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To cite this article: Müftüler-Baç, Meltem, “Turkey’s Ambivalent Relationship with the European Union: To Accede or not to Accede”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Volume 13, No. 52, 2016, pp. 89-103.

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Turkey's Ambivalent Relationship with the European Union: To Accede or not to Accede

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the changes in Turkish foreign policy towards the EU in the light of the alterations in the EU's external environment that makes enlargement less likely at least in the near future, and the least likely with regard to Turkey. That is because, while the EU is going through turbulent times internally, its external environment is also changing significantly. The paper first looks at the EU's enlargement policy, both in terms of its external and domestic scope conditions, and then at the specificities of Turkey's stance with regards to the EU. Finally, the paper assesses whether the Turkish foreign policy towards the EU has changed since 2013, and if so in what ways. In doing so, the paper aims to assess the interplay of the external and domestic conditions in shaping the Turkish foreign policy towards the EU.

Keywords: Turkey, the European Union, Accession, Enlargement Negotiations

Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birliği ile Belirsiz Geleceği: Üye olmak ya da Olmamak

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birliği ile ilgili dış politika seçimlerini AB genişleme sürecini etkileyen dinamikler ve Türkiye'nin AB üyeliği kriterlerini yerine getirmesi açılarından incelemektedir. AB'nin genişlemesindeki değişim ve Türkiye'nin iç politika dinamikleri Türk dış politikasında AB üyeliği hedefini etkilemektedir. Özellikle 2013 sonrası yaşanan dış ve iç etkenlerdeki değişim sonrası Türkiye'nin AB üyeliği hedefinden uzaklaştığı görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Avrupa Birliği, Katılım, Genişleme Müzakereleri

Introduction

On May 9, 2016, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared, “EU membership, a strategic goal for Turkey, will be a source of stability and inspiration for the region”,¹ reiterating one of the key goals of Turkish foreign policy. Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Turkish foreign policy aimed at Turkey’s inclusion into the European structure.² This had led to the formulation of a foreign policy after the World War II aiming to be an integral part of the Western system, its founding member status in the Council of Europe in 1949, OEEC membership in 1948 and its accession to NATO in 1952. It is precisely this foreign policy objective that led to Turkey’s application to the then European Economic Community (EEC) in 1959. Despite its very early association with the European Union (EU) -since its 1963 Association Agreement and the 1995 Customs Union Agreement- Turkey’s relations with the EU did not proceed very smoothly.

Although its candidacy for EU membership in 1999 and the opening of accession negotiations in 2005 clearly illustrate the extent to which Turkey is firmly anchored to the European order, whether and under which conditions Turkey would accede to the European Union remains one of the key questions for Turkish foreign policy. That is because, Turkey’s relations with the EU are affected by both the EU’s preferences in its external relations -actors that are beyond the control of Turkey- and Turkey’s own internal dynamics. This paper investigates these external and domestic conditions in Turkey’s EU accession process and aims to assess how they impacted the prospects for Turkey’s membership to the EU, especially after 2013.³ The paper proposes that Turkey’s foreign policy choices towards the EU are not solely shaped by the Turkish preferences and material interests, but influenced by the EU’s own momentum. Thus, to properly assess Turkish stance towards the EU, one must uncover the EU’s own dynamics. In other words, the paper proposes that the Turkish foreign policy towards the EU is shaped by the interplay of the external and domestic conditions.

This is why, a look at the EU’s enlargement policy and strategies are essential to understand Turkish foreign policy towards the EU. In terms of its enlargement policy, the EU changed its commitment for further enlargement after 2013, when the European Commission adopted a three-pillar structure, with prioritizing rule of law, economic competence and public administration reform, and enhanced the accession criteria. This change signaled a toughening up of the accession conditions, and impacted the EU’s credibility for the current candidates.⁴ The uncertainty surrounding the EU’s future -both as an integration project and its enlargement policy,⁵ the diverging member state preferences over Turkey’s accession,⁶ and the changing geopolitical environment constitute the external conditions for Turkey’s EU accession goal. As for domestic conditions, Turkey’s political development,⁷ its economic readiness

1 “Erdoğan Reaffirms Turkey’s EU accession goal”, *Reuters*, 9 May 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-turkey-eu-idUSKCN0Y01D4>, (Accessed on 6 October 2016).

2 For a comprehensive study of Turkish-EU relations, see Senem Aydın-Düzgüt and Nathalie Tocci, *Turkey and the European Union*, London, Palgrave, 2015; Meltem Muftuler-Bac, *Divergent Pathways: Turkey and the European Union: Re-thinking the Dynamics of Turkey-EU Relationship*, Berlin, Barbara Budrich, 2016.

3 The paper draws upon interviews conducted with EU and Turkish officials in March 2015-Ankara, in Brussels-February 2016, and in March 2016 – Ankara.

4 Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, “Governance by Conditionality: EU Rule Transfer to the Candidate Countries of Central and Eastern Europe”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol.11, No.4, 2004, p.661-679.

5 Antoaneta L. Dimitrova, Elitsa Kortenska, and Bernard Steunenberg, “Comparing Discourses about Past and Future EU Enlargements: Core Arguments and Cleavages”, *MAXCAP Working Papers*, No.13, Berlin, Freie Universität Berlin, 2015.

6 Arzu Kibris and Meltem Muftuler-Bac, “The Accession Games: A Comparison of Three Limited-Information Negotiation Designs”, *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol.12, No.1, 2011, p.399-427.

7 Meltem Muftuler-Bac, “The Pandora’s Box: Democratization and Rule of Law in Turkey”, *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol.14,

and ability to adopt the EU rules and *acquis* constitute the more pronounced domestic limitations, shaping its foreign policy choices. The EU's conditions and Turkey's own domestic limitations matter significantly in shaping Turkey's relations with the EU, impacting its foreign policy choices not only towards the EU but to the wider world. However, after 2013, the external⁸ and domestic conditions have no longer been conducive for Turkey's accession to the EU.

This paper investigates the changes in Turkish foreign policy towards the EU in the light of the alterations in the EU's external environment that makes enlargement less likely at least in the near future, and the least likely with regard to Turkey. That is because, while the EU is going through turbulent times internally, its external environment is also changing significantly. For example, the Turkish neighborhood, especially the area south of Turkey, is ridden with civil wars, active conflicts, ethnic strife, terrorism, possible proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the increasing presence of adventurous Russia testing its strength in Ukraine and Syria. At the same time, both Turkey and the EU are confronted with a massive refugee crisis reminiscent of the refugee crisis right after the World War II, with around 1 million people trying to get to the EU territories, and close to 3 million already living in Turkey.⁹ This refugee flow presented the EU with an unforeseen challenge for protecting its internal and external borders, and brought a new role for Turkey to play in Europe.¹⁰ As a result, the changing geopolitical dynamics, the challenges in the EU integration process, and Turkey's own inconsistent foreign policy choices complicate its relations with the EU.

The paper first looks at the EU's enlargement policy, both in terms of its external and domestic scope conditions, and then at the specificities of Turkey's stance with regards to the EU. Finally, the paper assesses whether the Turkish foreign policy towards the EU has changed since 2013, and if so in what ways. In doing so, the paper aims to assess the interplay of the external and domestic conditions in shaping the Turkish foreign policy towards the EU. To understand Turkey's own ambivalent stance towards the EU, a look at the external and domestic conditions of EU enlargement is in order, as the Turkish accession to the EU is directly impacted from internal developments in the EU¹¹ as well as the changes in its enlargement strategy, which is addressed in the next section.

The European Union Enlargement Process

Since Turkey's foreign policy towards the EU is determined partly by the EU's commitment to enlargement, a brief look at the EU enlargement policy is needed. While the EU's enlargement policy succeeded in unifying the continent in 2004,¹² and brought a vast socio-political and economic transformation for the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries,¹³ clearly it no longer occupies

No.1, 2016, p.61-77.

8 For the alterations in the enlargement strategy, see "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2013-2014", COM(2013) 700 final, *European Commission*, 2013.

9 The United Nations is providing an analysis of these refugees, *UNHCR*, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>, accessed, (Accessed on 5 October 2016).

10 This point was emphasized by the EU officials in DG Near and External Action Service during the interviews held in Brussels on February 16 and 17, 2016.

11 Meltem Muftuler-Bac, "Turkey's Accession to the European Union: The Impact of the EU's Internal Dynamics", *International Studies Perspectives* Vol.9, No.2, 2008, p.208-226.

12 Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, *The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe*, Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 2005.

13 Antoaneta L. Dimitrova, *Driven to Change: The European Union's Enlargement Viewed from the East*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2004.

the central role it has in the EU foreign policy. Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, attests to this on July 15, 2014, as “no new countries would be expected to join the European Union until 2019”.¹⁴ This meant that effectively under his term of 2014-2019, the current candidates -Turkey and the Western Balkan countries- should not expect EU accession. The EU’s priorities towards the enlargement seems to have altered with the Juncker Commission as even the European Commission Directorate General for Enlargement was renamed as DG Near in 2014, with Neighbourhood Policy being prioritized over enlargement of the Union. This is in contrast to the 1993-2007 period, when the EU clearly signaled to the Central and Eastern European countries that they would eventually join the EU as full members.

This is because of various key differences that set the current process apart from the previous rounds of enlargement. First, it seems that there is declining support amongst EU member states to continue with the enlargement policy. The European publics seem to find the EU responsible for their economic and political problems, as demonstrated with the British referendum in June 2016, where the majority of the British public voted to leave the EU. Second, the member states have visible diverging preferences over certain candidates’ accession, exemplified in Greece’s veto of Macedonia and Cyprus’ veto of Turkey. The Turkish accession negotiations proceeded very slowly and constituted a unique example where the bilateral relations between member states -Cyprus and France in this case- played a crucial role.¹⁵ These diverging member state preferences decrease the EU’s ability to speak with a unified voice over enlargement and thus decrease the effectiveness of its conditionality. Third, the EU is passing through particularly difficult times with the UK engaged in exit talks, some member states wary of the flow of refugees into the European territories, and others facing economic crisis of significant magnitude. Consequently, the EU does no longer seem to be committed to enlargement as a tool in its foreign policy.

As the EU’s commitment for further enlargement declined and the EU’s priorities changed, the enlargement policy began to lose its attractiveness and credibility. Yet, this was also compounded by the fact that the domestic political and socio-economic conditions in the new batch of candidates were much less favorable compared to the earlier group of candidates. This is critical as the EU’s ability to bring about change depends on the economic capabilities of the applicant/candidate countries, both in terms of their ability to adopt the EU’s extensive *acquis* and in terms of making their accession to the EU attractive for the EU member states,¹⁶ another indicator of the interplay of the external and domestic factors.

In other words, the EU’s external scope conditions do not exist in a vacuum, but they are also shaped by the domestic scope conditions of the candidates, both economic and political. Both political and economic preparedness in the candidates ultimately determine the extent to which these countries could adopt the costly reforms necessary to meet the EU conditionality. While economic levels of preparedness act as pre-condition for the EU’s evaluation of the candidates, these factors also determine the candidate countries’ ability to adopt costly reforms to meet the

14 *EUActive*, 16 September 2014, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/enlargement/serbia-grudgingly-accepts-junckers-enlargement-pause-308481>, (Accessed on 15 March 2016).

15 Meltem Müftüleri-Baç and Aylin Ece Çiçek, “A Comparison of the European Union’s Accession Negotiations with Bulgaria and Turkey: The Role of Bilateral Issues”, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, June 2016, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14782804.2016.1198690>, (Accessed on 15 March 2016).

16 This is dealt extensively as the key factor shaping domestic transformation in Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, *The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe*.

EU conditionality. With the 2004 and 2007 enlargement, the candidates involved were very similar in terms of their levels of political and economic development, similar communist pasts and well educated publics. This does not seem to be the case anymore, as the current candidates- Western Balkans and Turkey- are largely different in terms of their levels of socioeconomic, demographic and political characteristics, both compared to each other and also in comparison to former candidates in CEE. This means that the EU's enthusiasm for further enlargement is also impacted from the low levels of readiness,¹⁷ waning the commitment to and the continuation of the enlargement process. This is why, a look at the Turkish economic and political levels of preparedness matter in shaping its ability to adopt the EU rules and criteria as well as influencing the EU's position towards the Turkish accession. The Turkish readiness for EU membership is critical both in terms of demonstrating its commitment to the EU accession goal as a foreign policy objective, but also in terms of shaping the EU's views on Turkish willingness to become a member, and therefore the EU's commitment to the Turkish accession. The European Union member states view the EU candidates in terms of their potential contribution to the EU economic growth. This is important in terms of assessing the candidates' ability to meet the EU's economic requirements, but also to contribute to the European economic growth. Turkish economic capabilities, with about 800 billion \$ GDP, a relatively steady economic growth rate, and around 40% of its external trade with the EU indicate its possible contribution to the European economy.¹⁸

Compared to the previous and current candidates, the Turkish economic readiness and levels of economic preparedness are impressive, and the level of Turkish economic development enables it to adopt costly economic reforms in order to meet the EU criteria, which could be seen therefore as a domestic scope condition. In addition, Turkey competes with the EU in Western Balkans as "Turkey is one of the top players after Germany and the USA. Turkey is a credible role model in Bosnia, Kosovo, Albania and FYROM and is visible in the region not as an accession country, but as a country that brings a lot of money to the region."¹⁹ Turkish economic capabilities also determine partly the low Turkish commitment to the EU accession goal, as it seems to be less dependent on the EU market for its economic well-being.

The second main component of domestic scope conditions is political. To start with, democracy is an absolutely necessary precondition for accession. Democracy is a specific precondition for application for EU membership rather than a scope condition for accession tools and strategies to work. This is because unless the applicant country fulfils the basic political criteria and proves itself to be a democracy, neither candidacy nor accession negotiations could commence. Democratic political processes in the candidates shape their ability to pass the required reforms, and acquire a necessary level of development for EU accession. The political aspects of the Copenhagen Criteria act as the precondition for an applicant country to be accepted as a candidate and later for the opening of accession negotiations. As the CEE countries adopted the political reforms adjusting to the EU's conditionality, their ability to accede to the EU increased exponentially. In short, the scope conditions for the EU's effectiveness rely on the candidate countries' ability to transform themselves, the possible costs they would be willing to undertake for the transformation

17 Interview with an EU official in EEAS, Brussels, 16 February 2016.

18 For the EU's evaluation of the Turkish economic readiness, see "Indicative Strategy Paper for Turkey (2014-2020)", *European Commission*, 2014, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20140919-csp-turkey.pdf, (Accessed on 15 March 2016).

19 Interview with an EU Official from the DG Near, Brussels, 16 February 2016.

and the expected benefits they would reap as a consequence. The high degree of EU commitment, the credibility of the EU accession process, the possible material economic benefits to be reaped with accession all combined to make the EU enlargement a success story for the previous round of candidates.

Since both candidacy and the opening of accession negotiations are subject to the applicant country's ability to conform to the EU's political criteria, it is important to see how the EU evaluated Turkey's readiness and how Turkey remained committed to the EU accession goal with its political reforms. That is because Turkey possesses significant economic capabilities, which decreases the attractiveness of the EU membership among domestic actors, but also increases resistance to the diffusion of norms. The Turkish domestic political factors matter in shaping the effectiveness of the EU's scope conditions, precisely because they restrict the Turkish ability to emulate the European political norms. The next section looks at the Turkish integration into the EU and its ability to adjust to the EU's rules and norms since its accession negotiations began in 2005, as a gauge of its commitment to EU accession as a foreign policy goal. However, it needs to be noted here that Turkish domestic political scope conditions also impacted the formulation of its foreign policy towards the EU, as it is presented in the next section.

Turkey's Choice: The Road towards EU Accession

Turkish ability to stay on track for political reforms and its commitment to liberal democratic rules are essential in its relations with the EU. Similarly, Turkish economic integration to the EU plays a critical role in shaping the Turkish foreign policy goals. As Turkey's economic ties with the EU matter in providing an incentive for its accession to the EU, any alteration in the economic welfare in the EU, or Turkey's ability to find alternative markets for its trade and economic relations,²⁰ lessens the Turkish commitment to the EU accession goal, as it drastically changes the economic attractiveness of the EU.²¹ While these are actually domestic scope conditions, the Turkish internal political transformation and its economic strength are essential components shaping its foreign policy. In other words, Turkish foreign policy preferences to the EU would be assessed with regards to its commitment to domestic political reforms, and also in terms of the economic interdependence between Turkey and the EU. However, since Turkey already is engaged in a customs union for industrial products with the EU that enables economic integration between the two parties, its accession prospects are more directly affected from its political reforms. If Turkey wants to join the EU as a full member, it would be expected to see that it stays on track with its political reforms and aim at a higher degree of harmonization to the EU's political rules. That is why the Turkish political reforms from 1999 to 2016 are a good measure of its foreign policy commitment to EU accession. This was emphasized by the EU officials interviewed in Ankara in March 2015, who claimed that the EU anchor provided Turkey with substantive incentive in 1998-2007 period for political reforms.²²

20 Martin Raiser and Marina Wes. (eds.), "Turkey's Transitions: Integration, Inclusion and Institutions", *The World Bank Report*, No:90509-TR, 2014, http://www.wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2015/08/26/090224b083099d03/3_0/Rendered/PDF/Main0report.pdf, (Accessed on 15 March 2016).

21 For an alternative future between the EU and Turkey, see Cemal Karakas, "EU-Turkey: Integration without Full membership or Membership without Full integration: A Conceptual Framework for Accession Alternatives", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol.51, No.6, 2013, p.1057-1073.

22 Interview with the EU Delegation officials, Ankara, 30 March 2015.

The EU's evaluation of Turkish ability to meet the political aspects of the Copenhagen criteria plays a critical role in its negotiations with the EU. When the Commission finally recommended accession negotiations to begin with Turkey in 2004, it stated that "Turkey sufficiently fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria",²³ was the first example of the Commission's evaluations to be used as a qualification for an applicant country's adherence to the EU's political standards. It was also the first time that the Commission used such an indication, i.e. "sufficiently", to assess a candidate's political situation, signaling that while Turkey seems to be meeting the basic criteria, it still suffered from shortcomings in particular with regard to rule of law and freedom of expression in its political system. The Commission's evaluations in 2004 fit well with the Freedom House rankings for Turkey where Turkey was consistently ranked partly free with some improvements in 2004-2005 as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Freedom House Rankings for Turkey (data compiled by the author)

Year	1998	1999	2001	2002	2004	2005	2007	2013	2015
Status	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free
Freedom ranking	N/A	4.5	4.5	4.5	3.5	3	3	3.5	3.5
Civil Liberties	5	5	5	5	4	3	3	4	4
Political Rights	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3

Source: Freedom House Country reports <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2004/turkey> (Accessed on 17 June 2016).

As seen in the table 1, there is some improvement in Turkish freedom rankings and civil liberties in 2004-2007 period, but a backsliding is visible in 2013 and onwards. This also resonates with the results of the Freedom of Press Index where Turkey is ranked as the 154th out of 180 countries in 2014, but 99th out of 134 countries surveyed in 2002, and went up to 98th out of 161 countries in 2004 and 2005.²⁴ Its position remained relatively stable in the Index until 2009, but has been sliding down ever since, stabilizing at 149 out of 161 in 2015. *Polity IV* data for Turkey complements this empirical analysis.²⁵ As a database for democratic development, *Polity IV* categorizes regimes into three groups: Autocracy [-10,-6], anocracy [-5,+5] and democracy [+6,+10] with a range [-10,+10].²⁶ According to *Polity IV* data, at the beginning of the 1990s, Turkey ranked fairly high as a democracy, but from 1991 onwards, experienced a decrease in democratization, with the observable stages of "factionalism", i.e.. internal dissension, occurring after 1997. The fluctuations in Turkish democracy in the past 60+ years could be seen from the Polity data as summarized in Figure 1.

23 "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2011-2012", COM(2011) 666 final, *European Commission*, 2011.

24 "World Press Freedom Index", *Reporter without Borders*, 2014, <http://rsf.org/index2014/en-index2014.php>, (Accessed on 18 January 2015).

25 "Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2013", *Center for Systemic Peace*, 2014, <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4x.htm>, (Accessed on 18 January 2015).

26 The Polity data has this margin of error.

The Turkish Foreign Policy towards the EU

When Turkey applied for full membership to then EC in 1987, building on its 1963 Association Agreement with the EEC, it made a conscious choice that it saw its future with the European Union, mostly of course for economic reasons.²⁹ However, the Commission's Opinion of 1989, which effectively told Turkey that it was not ready to assume obligations arising from membership,³⁰ and its relative isolation from the EU enlargement process after 1997 while all the other applicants were made either candidates or become acceding states indicated that its foreign policy objective was not to be realized any time soon. While Turkey on paper remained committed to the EU accession goal, it did not engage in an extensive political reform process that membership required at least until 2001-2002. The lack of commitment to the EU rules and norms was surprising given the Turkish goal of EU accession; yet it needs to be noted that the EU anchor remained very weak for Turkey at this time, negating the move towards EU harmonization. Nonetheless, the goal of EU accession remained a constant Turkish foreign policy objective as stressed by Turkish governmental officials. This is also reflected by Ahmet Davutoğlu, in his role as the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2010: "Full integration with the EU is and will remain the priority. Membership in the EU is Turkey's strategic choice and this objective is one of the most important projects of the Republican era."³¹ Yet, the rhetoric did not necessarily match the actions of the government, creating a credibility problem in its foreign policy, reminiscent of the EU's own credibility problem towards Turkey. Despite the opening of the accession negotiations with Turkey in 2005 with a unanimous decision, the EU officials failed to follow a coherent policy in the negotiations process. In particular, chapters where Turkey was able to adopt the EU rules such as Chapter on Economic and Financial Matters, Education, Energy could not be opened due to some member states' vetoes. This created a significant credibility problem for the EU as its rhetoric did not match its actions. Similarly, as Turkey committed itself to the EU accession goal, when it strayed away from political reforms and in some instances reversed the earlier reforms, it created a credibility problem for itself.

The momentum for the Turkish adoption of the EU criteria and a convincing argument for its commitment to EU accession as a foreign policy goal began in 2001 under the coalition government of the Motherland Party (ANAP), Democratic Left Party (DSP), and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), specifically following the 2001 economic crisis in Turkey, thereby demonstrating the interplay of the external and domestic scope conditions explored in the previous section. The Turkish foreign policy goal of EU accession was enhanced after 2002 with the Justice and Development Party's (JDP) coming to power. The early years of the JDP rule was highly promising in terms of the Turkish ability to adopt the necessary political reforms and adapt the EU *acquis*.³² However, a breaking point in this came after 2007 when the complications in the Turkish-EU relations became visible, first with the issues relating to Cyprus and then later on with some member states -France in particular- acting as veto players for the Turkish negotiations.³³

29 Aydın-Düzgüt and Gürsoy, "The Rule of Law and Judicial Reforms in Turkey".

30 "The Commission Opinion on Turkey's Request for Accession to the Community", *Commission of the European Communities*, 20 December 1989, <http://aei.pitt.edu/4475/1/4475.pdf>, (Accessed on 10 October 2016).

31 Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkish foreign policy and the EU in 2010 (I)" *Hürriyet Daily News*, 2 October 2010, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=turkish-foreign-policy-and-the-eu-in-2010-i-2010-02-10>, (Accessed on 2 June 2016).

32 For an analysis of these political reforms, see Meltem Müftüler-Bac, "Turkey's Political Reforms: The Impact of the European Union", *Southeast European Politics and Societies*, Vol.10, No.1, 2005, p.16-30; Georgena Noutcehva, and Senem Aydın-Düzgüt, "Lost in Europeanization: The Western Balkans and Turkey", *West European Politics*, Vol.35, 2012, p.59-78.

33 For a full account of these vetoes and chapter openings see Müftüler-Bac and Çiçek, "A Comparison of the European Union's Accession Negotiations".

The first complication with regard to Turkish accession process is related to the Turkish-Cyprus-EU triangle. The Republic of Cyprus became a member of the EU in 2004, and under the EU *acquis*, Turkey's 1995 Customs Union Agreement for industrial products had to be extended towards the new members of 2004. For that effect, Turkish foreign ministry submitted a Protocol in July 2005, extending the Customs Union Agreement to all the new members, declaring at the same time that this does not imply the recognition of the Republic of Cyprus.³⁴ While the accession negotiations with Turkey were opened in October 2005, Turkey refused to implement the Protocol to Republic of Cyprus and thus, based on the European Commission's recommendation, the European Council agreed in December 2006 to suspend the negotiations for 8 Chapters due to the Turkish non-implementation. On top of that decision, starting from 2009, Cyprus began to veto the opening of various Chapters, even those that were not related to Customs Union.³⁵ From the Turkish point of view, both the 2006 Council decision and the vetoes from Cyprus on 6 Chapters were signals that no matter how Turkey aimed to comply with the EU rules and strived to achieve harmonization, the process was not going to end up with full membership. It needs to be noted here that the accession negotiations are not between the European Union and Turkey, but actually between the member states and Turkey, in line with the EU rules. This means that all kinds of bilateral issues might emerge during the negotiations process, and the Turkish experience with the Republic of Cyprus shows precisely that. It is similar to the Macedonia's experience with Greece or Croatia's with Slovenia, and it is part and parcel of the EU enlargement process. Having said this, it does not alter the Turkish perceptions of being unfairly treated,³⁶ nor does it alter the ability of the other EU member states influence the Republic of Cyprus to lift its vetoes. A particular problem with regard to Cyprus's vetoes presented itself in 2012 when the European Commission adopted a change in its Enlargement Strategy, prioritizing the opening of Chapters 23 and 24 at the start of the negotiations process to stimulate political reforms in rule of law, independence of the judiciary, and fundamental freedoms. However, these Chapters could not be opened and the new enlargement strategy could not be used for Turkey, as the Republic of Cyprus vetoed the opening of these two Chapters. This was also explained by one of the interviews at the Ministry of Justice where the Turkish official indicated that any progress on Chapters 23 and 24 is tied to the EU's opening of these Chapters as it has done so with the current negotiating countries such as Serbia and Montenegro.³⁷

While bilateral relations between Turkey and Cyprus affected Turkish accession negotiations, France emerged as another veto player in the EU blocking the opening of chapters where the Commission and Turkey have already agreed to common negotiation positions. A prime example was the then newly elected French President Nicholas Sarkozy's veto on the opening of Chapter 17 on Financial and Economic Integration in June 2007, despite the Commission's recommendation that Turkey has adopted the rules for that chapter. France from 2007 to 2013 vetoed the opening of 5 Chapters, ranging from economics and financial matters to regional policy, based on its notion that 'opening these chapters would prejudice the outcome of negotiations as accession'. Similarly, in 2007 Sarkozy came up with the idea of a "Union for the Mediterranean" and suggested that Turkey's role in

34 "Declaration by Turkey on Cyprus", Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/declaration-by-turkey-on-cyprus_-29-july-2005.en.mfa, (Accessed on 12 October 2016).

35 "Council of the EU Draft Minutes", 18 March 2010, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-17206-2009-INIT/en/pdf>, (Accessed on 10 October 2016).

36 Interview with the EU Desk, Ministry of Justice, Ankara, 30 March 2015.

37 Ibid.

this Union would be substantial, and this might be a better strategy for Turkey's relations with the EU, rather than full membership.³⁸

The Commission's 2006 decision to suspend the 8 chapters, which was a multilateral policy choice, and the French and Greek Cypriot individual vetoes sent an important signal to the Turkish government that the negotiation process was not going to be a smooth sailing, and it would be affected from factors that are beyond Turkey's control. As a result of these mixed signals coming from the EU, Turkey's own commitment to political reforms and adapting the EU's rules and norms began to wane. While the complications in the accession negotiations were not the only reasons for the Turkish political reforms to slow down after 2008/9, they, nonetheless, mattered precisely because the EU process increasingly lost its credibility in the Turkish eyes. Since the credibility of the EU accession process is key for the EU's ability to induce political changes and reforms, the mixed signals coming from the EU and bilateral vetoes led to the loss of the EU anchor for Turkey's political transformation.

Whether this has led to a change in Turkish foreign policy goal of gaining admission to the EU remains another question. As the EU accession goal post moved further away for Turkey, Turkey's search for alternative markets and allies was enhanced. It is, therefore, not a coincidence that after 2010, Turkey became less inclined to follow the European foreign policy visions and become active in global and regional affairs on its own. For example, Turkey's stance on the Iranian nuclear deal in 2010 at the United Nations, its position on Israel, the responses to the Arab Spring after 2011 and to NATO's intervention in Libya in 2011, and finally the Syrian crisis all indicated that Turkey follows its own foreign policy options, rather than fall in line with the European and American positions.³⁹ The Turkey's moving away from the EU membership goal, therefore, has also become visible in the way it responded to the international crises and did not necessarily align with the EU positions. An indicator of this change could be seen in the Turkish adoption of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) positions on global affairs. While the EU members themselves do not have a significant harmonization to the CFSP, it is expected from the acceding countries to signal their commitment to the EU accession goal. In 2006 and 2007, Turkey adopted to the EU's CFSP with around 98% alignment to EU common positions, however, there is a sharp decline in this alignment after 2011 to around 47%.⁴⁰

By all accounts, Turkey's relations with the EU almost came to a standstill and despite lip service on both sides on the continuity of the process, the Turkish-EU accession process was effectively frozen after 2013.

Yet, withstanding Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU, there were alterations in the EU's position towards Turkey, leading to a differentiated integration path. Turkish foreign policy towards the EU was institutionalized in a parallel fashion. For example, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs began to attend the Gymnich Meetings (informal meetings of the EU foreign ministers) starting in 2002 with the then Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül's. The Turkish participation in these meetings became more or less norm after 2007. Similarly, from 2010 onwards, the then Foreign Minister Ahmet

38 "Turkey angered by Sarkozy", *EU Observer*, 18 May 2007, <https://euobserver.com/news/24087>, (Accessed on 12 October 2016).

39 See Mustafa Aydın and Fulya Ereker. "Security in Turkey: Perception, Politics and Structure." *International Relations*, Vol.11, No.43, 2014, p.127-156.

40 The Turkish alignment to the EU's CFSP could be seen in reports, accessible from the European Commission's website on enlargement, "European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations: Turkey", http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/turkey/index_en.htm, (Accessed on 15 March 2016).

Davutoğlu began annual meetings together with the EU's High Representative and the Enlargement Commissioner, in line with the institutional adjustment brought by the 2007 Lisbon Treaty.⁴¹ These meetings were critical in letting the EU and Turkey to discuss their joint concerns with regards to the international affairs, and attest to the Turkish role going beyond a classical example of a candidate country. It is also for this reason that the European Commission adopted the Positive Agenda in 2012, which aimed at closer cooperation between the EU and Turkey on foreign and security matters, on the one hand, and enhancing Turkey's integration to the EU on the other.⁴²

Finally, in 2015, the EU and Turkey began to formalize their partnership with Turkey-EU summits to be held bi-annually, making Turkey the only candidate country with which the EU holds bilateral summits.⁴³ As a result, the first Turkey-EU bilateral summit was held on November 29, 2015 and the second summit held in March 2016. These bilateral summits were hastened by a new crisis on the European soil, the refugee crisis. In 2015, the EU faced a massive flow of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, with which it was largely ill equipped to deal with. Thus, it turned to Turkey for assistance, which was already hosting close to 3 million refugees on its soil. Finally, with an agreement reached on 18 March 2016, the Turkish government agreed to take back all irregular migrants who found themselves stranded on the Greek islands.⁴⁴ While the Turkey-EU deal had addressed the issue of Syrian refugees and the other irregular immigrants differently, the agreement indicated that even in the absence of accession, the Turkish-EU relations were of paramount importance for both parties. More importantly, the EU and Turkey agreed on a Joint Action Plan in October 2015, according to which the EU would process the Syrian refugees inside Turkish camps and grant them residency or asylum. The overall aim was to curb illegal migration and replace it with an orderly, legal migratory flow. However, it became apparent that the EU was unable to formulate a uniform policy on the refugee crisis leading to an existentialist threat to the Schengen regime, as member states began to debate over the freedom of mobility of people in the EU. As freedom of mobility of people is one of the key pillars of the European integration process, any alteration or restriction in that aspect would deliver a blow to the integration process itself. Thus the EU had to rely on the Turkish assistance to protect its borders and the freedom of movement for people.

Conclusion

Turkey has always been committed to the EU accession goal at least in its rhetoric, while many internal and external developments prevented the realization of this goal, Turkey's foreign policy choices towards the European Union has been more or less consistent since its application for full membership in 1987. Despite the stalling of the negotiation process after 2007-2008, Turkey's ties with the EU are solid, ranging from economic to security integration, as this paper demonstrated in the previous sections. This paper argued that in order to assess Turkey's foreign policy towards the European Union and its goal of EU accession, one needs to actually look at the EU, and the external and domestic scope conditions of the EU enlargement. At the domestic scope level, a candidate

41 For institutional changes under the Lisbon Treaty, see "EP after the Lisbon treaty: Bigger role in shaping Europe", <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/20150201PVL00008/The-Lisbon-Treaty>, (Accessed on 15 March 2016).

42 For Positive Agenda Declaration see http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-359_en.htm.

43 For the declaration on the Bilateral summits see <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2015/11/29/>.

44 For the text of the Turkish-EU agreement, see http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-963_en.htm.

country's, in this case Turkey's political and economic preparedness for EU accession played a critical role in paving the way for accession negotiations. At the external scope level, systemic factors such as the EU's commitment to enlargement, and divergences among the member states emerge as critical factors. The EU's attractiveness and its ability to act as an anchor are shaped by the credibility of the process. The changing external environment, and the marked differences among the EU members with regards to Turkey's accession affected the EU's commitment to Turkey's accession. As a result, this lower degree of commitment made the EU less credible as a negotiating partner. This was particularly clear and visible in the Turkish case. The interplay of the EU's lowering credibility and the domestic conditions in Turkey ultimately shaped whether Turkish foreign policy remained on track for EU accession. However, increasingly after 2013 there were significant changes in the EU's external environment and in the domestic scope conditions in Turkey. The interplay of these two sets of factors led to an alteration in the Turkish foreign policy objective of EU accession, and while Turkey still remained committed to the EU accession on paper, its actions and foreign policy choices indicated that Turkey was not committed to EU accession goal, unlike its foreign policy rhetoric.

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