

## THE ROLE OF TURGUT ÖZAL IN TURKEY'S APPLICATION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR FULL MEMBERSHIP IN 1987

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### Abstract

Turkey made a full membership application to the European Union (EU) on 14 April 1987. This constitutes one of the turning points in the long history of the Turkey-EU relations. Due to the heightened impasse in the relations between parties since 1970s, this unexpected application created a shock effect at the EU side. Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal was frequently depicted as the primary actor behind the application, especially his leading role in shaping Turkish political and economic lives extensively after 1980s. The application can be seen as an evidence of the harmony between the Turgut Özal's vision on Turkey and the required transformations to be achieved for the EU membership. This paper aims to evaluate Turgut Özal's role in Turkey's EU membership application process. In this scope, firstly, a brief information regarding the political leadership profile of Turgut Özal is provided. Secondly, the characteristics of the period before the EU membership application are elaborated. Lastly, Turkey's waiting of the EU's response to its membership application is considered. The paper concludes that a new dimension was added to the Turkey-EU with the Özal's application and this has had a great legacy in the development of the relations between parties in the succeeding years by adding it an accession dimension.

**Keywords:** Turkey, Turgut Özal, European Union, Membership Application

### 1987 YILINDA AVRUPA BİRLİĞİ'NE YAPILAN TAM ÜYELİK BAŞVURUSUNDA TURGUT ÖZAL'IN ROLÜ

#### Öz

Türkiye 14 Nisan 1987 tarihinde Avrupa Birliği'ne (AB) üyelik başvurusu yapmıştır. Bu başvuru uzun soluklu Türkiye-AB ilişkilerinde bir dönüm noktasını teşkil etmektedir. 1970'li yıllarla birlikte taraflar arasındaki ilişkiye hâkim olan kriz ortamından dolayı, bu beklenmeyen başvuru AB tarafından büyük bir şok etkisi yaratmıştır. 1980 sonrası dönemde Türkiye'nin siyasi ve ekonomik hayatını şekillendirmekteki rolü inkâr edilemez olan Turgut Özal sıklıkla bu üyelik başvurusunun arkasındaki isim olarak anılmıştır. Üyelik başvurusunu Özal'ın Türkiye'ye dair vizyonu, AB'nin üyelik için Türkiye'den yapmasını bekledikleri arasındaki uyumun bir göstergesi olarak görmek mümkündür. Bu çalışmada Türkiye'nin AB üyelik başvurusu sürecinde Türkiye'nin rolü ele alınmaktadır. Bu kapsamda ilk olarak Turgut Özal'ın liderlik profiline dair kısa bir bilgi sunulmuştur. İkinci olarak üyelik başvurusu öncesi dönemin özellikleri ele alınmıştır. Son olarak ise AB'nin üyelik başvurusuna vereceği cevabın beklenmesi süreci üzerinde durulmuştur. Çalışmanın sonucunda Türkiye-AB ilişkilerine katılımı içeren yeni bir boyut ekleyen üyelik başvurusunun, sonraki yıllarda ilişkinin gelişiminde büyük bir meşruiyete sahip olduğu yönündedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türkiye, Turgut Özal, Avrupa Birliği, Üyelik Başvurusu.

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## Introduction

*The next century will be a Turkish century.*

Turgut Özal, 1992

Turkey, as a country turning its face to the West after its foundation in 1923, couldn't stay aloof to the integration attempts in Western Europe after the World War II. There were two rival integration projects in Western Europe during the 1950s. One of them was the European Union<sup>1</sup> (EU), primarily designed for putting an end to the German-France enmity which was mostly seen as one of the underlying reasons behind the two world wars. The other one was the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) pioneered by the United Kingdom in order to guarantee the abolition of all the barriers for creating a free trade regime in Europe on the basis of decisions taken within an intergovernmental structure. While the former was aiming to establish ties among its members that would be closer and closer in time and could even go well beyond of a free trade regime; the latter was solely aiming to establish a free trade system. Turkey opted for the former in a context where the two projects hadn't produced any significant successes yet. In accordance with this choice, Turkey made an association application to the EU in 1959 and the relations between the parties gained a formal status with the signature of Ankara Agreement in 1961.

Many ups and downs have been observed in the operation of this decades-long Turkey-EU relations. The relations were frozen in the late 1970s and they were broken down after the 1980 military coup in Turkey. Turgut Özal was elected as the first civilian prime minister of Turkey in 1983 after the leaving of the military from the power. He played a critical role in the foreign policy developments of the era. Therefore, it is meaningful to make an analysis of the foreign policy events during his rule by putting him at the centre. This article embraces this tendency by focussing on the Turkey's application to the EU for full membership in 1987 by identifying Turgut Özal as one of the primary actors behind this decision. With the full membership application made to the EU in 1987, a new era in Turkey-EU relations started. Hence, the full membership application became one of the milestones in the long lasting Turkey-EU relations. The relations between parties gained an accession dimension that has been operating concomitantly with the association aspect of the relations. Therefore, studying

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the general tendency in the International Relations or Political Science literature, the term European Union and the abbreviation of the EU were used throughout the article, even for referring to the European Economic Community and European Community which can be classified as the ancestors of the contemporary EU. It should be indicated that the European Union having the abbreviation of the EU has acquired a legal existence with Maastricht Treaty in 1992.

Turgut Özal's undeniable role in Turkey's application to the EU was found very decisive for fully grasping the gist of many milestones in Turkey-EU relations experienced afterwards.

### **Turgut Özal as a Political Leader**

Özal was born in 1927 in Malatya. He grew up as a member of a lower income, religious and conservative family. Thanks to his brilliant intelligence, he was able to graduate from one of the prominent Turkish universities, Istanbul Technical University, as an electronic engineer. Özal's close relationship with Suleyman Demirel during his years at the university played a vital role in his succeeding career path and entrance to politics. Özal started his career in the public sector. Then, he worked for the World Bank for two years, before make a shift in his career by entering into private sector. After his high performance as a bureaucrat, he achieved to become a successful businessman. Especially thanks to his personality traits, he was also able to build good relations with the foreign actors, such as the officials from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the United States. In addition, he had close contacts with the religious sects as a pious man. By the way, it was possible to define him as religious, nationalist, conservative and liberal at the same time (Zürcher, 2000: 412; Kurt, 2018: 158). Thanks to combination of these different dynamics, he became a leader embraced by all the different segments within Turkish society, as well as he found supporters from abroad. He managed to persuade conservative masses and secular elites at the same time to his vision for Turkey by combining liberal, conservative, nationalist and welfarist ideologies.

Despite the high number of achievements in his later political career, his political life started with a failure. He firstly became a candidate for a parliamentary seat in the late 1970s from National Salvation Party of Islamists, but he couldn't achieve to get the seat. Thanks to his knowledge on economic matters and his successful negotiation skills, he was able to take part in the interim government established after the 1980 military coup as the deputy prime minister responsible from economic issues. In the first parliamentary elections symbolizing Turkey's return to democracy after 1980 military coup, the Motherland Party established under the leadership of Turgut Özal gained an unexpected election victory in 1983, despite the negative propaganda of military rulers. Motherland Party was able to won 212 of the 400 seats in Turkish parliaments by getting 45 percent of the votes and Turgut Özal became the prime minister as the leader of the party. He repeated his success in the elections held in 1987 and he continued to serve as the prime minister until his election as the president in 1989. He served as the president of Turkey until his death in 1993 (Öniş, 2004: 115-117).

1983 symbolizes the beginning of a new era for Turkey that would last for some ten years. This period was frequently labelled as “Özal Era” due to the dominance of Turgut Özal in Turkish political life. Additionally, due to the fact that Turgut Özal became the pioneer of several radical changes happened in Turkey during 1980s and early 1990s, there has been a tendency to study Turkish political life by making a twofold division as the “period before Özal” and “period after Özal”. That is, it is not possible to have a full vision of the changes happened in Turkey after 1980s without taking in to account Turgut Özal factor. He was a great reformer who wanted to make a change in the status quo (İzmirli et al., 2014: 245-246). However, in the early years of his era, he couldn't implement his revolutionary ideas because of the powerful role of military rulers in Turkish politics. As the military lost its power in politics, Turgut Özal started to find opportunities for putting his ideas into practice.

Turgut Özal can be considered as one of the most influential political figures in Turkish political life. He contributed significantly to the political and economic transformations Turkey achieved in the aftermath of 1980 military coup with his personal charisma and his visionary leadership. He played a prominent role in Turkey's transition to a neo-liberal development path (Öniş, 2004: 113). Accordingly, Özal has been seen commonly as the forerunner of Turkey's transition to neo-liberal economy. The influence of Özal on Turkish political and economic lives extended beyond of his ruling era. His visionary politics has been even affecting the contemporary Turkey. Despite a high number of people appreciating Turgut Özal's policies and decisions, he was also widely criticized.

His role in the depiction of Turkey's future roadmap in the political arena, especially in the foreign policy, has been mostly neglected. During his prime ministry and presidency, Turgut Özal often acted as the only decision-maker of the country in the field of foreign policy. He developed special relationships with many foreign leaders and he made many decisions by-passing the foreign ministry bureaucrats and relevant government officials (Duman, 2010: 392). As one of the transformative leaders in Turkish political life, he also pioneered many path-breaking developments in Turkish foreign policy, such as the development of the ties with the Middle Eastern countries and rapprochement with Greece, without creating a disengagement from its Western-orientedness. As the primary figure behind many foreign policy decisions during his rule, he was also condemned as the main responsible behind adverse situations in this field (Çınar, 2011: 6). EU's response to Turkey's full membership application can also be listed as one of the foreign policy events that makes criticisms of Turgut Özal by its opponents possible.

## **The Process Paving Way to the Full Application of Turkey to the EU and the Act of Application**

The harmonious relations between Turkey and the EU came to a halt in 1970s, when the international context and European integration was passing through a process of important changes under the influence of the transformations in the international economic system in the aftermath of 1973 worldwide oil crisis. Disappearance of the previous consensus over Turkey's relations with the EU among the Turkish political elites had also a vital effect on this process of alienation. The EU's concern for the democracy and human rights issues in Turkey were mostly seen as an intervention to internal affairs (Eralp, 2009: 153). In addition, unstable governments of the era failed in performing the necessities of Turkey's responsibilities, deriving from the Additional Protocol of the Ankara Agreement, especially the ones related to reducing external tariffs (Aybey, 2004: 21). Moreover, Cyprus Issue also started to affect Turkey-EU relations in those years following to the Turkey's military intervention to the island in 1974. In such a context, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit froze the terms of the Ankara Agreement in 1978. When Demirel, as his successor, intended to fix the relations and apply for full membership, another military coup occurred in 1980 (Gönlübol ve Kürkçüoğlu, 2014: 604-605).

Just before the 1980 military coup, the EU was in preparation of a package including some concessions to Turkey to reset the broken relations, namely gradual tariff concessions on Turkish agricultural exports, some improvements in working conditions of Turkish workers in EU countries and financial aid. The military coup prevented the implementation of this package (Arıkan, 2003: 64). Due to its role in stopping the domestic turmoil in Turkey, 1980 military coup didn't receive any harsh reactions from the EU side. At the beginning, the EU countries was not able to reach a consensus over their potential reaction to Turkey. While the member states such as France, Netherlands and Denmark were making claims regarding the suspension of the relations with Turkey; member states like Germany and United Kingdom had tendency to see the coup as an opportunity for the settlement of democracy in Turkey (Erhan and Arat, 2015: 84). On the other hand, Germany, France and Belgium, hosting high number of Turkish workers, used the military coup as a legitimate ground to stop free visa regime with Turkey (Balci, 2017: 193).

After 1980 military coup, military elites holding the power in Turkey decided to revitalize Turkey-EU relations. They even decided to apply for membership. However, the application of Turkey was postponed until 1987 especially due to misconducts of the same military elites

in human rights issues (Çalış, 2008: 221). As the military's eagerness for holding political power for an extended period became clearer, the EU member states started to be more critical about the coup, especially about the severe human rights violations and the problems related to democratisation. In this scope, European Commission froze the fourth financial protocol available for Turkey and the European side of the Joint Turkish-European Parliamentary Committee was abolished. That is, the EU made a choice for blocking all communication channels with Turkey until observing a clear improvement in the criticized issues. In the absence of real communication between parties, some groups and countries within the EU, especially Greece by using its newly gained EU membership as an asset, found a very fertile ground for their lobbying activities aiming to create an anti-Turkey atmosphere. Apart from Greece, the so-called Turkish citizens who fled to Europe after the 1980 military coup and were seeking political asylum in European countries also conducted anti-Turkey campaigns targeting both EU member states and institutions (Balci, 2017: 193). Under the influence of these factors, the EU's formal decision of suspending the relations was taken in 1982 (Akçay, 2016: 48-49).

Özal's election victory in 1983 didn't lead to the formation of a positive atmosphere against Turkey in Europe immediately. Since, the Özal's claims against the European integration project, while he was the head of State Planning Organization, were still alive in the minds of many Europeans (Karabulut, 2007: 138). As an irony of fate, it was the destiny of Turgut Özal to take this decisive step by making Turkey's application to the EU as a leader who was made his first intrusion to the Turkey's EU adventure as a blocker bureaucrat during the transition period foreseen in the Ankara Agreement (Çalış, 2008: 145-146). However, as the prime minister of the country, he preferred to act pragmatically rather than adopting an ideological approach (Dağı, 2001: 18). Özal draw a roadmap for creating a new Turkey and he saw Turkey's membership to the EU as a part of his roadmap, especially as an instrument that could support Turkey in reaching its own ideals. The objective of achieving membership of the EU was put to the government programme and Özal made an official statement in December 1984 in which the EU membership was depicted as a requirement for Turkey (Balci, 2017: 215). However, at the early period of its rule, Özal government was devoid of a stable EU policy. Instead, the relations between parties intensified as a result of contextual factors, stemming mostly from the disappointments with American and Middle Eastern partners (Karabulut, 2007: 142). The dominance of crisis situation in Turkish American relations, stemming from the US quotas imposed on Turkish products and unwillingness of

the US in providing financial credits to Turkey, created an impetus for Özal to establish a new balance with the EU. In order to reduce the level of control that the America had on Turkey, Özal government decided to balance the US with an actor within the Western camp, namely the EU. Moreover, the economic strength of the EU economies further motivated Özal government, because the EU was also seen as a panacea to the severe economic problems of Turkey (Balcı and Güleler, 2018: 84). The drop in oil prices after 1985 led to the falls in Turkish exports to the Middle Eastern countries and this caused a significant reduction in the export earnings from these countries (Dağı, 2001, 27).

When Turgut Özal came to the power in 1983, Turkey-EU relations was in a state of impasse under the influence of the political factors. That is, Turgut Özal inherited from the military rule problematic relations with the EU. The initiatives taken by the government to improve the relations between parties did not end up with the expected results. By the way, after his meetings with the high level European political figures, Özal decided to wait for the emergence of a fertile ground for the EU membership application (Akçay, 2016: 50). In the early years of his rule (1983-1987), Özal put more emphasis over economic liberalization. Accordingly, Turkish economy passed through a major transformation with reforms. As the military's control on Turkish politics relaxed, Özal started to pay effort to achieve political liberalization, especially by decreasing military's influence over civilian politicians. Full membership application made to the EU can also be evaluated in this scope, as a part of the struggle for political liberalization (Erdoğan, 2012: 106). Turgut Özal saw the EU accession as a guarantee for the continuation of these transformations in both economy and politics by reducing the power of military in these fields. Moreover, he also figured out Turkey as a model for other Middle Eastern countries in his mind. Therefore, he believed that this model should be supported by the West both politically and financially (Aybey, 2004: 25-26). To put it shortly, according to Turgut Özal, as being a member of the EU, Turkey could better respond to the demands of its population and offer itself as a viable model to the Islamic world, and achieve the peaceful coexistence of its dual identities (Kösebalan, 2002: 145).

There was a high convergence between the Özal's visions and expectations for the economic and political transformation of Turkey in 1980s and the transformations demanded by the EU side before the membership. As a result, the ideal of EU membership was given a place in the party programme of the newly found Motherland Party in 1983. In a great contrast with the previous tradition establishing a direct link between modernisation of the country and Europe, the application to the EU was seen as a reform project, rather than a security strategy (Çınar,

2011: 10). That is, he didn't see the EU as a mere modernization project for Turkey. Instead, he approached the EU pragmatically and instrumentally as a role model for turning to a competitive market economy fully integrated with world markets and a democracy guaranteeing fundamental freedoms (Duman, 2010: 344-345). Turgut Özal also saw Turkey's EU membership as a means for eradicating the humiliating discrimination between the West and others in world politics with global and humanist implications (Hale, 2003: 171).

Before applying for membership to the EU, Özal government paid effort to ensure the proper functioning of the association regime established between Turkey and the EU with Ankara Agreement. In this setting, Ankara invited the EU to the realisation of mutual commitments. Yet, Greece tried to block Turkey's efforts (Karabulut, 2007: 146). That is, as mentioned before, Turgut Özal tried to revise frozen relations between Turkey and EU in an unfortunate setting in which Greece started to become successful to carry its problems with Turkey to the EU agenda. The first step signalling the normalization of the relations between the parties was the gathering of the Association Council in 1986. In a speech delivered in 1987 in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, Özal mentioned that the real objective of all the reforms taken and the program conducted for achieving economic liberalisation is to ensure the integration of Turkey to the EU as a full member (Müftüler, 1999: 85). There were many factors motivating Turkey for making full membership application to the EU in 1987. Firstly, Turkey was hoping to respond the Greek entry to the EU. There was a desire to have an equal foot with Greece in the relations with the EU. Secondly, the EU was seen as a modernization project. Accordingly, full membership application was seen as a part of the long historical process aiming to be a part of all the Western/European organizations. Thirdly, Turkish industrialists wanted to have an access to the European market, especially due to the crisis in the Middle Eastern markets. With the fall in oil prices, Turkey started to have problems in making export to the countries in the Middle East in the 1980s. As a result, developing integration with the EU was also seen as a panacea for the need of new markets (Duman, 2010: 343). Fourthly, the EU was seen as a facilitator for the necessary political, economic and social transformations for Turkey (Barchard, 1990: 107). Fifthly, Turkey's application showed her response to the ongoing political, social and economic transformations that the EU had been experienced with its single market program. Lastly, there was a need for restoring Turkey's fading image in Europe after the 1980 military coup and Kurdish claims about atrocities targeting the Kurdish groups in the eastern part of Turkey (Çınar, 2011: 9). Furthermore, by analysing the objectives adopted by the EU with the Single European Act carefully, Özal government also

realised that Turkey's chance for EU membership would be more difficult in a transformed EU (Arıkan, 2003: 65).

Before submitting the membership application, Özal government took some actions targeting the EU member states and institutions in order to create a fertile ground for the application. Firstly, Turkish citizens' right to make individual application to the European Court of Justice was recognized in order to show the country's willingness for making reforms in the one of the mostly criticized fields, namely human rights and democracy. Secondly, Turkish government gave the signals for giving up from free movement of Turkish workers to the EU countries for the sake of full membership. Thirdly, big European firms were favoured in the public procurements, especially in the ones organized for the construction of dams or highways. Fourthly, Europeans were warned about the rising power of radical Islamists in Turkey in case of a falling apart from Europe. Fifthly, the ban on the sale of Greek properties in Turkey was lifted. Lastly, the importance of Turkey in ensuring the security of Europe as a reliable NATO member stressed (Yıldız, 2008: 87-88; Erhan and Arat, 2015: 93-94).

Özal approached to the conclusion of Ankara Agreement between Turkey and the EU in 1963 and Turkey's membership to the various Western and European institutions as the evidences confirming Turkey's Europeanness. From Turgut Özal's perspective, Ankara Agreement, as an association agreement which opened a way for a possible membership of Turkey to the EU in the long run, was very different from the simple trade agreements concluded between the EU and other countries in those years. Ankara Agreement was less than an accession treaty, but more than a mere trade treaty (Aybey, 2004: 24). Therefore, he interpreted the discussions turning around the Turkey's Europeanness as the attempts for trying to find an answer to a question that had been already answered (Özal, 2010: 353). In addition, Turgut Özal argued that Turkey had problems related to its democracy and economy that need to be corrected before membership (Özal, 2010: 347-348). To him, Turkey has to transform itself into a European country having the capacity to do the necessity of the responsibilities deriving Rome Treaty in terms of democratic and economic performances. Accordingly, he saw the EU accession as a process that could motivate Turkish political elites to take steps for dealing with the economic and political problems of the country. He even said that EU accession process will make Turkey stronger in achieving necessary transformations in the eve of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Özal, 2010: 366). Turgut Özal also underlined that if Turkey manages to make such transformations, Europe would be willing to accept Turkey as a member (Duman, 2010: 343).

The EU warned Turkey unofficially about the worse timing of application for the EU membership after hearing news about Turkey's intentions for the application. While Greece and Luxembourg openly stated their unfavourable approach to a potential application, United Kingdom and Belgium gave an evident support. Germany put forth its choice for an application demanding solely customs union (Balci, 2017: 215). Despite all the efforts paid before the application, the act of Turkey produced a shock effect among the European counterparts. The timing of the Turkish application was somehow problematic for the EU side, because the EU was acting as an inward oriented actor in the late 1980s. That is, the primary concern of the EU was to turn into a common market (Erhan and Arat, 2015: 91). Hence, Turkey's application wasn't welcomed by the EU side. In addition, Turkey's application for membership in 1987 caused a serious embarrassment at the EU side resulting from the factors, such as Turkey's economic backwardness, political instability, bad human rights records, huge and growing population (Barchard, 1990: 107).

Despite the long term objective of full membership, Ankara Association Agreement aimed primarily to initiate a process through which Turkish economy has become fully integrated with the European economies. Therefore, Turgut Özal's full membership application can be thought as an action that complemented the already established association relationship by showing Turkey's willingness for establishing relations with the EU that are extending beyond the economy. In other words, Turkey's membership application to the EU in 1987 has made the redefinition of all the parameters of the already existing relations between parties by enriching them with an accession dimension. Besides, it forced the Europeans to reconsider their neglected relations with Turkey.

### **The Process after Turkey's Full Membership Application to the EU**

*The road to the EU will be long and narrow. It will be a difficult one. They will try to discourage and even humiliate us. But we shall never concede.*

Turgut Özal

The statement above was made by Turgut Özal following the Turkey's formal membership application to the EU on 14 April 1987 by referring to the famous poem of Aşık Veysel in which a similarity between human life and a long and narrow road was established (Erdenir, 2015: 24). He defined Turkey's EU accession as a long and narrow road by taking into account the gap between Turkey and the EU and the problems and obstacles Turkey has to

face in this process (Duman, 2010: 342). Even after more than thirty years passed after this application, Turkey hasn't achieved to see the light at the end of this long tunnel. In addition, as the requirements that need to be fulfilled by Turkey getting severer and stricter, Turkey's road has become narrower.

As depicted in the previous section, Turkey-EU relations were passing through a turbulent era when Turgut Özal came to the power in the early 1980s. Therefore, his membership application to the EU can also be interpreted as an attempt for achieving the normalization in the relations between parties. On the other hand, it was unimaginable for a country to apply for EU membership in four years passing after the transition to a democratic regime after a military rule. Yet, Özal government achieved this by sending Turkey's application to the EU in 1987. It is undeniable that this application was one of critical moments that had a great influence in the development of Turkey-EU relations in the following decades (Karabulut, 2007: 157).

Turgut Özal believed that it was necessary to persuade Europeans to the fact that accepting Turkey as an EU member would serve their interest best. Therefore, Özal government continued to pay effort for guaranteeing an affirmative response from the EU after the application. Turgut Özal involved actively in those promotion initiatives. In this framework, he always stressed the cards in Turkey's hands such as its geostrategic location, huge economic potentials and probable roles in ensuring Europeans' access to new markets in his speeches. Besides, he also tried to get the support of significant actors from inside and outside the EU, such as the support of the countries namely the United States, Germany, United Kingdom and France, in order to ease Turkey's journey to the EU. Additionally, he extensively used his sincere personal relations with the European leaders to persuade his counterparts (Özdemir, 2014: 308). He conducted visits to European capitals in order to make lobby activities after the application. Even an advertising and consultancy group called Saatchi & Saatchi located in London helped the actions designed for promoting Turkey's image in Europe in the last six months before final decision taken by the EU (Barchard, 1990: 107). After the EU declared its decision regarding the Turkish application, Turgut Özal continued to pay effort by sending separate letters to European leaders in 1991 during the Gulf War to warn them about importance of accepting Turkey as a member (Erhan and Arat, 2015: 93-94).

European Commission declared its opinion report related to Turkey's application to the EU in 1989 after two years from the application. European Commission showed openly the

reluctance of the Europeans for Turkey's EU membership in its opinion without using a negative tone. EU's response to Turkey's application was a gentle one that wasn't closing the doors wholly by drawing an unforeseen future (Hale, 2003: 187). Furthermore, despite the emphases over the additional value that Turkish membership would bring for the EU and the eligibility of Turkey for the EU membership, the report was openly stressed that challenges are greater in comparison to the potential benefits (Lesser, 1992: 9). The Commission report identified the problems that could be faced in an attempt to integrate Turkey to the EU. Briefly, it put forth an image of Turkey which is unprepared for joining the EU (Kösebalan, 2002: 136). Turkey's low economic growth and GDP per capita nearly half of the EU's poorest member states, high rate of population growth and labour migration potential, budget deficits stemming from low tax revenues and high state expenditures, large state sector despite the privatization efforts of Özal government, high inflation rates were defined as the main challenges for Turkey's membership prospect. In addition to the economic problems, European Commission also underlined Turkey's need for expanding political pluralism and improving human rights (European Commission, 1989).

Turkey has been always paid effort to be recognized as a European country since its foundation. This willingness of Turkey has been always used wisely by its European counterparts for keeping Turkey at the waiting room of the EU by giving some minor incentives. The same scenario was put the scene again after Turkey's full membership application. By acting upon the opinion of the Commission, the EU leaders refrained from declaring their final decision regarding the EU membership of Turkey and came up with a middle solution enough for keeping Turkey at the gate. With the directives of the European Council, a package<sup>2</sup>, which was aiming to define a roadmap for the improvement of the relations between Turkey and the EU, was prepared by the EU officials. The relevant package stated that the customs union relation should be established between parties in accordance with the conditions of the Ankara Agreement, the cooperation between parties in the field of industry and in other areas should be enhanced, and the payment of the financial assistance that were also known as the Fourth Financial Protocol. By looking at the items existing in the package, it can be argued that there was a high level of convergence between the content of the package and what Turgut Özal hoped to achieve with the EU membership application. Yet, it should be mentioned that the EU couldn't pay the financial assistances under the

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<sup>2</sup> The package is also known as Matutes Package in the literature.

Fourth Financial Protocol once again like in the early 1980s, due to Greek veto (Hale, 2003: 249).

By delaying Turkey's membership to an unforeseeable future and giving priority to vitalize association regime, the EU didn't respond Turkey's application in line with Turgut Özal's expectations (Arıkan, 2003: 64-65). Despite the dominance of expectations for an unfavourable reply among the public, Turkish decision-makers in Ankara felt disappointed after being aware of European response received in 1989. After the final decision declared, the government under the prime minister Yıldırım Akbulut paid effort to show the rejection as a success by claiming that EU leaving an open door to Turkey. That is, they tried to demonstrate the EU's response as an encouraging act (Barchard, 1990: 107). Despite the prevailing uncertainty in the EU's response to Turkish application, the answer created an EU anchor at Turkish side and provided an impetus for political and economic reforms (Yalman and Göksel, 2017: 25).

The end of Cold War became unfortunate for Turkey because it decreased Turkey's strategic importance for the European security and eroded the *raison d'être* for Turkey's incorporation into the European order. Moreover, since the post-Cold War Europe was shaped along values such as rule of law and democracy, Turkey was forced by the European counterparts to face with her own shortcomings in the political system (Bac, 1998: 244-245). That is, the timing problem identified above worsened more with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1989, because the EU opted to concentrate on integrating the post-Soviet countries in the eastern and central Europe to the European project to ensure the unification of two sides of the Europe falling apart during the Cold War. All these tendencies led to the marginalization of Turkey's accession (Eralp, 2009: 157). To put it concretely, by making its membership application to the EU in a contextual setting in which Turkey's value as a security partner diminished, Turkey was required to redesign its political system in order to meet European standards by facing a competition from post-Soviet states which were very eager to accept European norms in order to leave their decayed political and economic systems behind (Bac, 1998: 243-244).

## **Conclusion**

Before Özal era, Turkish foreign policy was in a state of total isolation. During the 1970s, Turkey broke up its relations with the EU, faced with American arm embargo due to Cyprus Issue, didn't improve its relations with the Muslim countries due to Kemalist legacy and

couldn't improve its relations with the Soviet countries as a NATO member state. Therefore, Özal felt himself obliged to take necessary steps for ending this severe isolation both from the West and East. Accordingly, Turkey's full membership application to the EU in 1987 can be identified as one of those significant steps. By making an application for full membership of the EU in 1987, Turkey opted to revitalize its broken relations with its European partners in the previous decades. Since the association regime, already existing between the parties with the Ankara Agreement of 1961, was found unsatisfactory and inappropriate ground for the relations with the EU, Özal government chose the alternative path of membership to enrich the association relation with an accession dimension.

Turgut Özal firmly believed that Turkey's economic, political and security interests would be materialized efficiently only by joining the EU. He was quiet sure about that Turkey's membership to the EU would turn into an ideal that can be achieved in the long run, after Turkey experienced significant progresses in its democracy and economy (Özal, 2010: 349). Therefore, Özal government's EU membership application can be seen as an attempt for finding a legacy for the economic and political reforms which also served to the weakening of military's influence on Turkish politics (Arıkan, 2003: 64-65).

Unfortunately, Turgut Özal died before learning the final decision of the EU about his government's application for full membership. By considering the time passed after his application, it can be argued that Turgut Özal would probably not foresee that Turkey would wait for such a long period of time at the waiting room of the EU. The EU had neglected Turkish application more than ten years and it made its final decision on Turkey clear by giving the country candidate status only in 1999. However, it should be noted that it would be impossible for Turkey to grant EU candidacy without Özal's full membership application to the EU in 1987 due to changing climate of international and European politics. Despite the limited progress achieved in this field until the death of Turgut Özal, by using the advantage of knowing later developments in Turkish politics, it is possible to argue that Turgut Özal reached his ideals related to Turkey's membership application to the EU to a great extent after his death. Since, the application has had a tremendous effect on the development of the relations between Turkey and EU in the following decades.

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