

Changing Nature of the European Union - Turkey Relations: From a Civilizational Project to Transactional Cooperation

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Abstract

Turkey's ambition to be anchored in the European integration process is one of the oldest and most challenging priorities of its foreign policy. As a symbolic coincidence, the centenary of the Republic of Turkey overlaps with the 60th anniversary of its association relationship with the then European Economic Community (EEC), during which both sides have experienced frequent fluctuations in their bilateral relations. In that sense, the idea of change has always been embedded in Turkey-European Union (EU) relations corresponding to significantly broader changes in Turkey's foreign policy. This study is cognisant of the fact that focusing on one side will provide only a partial explanation of variations in the EU-Turkey relations and therefore aims to present the drivers of change in their mutual relations not only by focusing on the actions and inactions of the successive Turkish governments, but also by paying attention to changes in the policies of the EU and its member states towards Turkey. This study adopts "process tracing" and "explanatory case study" methods by conducting an extensive literature review and attempts to determine how Turkey's EU policy has transformed in the last 60 years by analysing historical turning points in this period and their implications for the ongoing relations. Based on this historical analysis, this study argues that the relationship between the EU and Turkey, which have been becoming increasingly distant from each other, has lost the initial civilisational spirit and turned into a patronage symbolised by ad-hoc transactional agreement/s.

Keywords: Turkey, European Union, Turkish Foreign Policy, Turkey-EU Relations, Transactionalism

Avrupa Birliği - Türkiye İlişkilerinin Değişen Doğası: Bir Medeniyet Projesinden İşlemsel İşbirliğine

Öz

Türkiye'nin Avrupa entegrasyon sürecinin ayrılmaz bir parçası olma isteği Türk Dış Politikası'nın en eski ve en zorlu önceliklerinden biridir. Sembolik bir tesadüf olarak, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kuruluşunun yüzüncü yıldönümü (ilk olarak 1957'de Roma Antlaşması ile kurulan ve daha sonra 1967'de Avrupa Topluluğu'na ve 1993'te Avrupa Birliği'ne dönüşen) Avrupa Ekonomik Topluluğu ile kurulan ortaklık ilişkisinin 60. yıldönümüne denk gelmiştir. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kurulduğu günden itibaren geçirdiği yapısal, kurumsal ve siyasal değişimlere istinaden, değişimin bir fikir ve gerçeklik olarak Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği (AB) ilişkilerinde her zaman için kendini hissettirdiğini söylemek mümkündür. Bu çalışma, Türkiye-AB arasındaki karşılıklı ilişkilerde gözlenen değişimin temel dinamiklerini taraflardan birine odaklanarak açıklamanın kısmi bir açıklama olacağını bilincindedir. Bu gerçekle karşılıklı ilişkilerde gözlenen değişimi sadece Türkiye Cumhuriyeti hükümetlerinin eylem ve eylemsizliklerine odaklanarak değil, aynı zamanda AB'nin ve üye devletlerinin Türkiye'ye yönelik politikalarındaki değişiklikleri de dikkate alarak sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Literatür taraması yoluyla sonuçlandırılan bu çalışma Türkiye'nin AB politikasının son 60 yılda nasıl bir dönüşüm geçirdiğini, bu dönemdeki tarihsel dönüm noktalarını ve bunların süregelen ilişkilere etkilerini analiz ederek cevaplamaya çalışmaktadır. Söz konusu tarihsel analiz, Türkiye-AB arasında ilk günden itibaren Batılılaşma ve modernleşme temaları kapsamında, "bir uygarlık projesi" olarak gelişen ilişkilerin özellikle 2010'ların ikinci yarısından itibaren bu ruhu kaybettiğini ve karşılıklı ilişkilerin geçici olarak, işlemsel temelde gelişen; değer ve ilkelere yoksun çıkar odaklı işbirliği modeline dönüştüğünü ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Avrupa Birliği, Türk Dış Politikası, Türkiye-AB İlişkileri, İşlemselcilik

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Introduction

Turkey's ambition to be anchored in the European integration is one of its most challenging foreign policy priorities. As a symbolic coincidence, the centenary of the Republic of Turkey overlaps with the 60th anniversary of its association relationship with the European Economic Community (the EEC, initially established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957 which later transformed into the European Community in 1967 and the European Union in 1993), during which both sides have experienced frequent fluctuations in their bilateral relations. In that sense, change as a concept has always been embedded in Turkey-European Union (EU) relations corresponding to much broader changes in Turkey's foreign policy. This study is cognisant of the fact that focusing on one side will provide only a partial explanation of variations in their bilateral relations and therefore aims to present the drivers of change in their mutual relations, not only by focusing on the actions and inactions of the successive Turkish governments, but also by paying attention to changes in the policy of the EU and its member states towards Turkey. This study applies "process tracing" and "explanatory case study" methods through an extensive literature review to determine how Turkey's EU policy has transformed in the last 60 years by analysing historical turning points in this period and their implications for the ongoing relations. This analysis will provide the opportunity to observe how the EU has lost its transformative impact on Turkey's internal policies in recent years as well as how mutual relations have evolved into an interest-driven relationship lacking its normative civilisational dimension as originally conceived. The evaluation of the historical turning points in the following parts clearly shows that Turkey's relationship with the EU has historically been marked by fluctuations leading to both convergence and divergence depending on the specific time and conditions. Although cooperation has been continuing in significant fields including migration, energy and economy, Turkey's relations with the EU have been deteriorating since the mid-2010s from a process involving accession negotiations to an interest-driven relationship conducted on a transactional basis.

1. Early Periods as the Starting Point for Bilateral Relations (1959-1963)

From the outset, Turkey's Europeanization-led modernization has been embodied in the European integration process (Erdenir: 2015: 26). Turkey started negotiations with the EEC to achieve associate status in September 1959, which was obtained through the Ankara Agreement signed in 1963. At the same time, the same agreement envisioned a period of preparation between 1963 and 1974 (preliminary period) as well as a transitional period between 1974 and 1995 with the objective of preparing both parties for a customs union.

The Ankara Agreement can fundamentally be regarded as an economic treaty with a focus on trade preferences and financial support. However, as Feridun Cemal Erkin, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, specified that the Ankara Agreement “constitutes a turning point in the life of the Turkish nation as a political document” that “confirms and approves Turkey’s desire to be part of Europe” (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2003: 70). Also, the application of Greece influenced the decision of Turkey to sign the agreement. From the EU side, the key determining factor behind the signing of the Ankara Agreement was its desire to see both Turkey and Greece moving to the EEC rather than toward any other political or economic bloc in Europe (i.e., the British-led European Free Trade Area). Different from other association agreements signed with the Mediterranean countries, the Ankara Agreement foresaw the possibility of Turkey’s accession to the Community in Article 28. This political commitment of the Ankara Agreement was strongly reinforced by the political statements of the European leaders and politicians. For example, the president of the European Commission, Walter Hallstein, continuously repeated the fact that “Turkey is part of Europe” (Redmond, 1993: 23).

The Ankara Agreement is just one of the links in a chain of decisions as Turkey’s accession to the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation in 1948, its membership of the Council of Europe in 1949 as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as of 1952 confirmed and consolidated Turkey’s sense of belonging to the West in general and to Europe in particular. These decisions made by Turkey reflect its desire to discard its previous policy of neutrality and build more engagement with Western Europe consistent with its international orientation. Since then, Turkey has always tried to maintain a much closer relationship with the EU with the ultimate objective of obtaining membership status.

The Ankara Agreement was followed by the Additional Protocol signed in 1970. According to the Protocol, the European Community (EC) would open its markets to Turkey with the exception of agricultural and textile products, while the Turkish economy would continue to benefit from the protection against the production of the members of the EC. In addition, Turkey was expected to repeal its tariff rates in time as its economy matured and as its industry gained sufficiency to compete with its European partners on an equal basis. However, the Additional Protocol ironically symbolised the beginning of deterioration in the Turkey-EC relations (Müftüler-Baç, 1997: 60), which can be justified by internal political and economic factors on both sides. From the Turkish side, resistance from the bureaucratic and political circles towards the content of the Protocol, the 1974 intervention in Cyprus as a guarantor power, and the 1980 coup d’état were the most relevant factors that caused the relations to deteriorate. From the EEC side, on the other hand, the Greek membership in 1981 which

'Europeanized' bilateral disputes and the changing attitudes of some members led by Germany on Turkey's membership contributed to worsening of the relations and even led to calls for the suspension of bilateral relations and freezing of political dialogue.

Also, the changes in the structure of the EEC during the 1980s (signing of the Single European Act in 1986, agreement on the establishment of a single market by 1992 and codification of the European Political Cooperation as the nucleus of the foreign policy of the EU) impacted its relations with Turkey, albeit in an ambivalent way. In addition, the fact that three Mediterranean countries became members of the EEC increased Turkey's concerns of being left behind.

This pessimist mood of Turkey was reversed in April 1987 with Turkey's official request for full membership representing another change of objective in bilateral relations. It is certainly possible to associate this decision of Turkey with domestic political and economic developments. The restoration of the multiparty and civilian system after the 1980 military coup and implementation of the economic reform package in the mid-1980s encouraged Turkey to apply to join the EC in the late 1980s. With this decision, Turkey showed its determination "to integrate into the European Community as a full member" (Müftüler, 1995: 85). However, the reaction of the EC was not promising. The *1989 Avis of the European Commission* confirmed the eligibility of Turkey for membership, albeit with little enthusiasm, and suggested that bilateral relations be developed with other possibilities. Under such unfavourable conditions, Turkey realised that the evolution of the EEC with wider and deeper integration made it more attractive for itself. However, at the same time, the developments within the integration also increased the possibility (for Turkey) of being excluded from the scope of integration (Soler i Lecha, 2023: 28) which is mostly justified by using civilisational excuses rather than the simple facts.

2. Civilisational Account of Turkey-EU Relations

Civilisation has been a key issue in Europe-Turkey relations, though the conceptions of civilisation have changed in mutual relations (Aydın-Düzgit and Rumelili, 2021 :65). Turkey has had strong ties to the West dating back to the period of the Ottoman Empire with the Turkish history and identity being completely entangled with that of Europe. Since *Tanzimat*, elements of European civilization have influenced the formulation of the main motto of the Republic of Turkey, i.e. being recognized as a European state (Akgül Açıkmeşe, 2010: 11).

In the initial period of the Republic, Turkish foreign policy was formulated in line with the broader objective of modernisation aimed at raising Turkey to a modern level of civilisation,

which in practice equated with Europe. From the outset, Europeanisation has been a significant element of Turkish modernization (Erdenir, 2015: 26). It was an obvious political preference of the founders of the Republic, while at the same also being a civilisational choice associated with the modernisation drive imposed on the country (Zucconi, 2009: 26). In the early years of the Republic, modernisation and Westernisation were largely synonymous, showing that developing close relations with the West/Europe was a natural counterpart of the broader project of Westernisation. Through a lasting and irreversible process of integration with the West, Turkey aimed to underline its westward orientation as the basis of the Turkish modernisation process, as well as one of the building blocks of its foreign policy (Yılmaz, 2008: 3). In that sense, the massive changes as the outcome of rapid and intense reform series between 1923 and 1938 aimed at bringing the country closer to the Western nations that Atatürk viewed as success models (Paul, 2015). Atatürk believed that Turkey could only modernise and prosper by embracing the Western values and way of life - ‘civilisation’ as he called it. In that sense, being an indispensable element of Turkish Westernisation and modernisation projects, integration with the EU has long constituted one of the pillars of the new Turkish foreign policy. Turkey’s close cooperation with the West was not only instrumentalised to strengthen its bonds with Western civilisation, but also to improve the country’s economic and technological developments and democratic achievements (Yılmaz, 2008: 1).

3. Long Period from Full Membership Application (1987) to Candidacy Status (1999)

Despite the existing barriers, Turkey applied for full membership of the EU in 1987. This application was complemented by the 1/95 Decision of the EC-Turkey Association Council on the application of final stage of the Customs Union which was a consequence of a series of global and domestic factors. The Customs Union was the outcome of the two previous decisions, namely the signing of the Ankara Agreement in 1963 and the application to become a full member in 1987. In that sense, the Customs Union was merely recognised as the initial step in the process of enhancing the relations with the EU, which was expected to culminate in the ultimate target of full membership. However, while it entered into force at the end of 1995, there was no prospect of Turkey achieving full membership. Rather, the EU favoured the continuation of relations with Turkey within the framework of partnership. In addition, when the Copenhagen Criteria were introduced earlier in 1993 for the subsequent waves of enlargement and when the political criteria were prioritised among the others, the possibility that Turkey would join the EU as a full member diminished significantly. In addition, the double

standards of the EU in terms of its attitudes towards candidate and possible candidate countries fed in the grievances of Turkey towards the EU.

Turkey's dissatisfaction reached a peak in December 1997 when the decision was taken at the Luxembourg Summit to recognise Turkey as an important partner while rejecting its candidacy due to the emergence of doubts about Turkey's Europeanness. Before the Luxembourg Summit, in March 1997, the then German Chancellor Helmut Kohl clearly declared that "the European Union is a civilization project and within this civilization project, Turkey has no place" (Nuttall and Traynor, 1997). Consistent with this logic, the EU offered Turkey a different strategy and special status (so called privileged partnership), while once again confirming its eligibility for membership of the EU. In line with this strategy, Turkey was invited to a European Conference which would symbolise the acceleration of political dialogue as well as further cooperation among the EU members and Turkey. This offer of the EU, however, fell considerably short of full membership and created pessimism in Turkey at both state and societal levels and generated widespread consternation toward the Union. The Turkish government rejected the invitation to the European Conference and declared the suspension of its political dialogue with the EU in 1998.

The Helsinki Summit decisions in December 1999 reversed pessimistic mood of Turkey, which received signals of full membership as a result of being given candidacy status by the EU. This status represented a significant turning point in the history of the relations between Turkey and the Union. With this decision, the leaders of the EU approved "Turkey is a candidate State destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate States" (European Union, 1999). The confirmation of Turkey's candidacy was an essential step towards the long-cherished Turkish goal of Westernisation and Atatürk's dream of attaining a place [for Turkey] within European civilisation (Mehmet, 2003: 41). In that sense, Turkey's candidacy accelerated the implementation of economic and political reforms in Turkey, leading to the "Golden Age of Europeanization" (Öniş, 2023: 696; Öniş, 2009: 34) between 2002 and 2007 when, despite its weaknesses, legal/institutional Europeanization continued as further contributions to the Republic's founding philosophy of modernization (Erdenir, 2015: 28).

The Helsinki decisions clearly represented a change in the EU's foreign policy and increased the relevance of Turkey's cooperation with the West. One of the dynamics behind this shift was the emerging favourable political context in Europe. The Social Democratic waves in leading European states (Germany's Social Democratic Party under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, New Labor in the United Kingdom under Tony Blair' and the Socialists in France under Michel Rocard) structured supportive conditions for Turkey's membership. In line with

their multicultural mindset, Social Democrats were not opposed to Turkey's membership on the basis of identity issues. Their main concern was the successful implementation of the economic and political membership criteria by Turkey. Another dynamic behind this shift was the attitude of Greece against Turkey. As a result of some political, diplomatic and natural developments on both sides, Greece lifted its ever-present veto card and agreed to provide candidacy status to Turkey (Kubicek 2002: 5-10).¹ Turkey, on the other hand, recognised the Helsinki Summit decisions as confirmation of its long-lasting ambition to be treated equally with the other European countries by the European leaders. Referring to the following wide-ranging political, economic and legislative reforms in Turkey, the Helsinki decisions favoured a positive evolution of the domestic conditions in Turkey and accelerated the process of Turkey achieving membership.

4. Turkey-EU Relations after 2000

4.1. Golden Age of Europeanisation in the Early 2000s

The dynamism in Turkey and the EU led to a virtuous circle in the post-Helsinki period initially under the 1999-2002 coalition government and later in the first years of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) government. As Tocci states "the accession process became a key anchor in supporting democratization and modernization in Turkey" (Tocci, 2005: 82).

The positive atmosphere in the EU, which was a direct outcome of Turkey's reformist efforts, opened the way for the accession negotiations based on the European Council's confirmation that Turkey had implemented the political membership criteria in 2004. Thus, in the beginning of the 2000s, the main driver of change was Turkey's reforms along with the contribution of other external factors, particularly the September 11 attacks. These attacks accelerated the discussions on Turkey's accession to the EU and led to the emergence of two groups within the EU, i.e., those supporting Turkey's membership of the EU represented as a civilization bridging and multiculturalism model and those perceiving Turkish accession as a threat to the idea of Europe as a Christian civilization. While the former, who largely represented the left-wing spectrum of politics, were supportive of accession negotiations starting based on their rejection of the idea that the EU was associated with Christianity, the

¹ For a more detailed treatment of the underlying dynamics of the Helsinki Decision, pls. see Öniş, Z. (2000). Luxembourg, Helsinki and Beyond: Towards an Interpretation of Recent Turkey-EU Relations. *Government and Opposition*, 35 (4), 463-483 and Soler i Lecha (2023: 33-34).

latter, on the right-wing spectrum, were determined to oppose Turkey's membership because of its "contested Europeanness". (Soler i Lecha, 2023: 35-36).

The civilizational concept played a prominent role in conceptualizing European integration from the beginning (Kuzmanovic, 2008: 56). Over time, as a result of the politicisation of the civilizational narrative in the early 2000s, the pro-Turkey coalition was weakened in the EU. One of the leading EU blocs in that period, led by Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy, presented Turkey "not as a natural insider - based on their perceptions of European identity, but as an important outsider - a key partner in terms of common economic and security interests but not as a full member" (Öniş, 2023: 692). Former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's famous statement on Turkey reflected the perceptions of many European politicians who privately believed that Turkey should never be allowed to become a member of the EU. In 2002, while acting as the President of the European Convention, d'Estang was vocal in his opposition to Turkey's eligibility, which actually put Turkey's Europeanness in question. After emphasising its "different culture, different approach, different way of life", d'Estaing clearly said that "Turkey is a country that is close to Europe, an important country, [...] but it is not a European country. [...] Its capital is not in Europe, 95% of its population are outside Europe [...]" (Black, 2002).

The emergence of this demarcation line between the insiders and outsiders sparked debates about Turkey's Europeanness based on the geographical, historical, cultural and religious differences between the two sides (Nicolaidis, 2004: 3; Oğuzlu and Özpek, 2008: 1003). It has become possible to represent Turkey as being inherently different by referring to the exclusive aspect of European identity determined by the above-mentioned characteristics. Additionally, after its biggest enlargement in 2004, the EU lost its enthusiasm for further enlargements in the near future and justified its unwillingness on the basis of "absorption capacity" and "enlargement fatigue".

After experiencing the challenges of new memberships, the EU once again started discussing the implications of Turkey's future membership. The member countries agreed on "long transitional periods, derogations, specific arrangements or permanent safeguard clauses" for Turkey and underlined that "these negotiations are an open-ended process, the outcome of which cannot be guaranteed beforehand" (European Union, 2005) despite the fact that Turkey's membership had been mutually agreed many times before. The accession of the Greek part of Cyprus and political changes in the largest and the most influential members of the EU (election victory of the Christian Democrats in Germany in 2005 and their offer of privileged membership to Turkey, election of Nicholas Sarkozy as the president of France in 2007 and his

vocal opposition against Turkey's Europeanness) complicated Turkey's bid further. When Angela Merkel assumed leadership in Germany in November 2005, she proposed a strategic partnership for Turkey rather than supporting its accession to the EU. When Sarkozy came to power in 2007, he strongly opposed Turkish membership and claimed that Turkey was part of Asia Minor, not Europe.

Since the mid-2000s, it has been clear that the Europeanness of Turkey has been increasingly questioned, although this was never doubted under the different world order during the Cold War. In the re-structuring of the EU, cultural differences and differing social attitudes and norms have been used to justify Turkey being non-European, referring to Europe as a "civilisation project" built on a common history, religion and culture with rather definitive boundaries. The rise of right-wing populism has revealed the identity aspect of the EU-Turkey relationship once again, thus justifying Turkey's present position in Europe as a country being in but not out of Europe (Cebeci, 2019: 78, 85). In particular, right-wing, conservative and nationalist circles justify their opposition to Turkey's membership by claiming it belongs to another civilizational realm defined by "cultural and political values that are fundamentally different from those shared by the EU member-states" (Kuzmanovic, 2008: 41-42).

4.2. Ironical Deterioration of the EU-Turkey Relations after Accession Negotiations in 2005

Although the opening of accession negotiations in 2005 represented another milestone, ironically it again deteriorated bilateral relations in the medium term (Soler i Lecha, 2023: 26). On the same day that accession negotiations were opened, the then French President Jacques Chirac declared that 'Turkey would have to undergo a major cultural revolution in order to realize its dream of joining the EU' (Ellis, 2005). The expected optimism and enthusiasm toward the negotiations were short lived due to disagreements among the members on Turkey's relations with the EU in the future. Currently, accession negotiations are almost frozen. Among the 33 chapters, only 16 of them have been opened thus far. Eight chapters have been suspended by the European Council due to the Cyprus issue and six of them have been unilaterally blocked by the Greek Cypriots. The latest opening of the chapters took place in 2016 and the negotiation process has been deadlocked for over a decade.

The current conditions in the negotiations as presented above show that the period of "intense optimism" (Öniş, 2023: 697) only continued until the second half of the 2010s when the common objective of Turkey obtaining full membership was replaced by "Turkey as a special case". The idea of new bureaucratic hurdles and 'permanent safeguards' even in the case

of Turkey's membership led to severe criticism against the EU at both state and societal levels in Turkey. The possible representation of Turkey as a full member, albeit in the form of a secondary member without reaping the same advantages of the membership as the others, caused Turkey to question the fairness of the EU. As a result, Eurosceptics strengthened their position in Turkey and spread anti-EU sentiments in the society by using the argument that Turkey would never be able to become a member of the EU due to its differences on the basis of culture and identity. Since 2010, pro-Turkey voices in Europe and reformists in Turkey have lost their influence and "Europeanisation in the form of political and legal reforms has become increasingly selective". (Yılmaz, 2014: 90-94; Alpan, 2021: 119-123).

4.3. Transactional Relations between the EU and Turkey after 2016

This study takes the current relations between the EU and Turkey as the recent milestone which, at the same time, symbolises a radical shift in the nature of bilateral relations. In the late 2010s, already strained relations began to deteriorate. Enlargement fatigue of the EU transformed into Turkey fatigue. Turkey, on the other hand, moved to a more multidimensional and rhythmic foreign policy in which the EU would remain just one of the priorities among other foreign policy issues (Aras, 2009).

This period represents relationships with the West that are established and sustained on a transactional basis in the areas of shared economic and security interests. Western/liberal norms have no longer been a primary point of reference for Turkish foreign policy. Rather, Turkey has built its new foreign policy understanding on the idea of strategic autonomy, implying that Turkey is a sufficient and independent country. It has the capacity to follow its national interests on various issues in its foreign policy agenda, which forces Turkey to balance its relations with the West and the rest at the global level. This new understanding has further distanced Turkey and the EU from each other. However, at the same time, neither of them is prepared to accept blame for damaging the relationship. Despite the increasing disagreements, both sides have been trying to find a way of preserving cooperation in the areas of common interest. This was the main motivation behind the European Commission's Positive Agenda proposed in 2012 adopted to "launch a positive political EU-Turkey agenda with a specific emphasis on the modernization of the Customs Union and trade facilitation, people to people contacts, high level dialogues, continued cooperation on migration issues" to re-anchor Turkey to the EU. This mutual relation was described as conflictual cooperation (Soler i Lecha, 2023: 38-39). In this framework, due to its transactional nature, migration has emerged as the most suitable area of cooperation between the two sides.

Transactionalism represents a foreign policy approach which is in favour of bilateral rather than multilateral relations, prioritises short-term over longer-term strategic commitments, adopts a zero-sum conception of the world by referring to the relativity of all gains and absence of reciprocity, denies value-based policy making and rejects the adoption of grand strategies. A transactional foreign policy is associated with domestic political sensitivities, implemented in a personalist way rather than through institutional practices. Thus, the consolidation of power and maximisation of domestic interests are at the core of transactional foreign policy. Overall, transactionalism is in favour of building relations based on the separate, specific, bilateral and issue-specific transactions in the lack of ideational, institutional and strategic settings (Bashirov & Yılmaz, 2020: 166-168).

The EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016, also known as the EU-Turkey Deal, transformed Turkey-EU relations into a transactional partnership which not only ignored the norms and values that have been an integral part of the historical relations between the parties as advocated by the EU but also contributed to the already existing standstill in the other processes including Turkey's membership of the EU (Janning, 2018: 62-63). The deal had "favourable transactions" for both Turkey and the EU. While Turkey was paid 3 billion Euros during following two years for hosting the Syrian refugees and promised for some security and technology assistance (worth 30 million euros), the EU exempted itself from having to deal with the refugee problem. The EU escaped its humanitarian responsibility in exchange for money. In line with the content of the Deal, Turkey was also given some guarantees for the acceleration of visa liberalization with the EU and revitalisation of accession negotiations that had been practically frozen for years (European Council, 2016). Under those conditions, the EU-Turkey Deal as the tool for satisfying the needs and interests of both parties represented a transactional logic in the relations between the two parties (Bashirov & Yılmaz, 2020: 176).

In the 2016 Deal, Turkey recognised the EU as a partner rather than an ally, which would shape the relations on the basis of a short-term cost and benefit analysis as opposed to values, principles and institutional commitments. In this framework, a transactionalist turn was apparent in the Deal where Turkey was also recognised as a buffer state rather than a genuine and equal partner. The Deal was signed as short-term agreement based on a monetary exchange as a response to a serious humanitarian crisis. This fact shows the willingness of both sides to agree on a transitional mechanism to fix an emerging problem rather than applying the European as well as international norms/principles to find a sustainable and permanent solution concerning the refugee issue. It is very clear that the short-term interests of the transactional paradigm were preferable for both Turkey and the EU at the expense of their long-term

principled engagement, which would make it possible for both sides to break the transactional relation once the benefits and advantages of the deal vanished.

Thus, based on “self-centred opportunism and lack of commonness” (Reuters 2018), transactionalism became apparent in the Turkey and EU relations after 2016. In this period, migration in particular began to be utilized as a bargaining tool over and during the accession negotiations between Turkey and the EU (İçduygu & Aksel, 2014: 361). More importantly, it seems likely that transactional relations will continue at least in the near future. However, transactional relations would not only weaken Turkey’s membership prospects, but also its civilizational and ideational attachment to Europe as initially structured. Under those conditions, Europe would constitute one of the agenda items in Turkish Foreign Policy and the transactional direction symbolised by functional cooperation would dominate mutual relations between Turkey and the EU as opposed to an “accession-oriented relationship resting on mutual interdependence and Turkey’s integration in the relevant policy areas of the EU’s *acquis communautaire*” (Saatçioğlu, 2020: 170; Çetin, 2022: 55). It should also be noted that although the signing of the Deal in March 2016 between the EU and Turkey was recognized as an instrument that could reactivate the frozen accession process or at least intensify the bilateral cooperation between the EU and Turkey (Angeliki et al, 2018), this structured illusion disappeared with the declaration of the EU in the same year that opening new chapters was not on the EU’s agenda. The EU was more clear in its 2018 *European Commission Report* which clearly stated that “Turkey had been moving away from the EU” (European Commission, 2018).

This historical evolution shows that Turkey-EU relations are no longer based on its historically oriented structure along with the long-term commonly shared targets and interests. Relations deteriorated further in the subsequent period. In July 2019, EU ministers announced that the level of relations with Turkey would be lowered in line with the proposal of the Commission demanding a reduction in the amount of pre-accession assistance given to Turkey as a reaction to the latter’s drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean (European Council, 2019). Turkey’s activities in the region further provoked the EU to adapt restrictive measures that could be used against either natural or legal persons involved in “illegal drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean” (European Council, 2021). A number of other events in 2020 (migration crisis on the border with Greece in February, involvement in a naval incident with France in the Mediterranean in June and declaration of sanctions by the EU on a Turkish shipping company due to the accusation of breaking the UN arms embargo on Libya in September) represented a severe risk of escalation as the rivalry had the potential to destroy all

prospects for convergence and created doubts on the possibility of collaboration between Turkey and the EU.

Turkey-EU relations entered a period of significant fragility and instability in 2020-2021 as a result of domestic events in Turkey (introduction of the presidential system, 2016 coup d'état attempt, a shift from a soft power to a hard power understanding and the escalating nationalistic tones) and foreign policy choices of some of the EU members (more assertive foreign policy by Greece, frequently emerging debates/clashes between the leaders of the EU and those of Turkey). In addition, some international factors (war in Syria and the global rise of illiberal leaders) caused the Turkey-EU relations to deteriorate further. The drastic deterioration ironically paved the way for more pragmatic cooperation between the EU and Turkey. Their shared vulnerability forced both sides to insist on preserving cooperation and avoiding any rupture in their mutual relations. This opened a period of fragile de-escalation between the two sides leading to the reactivation of bilateral talks in January 2021 followed by another *Communication of the European Commission* in March 2021, which confirmed the calmer and more constructive attitude of Turkey towards the EU. As a result, the idea of a positive agenda was revamped with the hope of providing a progressive approach for further possibilities in the different areas of cooperation. However, even the possibility of another “Positive Agenda”, with some measures to improve the relations again (increasing trade, modernizing Customs Union, setting dialogue at the highest levels and promoting people-to-people communication) failed “to revitalize the Turkey-EU relationship towards a more positive, trustful, and cooperative path” (Nas, 2023).

Conclusion

Western orientation, which is mostly identified with Europe, is a historically structured pillar of Turkish Foreign Policy. However, idea of change characterized by ups and downs, fluctuating periods of hope and despair, and the eruption of sudden crises has been deeply-rooted in Turkey-EU relations since the beginning (Hauge et al, 2022).

During the 1960s, Turkey's objective was to be associated with the EEC. In the 1980s, Turkey opposed to any kind of discrimination towards it and demanded to be treated in the same way as any other applicant country, which included being recognized as a candidate, membership negotiations starting and the receipt of pre-accession aid and support. These demands of Turkey were realized in 1999 when it was recognized as a candidate and in 2005 when accession negotiations started. However, by 2016, the nature of Turkey-EU relations

changed and moved towards transactional cooperation, which contributed to the adversarial/antagonistic nature as discussed in the above parts.

The highest number of refugees on record in Europe during the summer of 2015 had serious repercussions for EU-Turkey relations and replaced the historically structured value-based partnership with interest-based transactional cooperation. Since then, a short-term based interest-driven relationship has been dominating mutual relations at the expense of the original structuring of normative and value-based relations. The EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016 on refugees has become the symbol of transactional relations and forced both sides to proceed into a new domain in their historical course of bilateral relations. More importantly, Turkey's EU membership prospects have become detached from the initial intellectual and civilisational context based on shared historical values and it has become an issue in Turkey's foreign policy agenda to be pursued on a transactional basis as long as bilateral relations serve the overall objectives of both the Turkish and EU foreign policies. It is important to emphasise that a definite rupture has largely been averted because both sides are still insisting on maintaining their international reputations, namely being a Western state (for Turkey) and being a transformative power (for the EU) at the global level.

The last 60 years symbolize an interesting case study for the analysis of relations between Turkey and the EU. This analysis shows that change has always been possible and even necessary. What is important is to calculate the results and impacts of the changes and take the most optimum and rational decisions. Despite the current deterioration and transformation of the bilateral relation from a civilisational to a transactional basis in an unexpected and undesired way, the prospect of membership remains the most functional framework for regulating the relations between the EU and Turkey. It seems to be the only opportunity for both sides to reap the benefits of mutual cooperation in various areas.

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**Avrupa Birliđi - Türkiye İliřkilerinin Deđişen Dođası:
Bir Medeniyet Projesinden İřlemsel İřbirliđine
Geniřletilmiş Özet**

Türkiye'nin Avrupa bütünleşme sürecinin ayrılmaz bir parçası olma azmi ve isteđi ülkenin en zorlu dış politika önceliklerinden biridir. Sembolik bir tesadüf olarak, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kuruluşunun yüzüncü yıldönümü (ilk olarak 1957'de Roma Antlaşması ile kurulan ve daha sonra 1967'de Avrupa Topluluđu'na ve 1993'te Avrupa Birliđi'ne dönüşen) Avrupa Ekonomik Topluluđu ile kurulan ortaklık ilişkisinin 60. yıldönümüne denk gelmiştir. Hem Avrupa bütünleşmesinin kendi içindeki tarihi deđişim ve dönüşümlerine hem de Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kurulduđu günden itibaren geçirdiđi yapısal, kurumsal ve siyasal deđişimlere istinaden, deđişimin bir fikir ve gerçeklik olarak Türkiye-Avrupa Birliđi (AB) ilişkilerinde her zaman için kendini hissettirdiđini söylemek mümkündür. Bu çalışma, Türkiye-AB arasındaki karşılıklı ilişkilerde gözlenen deđişimin temel dinamiklerini taraflardan birine odaklanarak açıklamanın kısmi bir açıklama olacađının bilincindedir. Bu gerekçeyle karşılıklı ilişkilerde gözlenen deđişimi sadece Türkiye Cumhuriyeti hükümetlerinin eylem ve eylemsizliklerine odaklanarak deđil, aynı zamanda AB'nin ve üye devletlerinin Türkiye'ye yönelik politikalarındaki deđişikliklere dikkat ederek sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Literatür taraması yoluyla sonuçlandırılan bu çalışma Türkiye'nin AB politikasının son 60 yılda nasıl bir dönüşüm geçirdiđini, bu dönemdeki tarihsel dönüm noktalarını ve bunların süregelen ilişkilere etkilerini analiz ederek cevaplamaya çalışmaktadır. Söz konusu tarihsel analiz, Türkiye-AB ilişkilerinin zamana ve koşullara bađlı olarak hem yakınlaşmaya hem de ayrılmaya yol açan dalgalanmalara açık olduđunu göstermektedir. Son yıllarda göç, enerji ve ekonomi gibi önemli alanlarda karşılıklı işbirliđi devam etmekle birlikte, son yıllarda iki tarafın birbirinden gittikçe uzaklaştıđı da bir gerçektir. Söz konusu uzaklaşmaya dayanarak, bu çalışma Türkiye-AB arasında ilk günden itibaren Batılılaşma, modernleşme temaları kapsamında, "bir uygarlık projesi" olarak gelişen ilişkilerin özellikle 2010'ların ikinci yarısından itibaren bu ruhu kaybettiđini ve karşılıklı ilişkilerin geçici olarak işlemsel temelde gelişen, deđer ve ilkelerden yoksun çıkar odaklı işbirliđi modeline dönüştüđünü ileri sürmektedir.

Türkiye, AET ile müzakereleri 1959 yılında başlatmıştır. Ortaklık statüsünün elde edilmesini hedefiyle geliştirilen bu müzakereler 1963 yılında Ankara Anlaşması'nın imzalanmasının yolunu açmıştır. Ekonomik bir anlaşma olarak düşünölen Ankara Anlaşması'nın, Topluluđu'nun Akdeniz ölkeleriyle imzaladıđı diđer Ortaklık Anlaşmalarından farklı olarak, Türkiye'nin Topluluđu'ya üyeliđini öngören siyasi bir yanı da mevcuttur. Anlaşmanın 28. Maddesi ile öngörölen bu üyelik tarafların üzerinde anlaşlıđı ortak ve nihai hedefi temsil

etmektedir. Ankara Anlaşması, Türkiye'nin o dönem almış olduğu (1948 yılında Avrupa Ekonomik İşbirliği Örgütü'ne katılım, 1949 yılında Avrupa Konseyi'ne üyelik, 1952 yılından NATO'ya katılım gibi) bir dizi kararlar zincirinin halkalarından sadece biridir ve Türkiye'nin genelde Batı'ya özelde Avrupa'ya aidiyetini pekiştirmektedir.

Ankara Anlaşması'nı takiben 1970 yılında taraflar arasında Katma Protokol imzalanmıştır. Ankara Anlaşması'nın öngördüğü Hazırlık Dönemi'ni sona erdiren ve Geçiş Dönemi'nin koşullarını belirleyen Katma Protokol, ironik bir şekilde, Türkiye-AB ilişkilerinin bozulma sürecinin başlangıç noktasını temsil etmektedir. İki tarafın da kendi içinde yaşamakta olduğu ekonomik ve siyasi gelişmeler, karşılıklı ilişkilerin bozulmasının temel nedenini oluşturmuştur. Bozulan ilişkilerin tamiri adına Türkiye 1987 yılında Avrupa Topluluğu'na tam üyelik başvurusunda bulunmuş, ancak Topluluğun ret cevabı ile karşılaşmıştır. Avrupa Komisyonu yayımladığı resmi raporunda Türkiye'nin üyelik için ehilliğini onayladıktan sonra ikili ilişkilerin tam üyelik dışında başka çerçevelerde devam ettirilmesi ve geliştirilmesini tavsiye etmiştir. Bu gelişmeler ışığında Türkiye, Topluluk içindeki genişleme ve derinleşme adımlarının kendisinin Topluluk dışında bırakılma riskini artırdığını fark etmiştir.

Türkiye'nin 1987 yılında tam üyelik başvurusunun getirdiği en önemli sonuç Gümrük Birliği'nin canlandırılmasıdır. Türkiye tarafından, AB ile ilişkilerin geliştirilmesi ve nihai tam üyelik hedefi için önemli bir adım olarak kabul edilen Gümrük Birliği, 1995 yılı sonunda herhangi bir üyelik hedefine değinmeden yürürlüğe girmiştir. AB, Gümrük Birliği kararıyla Türkiye ile ilişkilerin mevcut ortaklık çerçevesinde geliştirilmesini tercih etmiştir. AB'nin Türkiye karşısındaki bu tutumu, Türkiye'de bir memnuniyetsizliğe neden olsa da Türkiye'nin memnuniyetsizliği 1997 yılında Lüksemburg Zirvesi kararları ile zirveye ulaşmıştır. Zirvede, Türkiye'nin adaylık statüsünü reddeden AB, Türkiye'ye "imtiyazlı ortaklık" statüsünü önererek Türkiye için farklı bir strateji geliştirmiştir. Karardan duyduğu hoşnutsuzluğu en üst makamlarca en sert şekilde dile getiren Türkiye 1998 yılında AB ile siyasi diyalogun askıya alındığı kararını açıklamıştır.

1999 yılında kendi içinde bazı değişiklikler neticesinde Türkiye'nin önündeki engelleri kaldırabilen AB, 1999 Helsinki Zirvesi kararları ile Türkiye'nin adaylık statüsünü resmen tanımıştır. Bu adaylık neticesinde ülke içinde hız kazanan ekonomik ve siyasi reformlar Türkiye'de 2002-2007 yılları arasında "Avrupalılışmanın Altın Dönemi" olarak anılan süreci de beraberinde getirmiştir. Bu dönemde hayata geçirilen ve uygulamaya konan reformlar AB liderleri tarafından da olumlu olarak değerlendirilmiş ve nihayetinde AB, Türkiye ile üyelik görüşmelerinin başlatılmasına yönelik kararını açıklamıştır.

Türkiye'nin 2005 yılında AB ile katılım müzakerelerine başlaması iki tarafın da dış politikasında bir başka dönüm noktasıdır. Ancak, üyelik görüşmelerinin yarattığı olumlu ortam kısa bir süre sonra yine beklenmedik bir şekilde iki tarafı da açmaza sürüklemiş, ilişkileri donma noktasına getirmiştir. AB'nin 2004 yılında Doğu'ya genişlemesi neticesinde karşı karşıya kaldığı “hazmetme kapasitesi” ve “genişleme yorgunluğu” argümanlarını ilerideki genişlemeleri yavaşlatmak için ortaya atmıştır. AB'nin söz konusu tutum değişikliğinden etkilenen ülkelerin başında Türkiye gelmektedir. AB'yi çifte standart ve aday ülkeler arasında ayrımcı davranışlarla suçlayan Türkiye, AB üyeliğini dış politika önceliği açısından tekrar değerlendirmeye almıştır. Böylece, hem Avrupa'daki Türkiye'nin üyelik destekçilerinin hem de Türkiye'deki AB üyeliği taraftarlarının etkisi giderek azalmış, Türkiye-AB ilişkileri her iki tarafın da dış politika gündeminde alt sıralara düşmüştür.

2010'ların ortası Türkiye-AB ilişkilerindeki değişim açısından farklı bir dönemi simgelemektedir. Bu dönemde, Avrupa ile ilişkiler, *işlemselcilik* (transactionalism) temelinde ve siyasi ve ekonomik çıkar odaklı bir anlayışla yürütülmektedir. Her iki taraf da ortak çıkarlar noktasında işbirliğini sürdürmenin yollarını aramakla birlikte karşılıklı ilişkileri bu anlayışın ötesine geçirmemektedir. Uzun dönemli yükümlülüklerden ziyade kısa dönemli önceliklere dayanan, ilkesel temelli ilişkileri reddeden ve iç politikadaki hassasiyetleri dikkate alarak kurumsal tecrübelerden ziyade kişisel özelliklerin ön plana çıktığı bir anlayışı temsil eden işlemselcilik, son dönemlerdeki Türkiye-AB ilişkilerini tanımlayan temel parametredir. Söz konusu anlayış, *18 Mart 2016 tarihli AB-Türkiye (Mülteci) Anlaşması/Bildirisi* ile fiiliyatta da uygulanmaya başlanmıştır. İmzalanan bu bildiri ile iki taraf da çıkar ve ihtiyaçlarının karşılanması amacıyla dönemin en akut krizlerinden biri olan göç sorununu, Avrupa norm ve ilkelerine başvurarak çözmekten ziyade fayda-maliyet hesabıyla geçici mekanizmalarla çözmeyi seçmiştir. İki tarafın da bu işbirliğinden alacağı kazanımlar bittiğinde karşılıklı işbirliği de sona ermesi muhtemeldir.

Bu çalışmanın vurgulamaya çalıştığı gibi Türkiye-AB ilişkileri, zaman içinde, iki tarafın kendi içinde ve birbirlerine karşı tutumlarında yaşadıkları değişimler neticesinde, bir uygarlık ve medeniyet projesi olarak çizilen başlangıç parametrelerinden uzaklaşmış ve işlemselcilik temelinde yürütülen kısa-dönemli çıkar odaklı bir ilişkiye dönüşmüştür. Bu anlayış, Türkiye'yi gündem güne üyelikten uzaklaştırmaktadır. Oysa ki, tüm mevcut sorunlara rağmen, üyelik perspektifi, hala, Türkiye-AB ilişkilerine istikrar kazandıracak ve ikili ilişkileri düzene sokacak en etkili mekanizmadır.