the Copenhagen Criteria and EU's core principles, due to the democratic backsliding of Turkish institutions. The never-ending debate inside the European Union whether Turkey should be admitted following negotiations, veered into the direction on whether access negotiations should be terminated (Blockmans & Yilmaz, 2017). Between 2016 and 2017, the European Parliament and some EU member states, notably Germany, began calling for a suspension or halt of negotiations due to concerns over Turkey's democratic backsliding and human rights issues. But only in 2018, the European Union officially stated that Turkey's accession process was effectively stalled, and while the negotiations were not officially "terminated," the process was significantly frozen, and the prospect of Turkey's EU membership became unreachable.

Conclusion

What began as a hopeful bid for integration into the European Economic Community in 1959 has, over the course of more than half a century, evolved into the longest accession processes in the history of the EU. Turkey's strategic importance, its geographical position as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East, and its historical ambitions to be recognized as a part of the Western order have always been central to its foreign policy, and yet, this thesis has highlighted how these same attributes, while offering considerable benefits to the EU, have also raised difficult questions about identity, governance, and the future trajectory of European integration.

During the Cold War, its proximity to the Soviet Union and its crucial role in the Mediterranean underscored how strategic interests overshadowed other concerns, such as democracy and human rights, and Turkey's value to the Western alliance, especially through its membership in NATO, was unquestioned. The end of the Cold War however, brought a redefinition of priorities on both sides: while for Europe, the focus shifted towards deepening integration through the establishment of the European Union and the enlargement to Central and Eastern European countries; for Turkey, the collapse of the Soviet bloc opened new opportunities, and Turkish leaders sought to redefine their role on the global stage and push for closer ties with the EU. As this thesis has demonstrated, the accession process is not simply about ticking off criteria outlined by the Copenhagen Criteria but is deeply intertwined with broader geopolitical, economic, and cultural factors. The 1990s, in particular, were a crucial decade for Turkey-EU relations, marked by the formal recognition of Turkey's candidacy and the signing of the Customs Union Agreement in 1995. Despite the progress, it became increasingly clear that national interests, both within Turkey and among EU Member States, would play a decisive role in shaping the accession process. Turkey's internal political dynamics, including the rise of political Islam and concerns over democratic governance, complicated its path to full EU membership: the ascension of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the early 2000s initially brought hope for reform and alignment with EU values.

However, as time progressed, concerns about democratic backsliding, human rights violations, and an increasingly authoritarian political climate in Turkey began to overshadow the early optimism surrounding its candidacy. Contemporarily, the European Union itself has grappled with internal divisions over Turkey's accession: Member States such as Germany and France expressed

reservations about its inclusion, largely due to concerns over cultural compatibility, migration, and the potential strain on EU institutions. The question of identity, and what it means to be European, have been a particularly contentious issue in Turkey's case. Another major stumbling block in Turkey's accession process, the Cyprus issue highlights the intersection of national interests and broader geopolitical concerns: Cyprus's accession to the EU in 2004 has been a significant roadblock in Turkey's EU path, and the persistent tensions between Greece and Turkey, as well as Turkey's refusal to fully recognize the Republic of Cyprus, have further complicated matters, demonstrating how regional disputes can have far-reaching implications in the EU enlargement process. The progressive breakdown of accession talks, particularly after 2015, can be attributed to a combination of these internal and external factors: while Turkey's increasing divergence from EU democratic norms, particularly with regard to the rule of law, press freedom, and the treatment of minorities, has raised significant concerns in Brussels, the EU's internal dynamics, including the rise of populist and nationalist movements, have made the prospect of further enlargement, especially to a large, predominantly Muslim country like Turkey, an increasingly difficult political sell, and thus, the future of Turkey's relationship with the European Union remains uncertain. While the strategic importance of Turkey to Europe cannot be denied, particularly in terms of security, migration, and energy, the political and cultural gaps between the two entities have widened in recent years. The stagnation of accession talks and the growing mistrust on both sides point to a relationship that, while deeply interconnected, will never result in full EU membership for Turkey, and instead, what may emerge is a new form of partnership that recognizes Turkey's strategic importance while acknowledging the limits of full integration.

Ultimately, the case of Turkey truly shows the complexities of EU enlargement and the challenges of integrating countries with different historical, cultural, and political backgrounds, while also highlighting the ways in which national interests, both within the EU and in candidate countries, can profoundly shape the course of accession negotiations. As the EU continues to evolve in a rapidly changing global landscape, the lessons learned from Turkey's accession process will likely inform future enlargement debates, particularly with regard to the EU's relationships with its more troubled neighbors, such as the delicate issue of Ukraine's potential accession.

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