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**The Role of Internal and External Factors in EU-Turkey Relations: Remapping Turning Points**

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to give a historical account of the important events that have shaped the relations between European Union and Turkey. The paper categorizes important events in three dimensions that are political, economic and social events that have affected the relations between the two actors.

**Introduction**

Turkey and the European Communities/ European Union (EC/EU) has deep-rooted relations for more than five decades. The relations has had its ups and downs in the course of history in line with the changes in the systemic, national, and individual levels. The volatile relations has been debated by many academics and still, the debates are going on over the problematic relations between the two actors. Many approaches have been employed to have a better understanding of EU-Turkey relations.

This paper is going to analyze the most important events that have an impact on dual relations. The article divides important events in terms of time periods which are 1960-1980, 1980-1999, and 1999 onwards and the paper will be finished by a conclusion.

**A New Era in the Relations between the 1960-1980 Period**

Turkey’s Westernization and Europeanization are not new phenomena but dating back to the last period of Ottoman period. One of the debates was whether or not Ottoman Empire was a European state and the idea of being a European state was pursued by founders of the Turkish Republic. According to Müftüler Baç (2005), the recognition of Turkey as a European state was one of the foreign policy objectives of Turkish elites who proclaimed the Turkish Republic (Müftüler-Baç 2005, p.17). Given the historical relations Turkey had with European nations since the Ottoman times, she has entered a new period in the 1960s with the Agreement establishing an Association between the European Economic Community and Turkey. The agreement was signed on September 1 in 1963 in Ankara, therefore, it was called Ankara Agreement. This agreement brought new perspectives to the long existing relations between the two actors for this reason the Ankara Agreement is a milestone in the history of the relationship mainly because it has introduced economic benefits for both parties and gave an indirect perspective on future membership of Turkey to the Community. For instance, the article 2 states that;

‘’The aim of the agreement is to promote the continuous and balanced strengthening of trade and economic relations between the parties […] an accelerated development of the Turkish economy and to improve the level of employment and the living conditions of the Turkish people.’’

For the aforementioned goals and in order to achieve the objectives a customs union was established that consisted of three stages. These stages are indicated as preparatory, transitional, and final stages to apply the customs union.

However, the article 28 was opening a new window for the future of the relations for both parties. The article 28 states that ;

‘’As soon as the operation of this agreement has advanced far enough to justify envisaging full acceptance by Turkey of the obligations arising out of the Treaty establishing the Community, the contracting parties shall examine the possibility of the accession of Turkey to the Community.’’

The article 28 became the ‘starting point’ of Turkey’s EU accession journey. According to Eralp (2009), The period between 1959-1970 was a harmonization period in which both actors have converged in some policy areas and also the international context that has been shaped by cold war made United States policymakers to support the formation of European Community. Also in line with cold war context Tukey designated its conception of westernization as siding with the western alliance. By the same token, there was a favorable domestic context for the implementation of the Ankara Agreement. The leaders of mainstream political parties and business elites have declared their support for the association agreement. For political and business elites it was more than political and economic gains but rather it was perceived in civilizational context. (Eralp 2009, pp.151-152).

However the relations has had many hindrances. For instance 1960 military coup was the reason that Ankara Agreement was signed with a two years delay compared to the association agreement that was signed between Greece and European Economic Community. Given the cold war context, there has been other external and internal occasions that formed the relations. For instance, 1971 coup d’etat, American influence, Cyprus military operation, first enlargement, EC’s internal reform process altogether have impacts on the nature of the relations between the parties. Especially, America’s leverage has been felt very deeply via Eisenhower administration, Kennedy administration, and Johnson administration at the very first years of EEC-Turkey relationship. America’s interest over Turkey’s EEC affairs was a result of the systemic conditions. Turkey was in dire conditions economically and desperately needed financial assistance. In order to keep Turkey in the western alliance against communist threat America supported Turkey’s EEC relations to embed her further in western alliance (Çakır 2016). Starting in the mid-1970s the relations were soared up due to a number of issues. For instance, 1971 military coup and deterioration of Turkish democracy, Turkey’s Cyprus intervention, international crises have contributed to antagonism between EEC and Turkey. Especially Cyprus issue have drawn close attention both of United States and EEC. The bad management of Turkey’s transitional stage for customs union added up cautious approaches towards EEC. Turkish newspapers were announcing that trade deficit with EEC was skyrocketing by 223 percent in the eight months. Even though Turkey was recommended to make a similar application upon Greece’s application for full membership to the Community, Turkish political elites regardless of right or left took a negative and cautious stance on this recommendation and they did not submit an application to the EEC ( Çakır 2016, pp.88-89). Especially, Islamists led by Necmettin Erbakan were very critical of EEC for both ideological and economic reasons. Aside from political parties and civil society organization State Planning Organization was against more integration with the EEC (Aybey 2004, p.23). Another point that affected the intensity of the relations was that EEC was busy with reforms such as European Monetary System (EMS), European Political Cooperation (EPC), European Currency Unit (ECU), the Exchange rate Mechanism (ERM) were internal elements that kept EEC busy (Urwin 1995, pp.154-155). Towards the end of 1970s Ecevit government refrigerated the terms of Ankara Agreement but the government next in line led by Demirel tried to rebuild relations. In sum, the period starting with the signing of Association Agreement until 1980 have witnessed dramatic changes in world politics, European politics, and domestic politics of Turkey that closely affected the endeavor of Turkey ’s in Europe.

**A Search for Membership 1980-1999 Period**

Throughout 1980 still there was bipolar international system that Soviet Union and United States were the dominant actors. Reagan administration in the United States and Gorbachev as the general secretary of Communist Party were to change the fate of bipolar international system that would affect every actor in the system towards the end of the 1980s. In 1989 the cold war ended unexpectedly and the historical moment when the Berlin wall fell new opportunities became apparent for the enlargement of the European Community. For Turkey, again the democracy was suspended by a military coup in 12 September 1980 which affected the relations between the Community and Turkey. Özal who was a bureaucrat-dominated Turkish politics via introducing the new economic model and making first official application for full membership to the EC. He introduced massive economic reforms and abandoned protectionist statist economic model with neo-liberal economic policies. (“Özallı Yıllar Belgeseli 1. Bölüm | 32. Gün Arşivi - YouTube,” 2017). Özal who was at the time a bureaucrat implemented the famous 24 January 1980 economic reform package (Öniş 2004, p.117). He later involved in the founding of Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi, ANAP) that would be opened the way for his future political career for the post of prime ministership and presidency. The relations that were nearly dormant for 5 years were revitalized by his government and after he was elected for the second time in 1987 Özal’s government submitted a formal request for full membership to the European Community (Daban 2017, p.86). However, Turkey’s application was declared as eligible (“Turkey - European Commission,” 2016) but it was rejected on the basis that it is not ready to be a member. At the same time EC was occupied with internal reforms like the structuring of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Single European Act (SEA), deepening, Britain’s rebate issue were on the agenda of EC. Another important event is the fall of Berlin wall. According to Best et. al. (2004) the fell of Berlin wall made ‘’the future of European integration far less predictable ((Best, et. al., 2004, p.508). The 1990s has witnessed major changes in the international context. Cold war ended unexpectedly therefore European Union devised a new strategy. This strategy opened up the way for a new enlargement for Central and Eastern European countries. European Parliament interest for a new enlargement has also risen (“The role of the European Parliament in the enlargement process (1),” 1997). As the main objective of Association Agreement finally the customs union was established in 1995 and fully operationalized by 1996. The customs union enabled Turkey to export industrial and processed agricultural products without any tariffs to the member countries. Trade figures indicates that after completion of the customs union by 1996 Turkey’s import rates grew by 34.7 percent compared the previous year. Whereas exports to the EU countries rose by 3.6 percent amounting almost 11.5 billion dollars (“History of Turkey- EU Relations,” 2017) that making EU the biggest trading partner.

Some most important factor that transformed EU-Turkey relations in the 1980s and 1990s are southern enlargement that included Greece, Maastricht Treaty which introduced many economic criteria, Copenhagen political criteria. Especially, Maastricht Treaty was concluded in 1991 and the Treaty replaced European Community with European Union. At the same time, it has come out with new criteria for candidate countries. In other words, EU only was willing to accept newcomers on the basis of new conditions that are political and economic criteria (Grabbe 1999). Some of these conditions are guaranteeing the stability of democratic institutions, rule of law, human rights, protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy and capacity to deal with the pressure of the market forces within the EU (Grabbe 1999, p.4). Even though Turkey’s economy was not promising at least it was a functioning market economy but Turkey’s democracy has not been that good. Almost in every ten years, the democratic institutions were interrupted by coup d’Etats hence it had a bad reputation in terms of human rights issues. Therefore political criteria would become a problematic issue for the future of the relations.

Helsinki summit is one historical moment for Turkey’s European journey. According to Tocci (2014), the decision was a watershed due to the reason that EU did not open accession negotiation as it did for the other enlargement countries at the time which were Central and Eastern European countries. The quarrel was that Turkey did not fulfill the Copenhagen political criteria and no progress on the resolution of Cyprus problem. (Tocci 2014, p.2). Another characteristic of this era is internal conflicts. Turkey had been fighting separatist movement, PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) since PKK started violence in 1984. This situation has been causing human rights deteriorations in Turkey. When his opinion asked US president Clinton said that human right issues were significant deterrents to the nation's increase to the EU and he prescribed Turks to attempt to meet EU human rights standards. At the same time, US Congress included Turkey’s human rights issues on its agenda. The Congress, in a 1994 draft enactment proposed 25 percent of the amount of the help accessible to Turkey in the case that Turkey’s improvement of its human rights performance. Also, the enactment confining Turkey the utilization of American military gear acquired through this help program for internal security purposes (Çakır 2016, p.134). Turkey’s NATO membership is another crucial factor for US involvement in the Turkish-EU affairs. When Turkey was excluded in enlargement perspective in Luxembourg summit, Çiller government declared that her government would block any enlargement of NATO (Çakır 2016, pp.145-146). That is one of the reasons that saved candidacy status for Turkey in 1999. In sum, as well as Turkey’s internal dynamics external actors and factors have played a paramount role in EU affair of Turkey.

**Turkey’s Accession to the EU and Congestion Period**

The characteristics of this period are crises, conflicts and distrust between the parties. In this era international conjuncture, terrorism, migration, refugees are the other important parameters in the relations. In this period Turkey has improved its human rights records, undertook significant reforms. For instance, it has abolished capital punishment, improved minority rights, launched state-funded local language television. By the year 2000, the European Commission published the first Accession Partnership document Turkey prepared the National Programme in order to adopt the Acquis. Turkey made 34 constitutional amendments in 2001, adopted a new Civil Code by 2002. Justice and Development Party (JDP) came to power in the early election in November 2002. JDP took advantage of EU conditionality to change domestic power structures. Reform process and EU accession was used by JDP as an apparatus to increase its legitimacy (Keyman and Düzgit 2007, pp.74-75). Towards 2004 the relations were getting soared up again due EU’s internal reform process. EU was occupied by ratification of the Constitutional Treaty which was failed. Enlargement policy became the scapegoat of the failure and Turkey became an easy target due to the fact that it was one of the countries that causing trouble at the negotiating table (Eralp 2009, p.160). The ruling party has lost its enthusiasm about the EU process and it saw the political costs regarding the Cyprus issue. Especially after every election victory the governing party slowed down the reform process (Eralp 2009, pp.163-164). Turkey started accession negotiations in 2005 and paradoxically the momentum was lost. Since Turkey agreed to apply Additional Protocol of the Ankara Association Agreement to Cyprus but does not abide by its obligation arising from the aforementioned agreement. Therefore six chapters has been blocked by Cyprus, eight chapter has been suspended by the General Affairs and External Relations Council Decision of 11 December 2006. Only one chapter has provisionally closed since the accession negotiations started. According to Turhan (2017) this makes an anomaly in EU’s widening process because over 12 years period only 16 out of 35 chapters have been entered talks. This situation is making Ankara to refrain itself for opening of remaining chapters (Turhan 2017, p.2). In this this period there is a shift of EU policy toward Turkey’s EU accession. According to Çakır (2016) ‘’the US advocacy of Turkey’s EU membership connected to Turkey’s cooperation with the US in the Iraq issue’’ (Çakır 2016, p.189). Çakır (2016) also states that French government led by Sarkozy made Turkey a constant in the framework of anti-Americanism. When he was interviewed by Le Monde in 2006 he was asked if he wants a Europe submissive to America regarding US support of Turkey’s membership his answer contained explicit anti-Turkey sentiment.

‘’Under no circumstances and in no way!… How can you ask such a thing? Who wanted Turkey in Europe?: […] Le Monde, calling me a populist because I was opposed to the entry of Turkey into the EU. This is a major issue where I opposed head-on—because I am attached to a political Europe—to a US strategy’’ (Çakır 2016, p.215).

As it is mentioned Turkey’s accession negotiations has been an anomaly and the chapter are either blocked by the Commission, Cyprus or France mostly for political reasons. It has been the only country that the negotiations lasted more than decades. Upon all these developments the Arab spring and its ramifications have contributed negatively to EU-Turkey relations. The crisis has created instability in the region, power vacuum enabled terrorist organizations to flourish. Radical terrorist groups like ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and Levant) have taken control on a vast territory implementing their version of Islamic rule. This, among many other reasons, caused mass migration flow through Turkey to western European countries. In order to prevent the influx of refugees, EU and member states have concluded agreements with specific countries like Turkey. EU and Turkey have signed readmission agreement in 2013 and launched visa liberalization dialogue. The situation led to a temporary improvement in EU-Turkey dialogue ( Turhan 2017, p.648). By the same token, on 18 March 2016 EU leaders met with their Turkish counterpart to discuss a number of issues. In order to realize their objectives, they agreed on certain issues among which ‘’ the commitment to re-energize accession process’’ was one of them (“European Council, 17-18/03/2016 - Consilium,” 2016). To sum up, this period has witnessed a number of factors that shaped the relations. Turkey’s accession negotiations have entered in a dormant period where nearly no progress achieved.

**Conclusion**

Since the Association Agreement signed there has been a number of external and internal factors that have influenced the form of the relationship. Firstly, this paper’s argument has centered around US support and international context (mainly cold war context), and Arab spring and its repercussions as external factors. Secondly, military interventions, PKK insurgency, human right issues, democratization, Europeanization, and Westernization as internal factors. And Thirdly, EU internal reforms, EU summits as EU level factors. It has been observed that regarding the interests, international contexts the two parties either converged or diverged in the framework of cooperation. The framework of the cooperation is likely to change in the form of strategic partnership or privileged partnership. Probably Turkey will lose its enthusiasm for full membership and settle for sui generis kind of relationship.

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