

Misfit or Strategic Partner? The Role of Gatekeeping Geopolitics and Institutional mechanisms on Turkey's EU-BRICS Relations

Uyumsuz mu yoksa Stratejik Ortak mı? Türkiye'nin AB-BRICS İlişkilerinde Kapı Bekçiliği Jeopolitik ve Kurumsal Mekanizmaların Rolü

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ABSTRACT

Over the three decades following trade liberalization, countries have formed trade, economic, and political unions. In contrast to the European Union (EU), other formations such as BRICS, where membership criteria remain relatively ambiguous, have emerged. In such cases, institutional and structural similarities, along with trade motivations, play a significant role in determining admission. Despite the differences in governance and accession criteria, Turkey faces partial integration offers in both institutions without full membership. A review of the literature reveals that three key mechanisms exist in Turkey's engagement with the EU and BRICS: asymmetric interdependence, institutional gatekeeping, and strategic flexibility. These can be explained through trade orientation, formal and informal rules of acceptance, alongside selective cooperation models. Therefore, partial integration should not be interpreted as an incomplete process; rather, is an equilibrium based on mutual hybrid integration. This form appears due to the coexistence of flexibility and selective gatekeeping, alongside conditions of unequal interdependence between the parties. To explain this duality, the paper argues that differentiated integration, beyond traditional arrangements, can strengthen Turkey's position. In conclusion, when a candidate exhibits geographical, ideological, and structural similarities with multiple blocs, intermediate forms may produce more sustainable outcomes than constant candidacy or transitional membership status.

ÖZET

Son otuz yılda, ticaretin serbestleşmesiyle birlikte ülkeler ticari, ekonomik ve politik birlikler oluşturmaktadır. Avrupa Birliği'nin (AB) aksine üyelik kriterlerinin muğlak kaldığı, BRICS gibi diğer oluşumlar da söz konusudur. Bu durumlarda, kurumsal ve yapısal benzerlikler ile ticari motivasyonlar üyelğe kabulde etkin rol oynamaktadır. Yönetim ve giriş kriterlerinde olan tüm farklılıklara rağmen Türkiye iki kurumda da tam üyelik olmaksızın kısmi entegrasyon önerileriyle baş başa kalmaktadır. İlgili literatür incelendiğinde Türkiye'nin AB ve BRICS süreçleri ile ilgili üç mekanizmaya odaklanıldığı gözlemlenir: Asimetrik karşılıklı bağımlılık, kurumsal kapı bekçiliği ve stratejik esneklik. Mekanizmaların çalışma kanallarını; ticaret eğilimi, resmi ve gayri resmi kabul kurallarının yanı sıra, seçici iş birliği modelleri ile açıklamak mümkündür. Analizler sonucu, kısmi entegrasyonun tamamlanamamış bir giriş sürecinin yerine, karşılıklı hibrit entegrasyonu temel alan bir denge modeli olduğunu savunmak mümkündür. İki taraf için de esneklik ve seçici kapı bekçiliği kavramlarının yanında, eşit olmayan karşılıklı bağımlılık olduğu durumlarından ötürü bu formun oluştuğu görülmektedir. Bu çifte standart uygulamasını açıklamada, bu makale geleneksel üyelik aranjmanlarının ötesinde; farklılaştırılmış entegrasyon tipinin Türkiye'nin pozisyonunu güçlendirebileceğini savunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, aday ülkenin iki grup ile de coğrafi, ideolojik ve yapısal benzerlik taşıdığı durumlarda, ara üyelik tipi entegrasyonların, geçiş tipi ya da uzun süren aday üye konumlarının aksine, daha sürdürülebilir sonuçlar çıkarabileceğini göstermiştir.

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INTRODUCTION

As it has been widely debated in various literature strands including institutional, political and development; being a member of international arrangements play vital role in the global economy, especially in the last forty years, followed by trade liberalization efforts. There might be cases where countries directly fit into the group with visible institutional and structural similarities or macro-financial indicators. However, there are also cases where the membership criterion remains vague, and admissions remain based on rather strategic. In most cases, countries which deliberately remain at equal distance from different mechanisms, rarely fit into the binary categories of “members” and “outsiders” within major regional associations. In contrast, in many cases they fit into the intermediate positions or partial access, selective or structural partnerships (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; North, 1990; Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson, 2005).

Turkey, including long withstanding engagement with the EU, as well as the encounter with BRICS¹, portrays a pattern of incomplete integration pattern which remain ambiguous. Despite the Turkey’s strong economic relations and political commitment throughout the years, Turkey has been offered partnerships with limited institutional access and voting rights, while maintaining the strategic engagement (Börzel & Risse, 2016; Hammermann & Schweickert, 2005). Therefore, using Turkey as a solid example, this paper aims to answer the question of why some countries are offered strategic partnerships as opposed to memberships. The main argument of the relevant literature is that these types of choices are not interim or solely based on geographical proximity, yet typically they are political economy equilibrium, that are shaped by various factors such as material interests, institutional gatekeeping and the way of accession procedures design (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). It can be inferred that partnership form emerges when economic benefits versus the cost of the potential enlargement. Existing members potentially evaluate the benefits of further cooperation compared to the political and institutional costs of extension. When these conflict, partnerships arise in form of a solution. Turkey is a particularly good example as it carries both high economic contributions along with institutional and political differences to mainstream organizations in both EU and BRICS cases. Particularly, earlier studies from Baun, 2000; Landesmann & Rosati, 2004; Inotai, 2003 provide foundation to explaining these differences and mechanisms behind.

By investigating the previous literature and mechanism behind the paper identifies three channels in explaining Turkey’s ongoing “neither fully in nor fully out” position. Firstly, the important reason is the asymmetric economic interdependence. Due to existing economic dependence limits Turkey’s bargaining power. Despite the geographic proximity and trade relations, Turkey’s accession to EU would create a potential conflict for them the EU, in terms of voting power or potential power in the region, in terms of young population, geographic strength as well as remaining with good relations to both “West” and “East”. Secondly, formal accession rules, voting mechanisms and compliance standards are the main sources of institutional gatekeeping (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Gateva, 2015; Sekulić, 2020; Schimmelfennig, Engert & Knobel, 2006). Third, as opposed to the expectations, flexible solutions might indeed benefit both parties, Turkey vs EU or BRICS, as partners allow the candidate to ensure the economic cooperation without formally being bound. This enables the candidate, Turkey in our case, to have the authority to take its own position in terms of foreign policy and economic relations (Boix, 2007; Börzel & Risse, 2018).

While the existing studies usually treat the partial integration often as a transitional stage this paper offers the partnership arrangement can generate a stable institutional equilibrium given the sustained economic relationship with all the actors in the global economy. By extending the possibility of partnership mechanisms beyond the EU, BRICS and Turkey relationship can also be similar to this case. Therefore, this is possible argue that this framework can be applicable to different multilateral formations where the candidate seems to share commonalities with observably dissimilar groups such as BRICS and EU. This offers an equilibrium approach that maximizes the cooperation between all parties.

In general, this paper contributes to the ongoing debates of economic integration by investigating the channels such as regional integration, institutional arrangements as well as inclusion. In cases where accession forms are uneven partnerships offer a stable institutional solution (Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson, 2005; North, 1990; Vedres & Nordlund, 2018).

Thus, it is arguable that partnerships should not be taken as compromises but as outcomes that benefit both sides in terms of keeping the freedom of taking independent economic and political decisions. The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows.

¹ As of 2026, following the recent BRICS enlargement actions in 2024, the full members of the group include: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, United Arab Emirates, and Iran.

Section 2 develops the theoretical framework. Section 3 examines Turkey's position across the EU and BRICS using the suggested analytical frameworks. Section 4 discusses the findings and policy implications while Section 5 concludes the paper.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A SNAPSHOT OF THE RECENT ARRANGEMENTS

Despite the economic linkages and diplomatic relations, certain countries remain to be offered partnerships rather than institutional memberships to various multilateral arrangements: EU and BRICS. Despite the economic or institutional fit with most of the European countries, especially the ones admitted in the extension periods, Turkey accession kept getting blocked. In addition to ongoing setbacks in Turkey-EU negotiations, Turkey seem to be kept out of the formal accession to BRICS, despite having stronger economic positions as well as more solid institutions than most of the members and offered alternative ways of strategic partnerships. This raises the question of the logic behind to answer that concern.

This section uses the institutional design and enlargement concepts to discuss the partnership versus membership conflict (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Börzel & Risse, 2018; Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson, 2005; Schimmelfennig, Engert & Knobel, 2006). The framework outlines how distributional conflicts, rule-based constraints, and strategic incentives jointly shape the boundaries of regional institutions.

1.1. The Political Economy of Enlargement

As discussed in studies such as in Boix, 2007; Hammermann & Schweickert, 2005; Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson, 2005, the international engagement decisions are designed not only legal and structural criteria but also strategic choices. Existing members evaluate the potential economic gains of integrating a new member versus the loss in terms of added competition and shift of power, fiscal and economic burden. In the multilateral arrangements such as BRICS and the EU, enlargement creates its own winners and losers in variety of fields, in terms of sectors, countries even regions. This creates potential coalitions within the institutions and shapes the decisions (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Baun, 2000).

Thus, if the existing members do not value the accession of the new member in the same way that candidate does, this creates a preference asymmetry. Here the term called asymmetric interdependence arise, in cases where the candidate already is connected to the trade, financial flows and value chains of the group, as this signals the offer of partnership as a low cost alternative for the group. Due to structural and strategic power imbalances the groups can generate the benefit of having positive cooperation without taking the burden of adding a new member, and having the economic, fiscal and political costs (North, 1990; Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson, 2005; Vedres & Nordlund, 2017).

1.2. Institutional Design, Gatekeeping, and Accession Constraints

In the institutional design, analysing the economic feasibility of admitting new members remain crucial (Gateva, 2015; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Sekulić, 2020). Regional institutions generally impose accession rules and criteria that operates as gatekeeping mechanisms. The rules not only create formal thresholds but also allow members to delay, or block admission as well as having veto points. There are three aspects of institutional design that remain critical. First of all, admission usually needs to be taken unanimously or involving super majority, which gives members the veto opportunity. Secondly, from macroeconomic convergence rules to political or regulatory conditions, the accession or compliance standards ease the justification of the persistent non-admission without bearing the political tensions.

Third, once a potential candidate's track becomes inert, bureaucratic and political tensions remain as a burden to make the impose of the change difficult (Boix, 2007; Hammermann & Schweickert, 2005).

As discussed in various studies including (Börzel & Risse, 2018; Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson, 2005; Schimmelfennig, Engert & Knobel, 2006), in such particular cases as mentioned before, partnerships offer a valid substitute to memberships, where the cooperation is ensured without formal rules.

1.3. Partnership as an Institutional Equilibrium

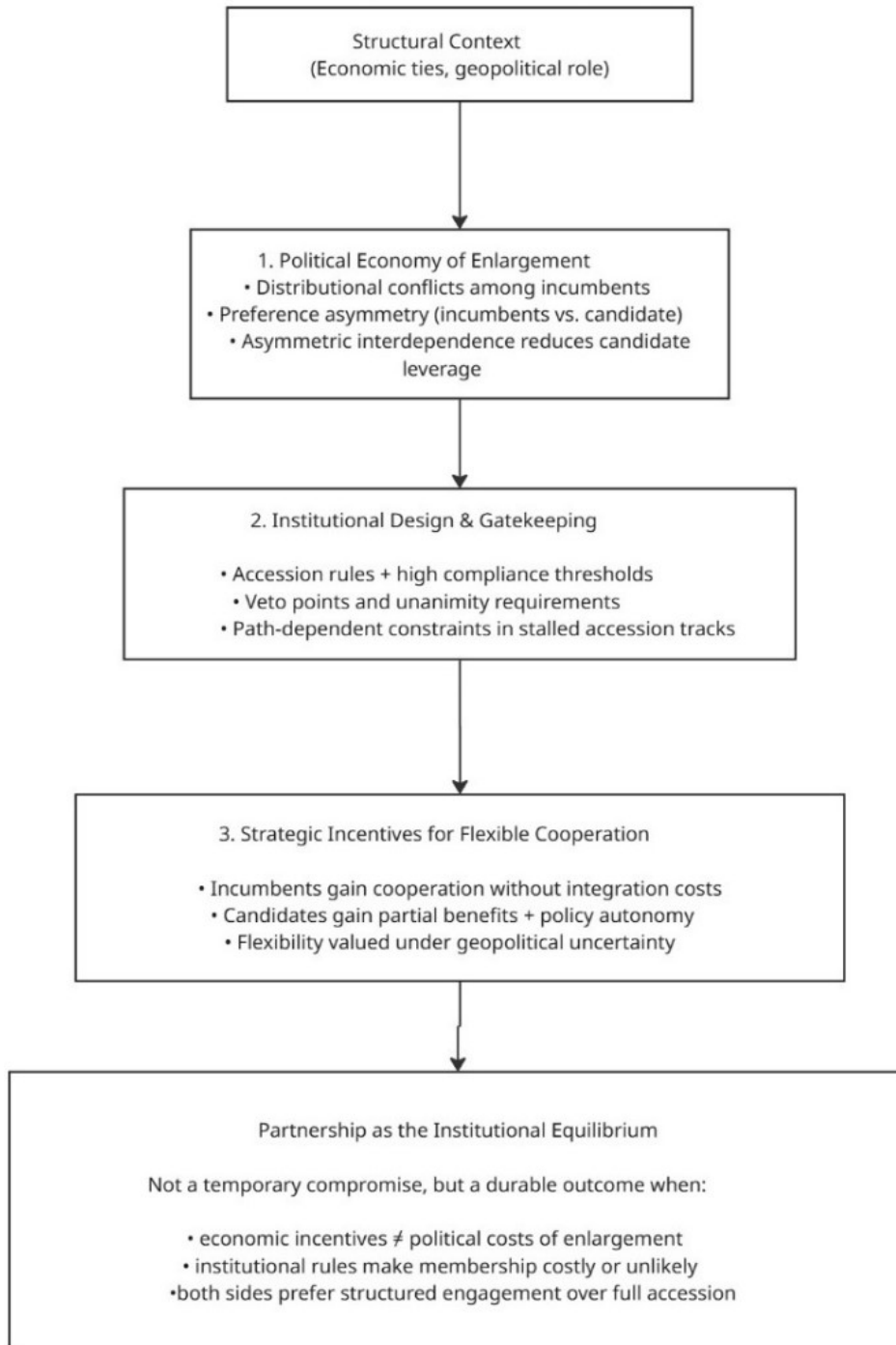
Partnerships provide access to markets, security cooperation, supply chains, or diplomatic alignments to its members without the cost of the institutional rigidities, and with flexibility in foreign policy decisions. Therefore, as opposed to memberships where member countries are tied with the unions political, strategic and structural decisions, partnerships can be understood as an official stage rather than an interim phase. This can be concluded as an equilibrium point for the both parties involved in North, 1990; Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson, 2005; Coccia, 2020).

This equilibrium is supported by three mechanisms: economic benefits, institutional rules, geopolitical environments. If the economic benefits are large enough to compensate for the non-integration, or else if the institutional rules are so high that this enlargement becomes costly. Thirdly, the flexibility is rewarded where there are geopolitical specialties, such as in case of Turkey, where remains to be a bridge between the Europe and the Middle East. As discussed in Gateva, 2015; Börzel & Risse,

2018; Džankić, Keil & Kmezić, 2019, those factors allow the partnerships to arise as equilibrium mechanisms. This type of engagement, allow both parties to align without renegotiating formal membership structures and also to respond to any shocks, crises strategically.

To this extend, it is important to understand that the partnerships are not compromises but are form of arrangement where both parties benefit from strategic alliance. This highlights a political economy perspective where the marginal gains of enlargement do not outweigh the institutional, distributive, and political costs for any parties (see Boix, 2007; Inotai, 2003).

Figure 1. Theoretical framework: why some states receive partnership instead of membership



Note: Author's own construction

By focusing on major earlier studies such as Keohane, 1984; Börzel & Risse, 2018; Vedres & Nordlund, 2017; Coccia, 2020, some key dimensions arise. Those dimensions include norms, political conditionalities, and formal decision-making

procedures. By focusing on the mentioned procedures, the next section evaluates the Turkey's current position in EU and BRICS relations.

1.4. Current View of Turkey's Position vis-à-vis the EU and BRICS

Particularly, Turkey's position in global institutional arrangements remain to have both strategic opportunities and also constraints. The complexity start from the EU accession process that has started more than thirty years ago. Despite the ongoing attempts to align with the EU norms, standards, regulations and ensuring to maintain the democratic governance structure, the process seem to remain paused for long time due to persistent political, economic, and social divergences (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Baun, 2000; Džankić, Keil & Kmezić, 2019).

As an alternative, Turkey and BRICS relation shows a convergence in trade and and exports, as well as emerging markets capital flows. However, even in this case, institutional and geopolitical asymmetries limit full membership (Hammermann & Schweickert, 2005; Gateva, 2015). Consequently, Turkey's engagement with BRICS is also considered as cooperation rather than full institutional integration.

By using a comparative mapping approach, the Turkey's position remains to be "neither fully in nor fully out" across both blocs. Turkey's position reflects a hybrid scheme: leveraging institutional engagement to maximize economic and political benefits while retaining flexibility in foreign policy and multilateral commitments. This dual approach aligns with broader theoretical and practical perspectives on membership in international organizations (Börzel & Risse, 2018; Sekulić, 2020; Schimmelfennig, Engert & Knobel, 2006, Moravesik, 1998).

Turkey occupies an intermediary position shaped by asymmetric interdependence and institutional gatekeeping across both the EU and BRICS contexts.

Figure 2. Turkey's accession dilemma



Note: Author's own construction

2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: TRACING THE MECHANISMS ACROSS INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS

This study uses a comparative approach to evaluate why Turkey has persistently been placed as a strategic ally rather than a member in both EU and the BRICS. Importantly, this paper investigates where Turkey is placed in a more formal structural mechanism such as EU criterion, vs a more strategic accession in case of BRICS. This allows the underlying mechanism of convergence despite divergence in the institutional forms. Turkey as a specific example remains to be key in analysing this position. Economically and geographically integrated to both parties to some extent however remains to be excluded from the major blocs.

The EU and BRICS are chosen for comparison because they represent contrasting institutional models of international cooperation. The former operates with former accession rules, legal conditionality and veto-based decisions whereas the latter relies on informal consensus and flexibility in participation rules. This comparison allows us to investigate whether "neither fully in nor fully out" position of Turkey is context-specific or it reflects the need of an alternative institutional form without the official commitment that risks the relationship with the opposition. Specifically EU and BRICS naturally carry different interests and to maintain political relations with both parties seem to be structurally less possible without alternative path of strategic partnerships.

The purpose of the evidence is not statistical overview but process tracing and pattern identification, allowing the study to assess whether the proposed mechanisms consistently operate across both institutional settings. Table-1 below traces how each mechanism operates across the EU–Turkey and BRICS–Turkey context.

Table 1. Implications of the Explanatory Mechanisms in EU–Turkey and BRICS–Turkey Relations

Mechanism	Consequence	EU–Turkey	BRICS–Turkey
Asymmetric interdependence	Trade concentration and market dependency	High share of EU in Turkey’s trade and investment; asymmetric exposure despite customs union	Lower but rising trade shares; selective sectoral dependence rather than systemic
	Strategic reliance	Security and migration cooperation creates leverage without membership	Energy, finance, and geopolitical coordination without formal commitments
Institutional gatekeeping	Formal access rules	Codified accession criteria; unanimity and veto points in enlargement	Absence of codified accession rules; membership expansion by consensus
	Blocked or delayed integration channels	Frozen negotiation chapters; stalled accession process	Informal limits on membership; partnership status without clear accession pathway
	Veto points, unanimity rules	Accession chapters blocked	Informal membership criteria
Strategic flexibility	Selective alignment or compliance	Functional cooperation (customs union, migration deal) without political integration: Customs Union without membership	Issue-based participation in summits, development finance, and policy coordination. Issue-based cooperation
	Preference for ambiguity	durable intermediate status framed as “strategic partnership”	Flexible engagement without formal obligations or irreversible commitments

Note: Author’s own construction

This table has three analytical findings. First, it ensures that the comparison of both cases is assessed along identical dimensions rather than descriptively. Second, it enables mechanism tracing by linking theoretical claims to observable institutional and economic patterns. Third, it clarifies why similar outcomes can occur across fundamentally different institutional environments.

The results reveal that Turkey’s hybrid position is not the result of only political decisions but reflects a structurally reproduced equilibrium shaped by the interaction of asymmetric interdependence, institutional gatekeeping, and strategic flexibility. Each of these underlying channels are discussed in below.

2.1. Asymmetric Interdependence: Uneven Integration Without Membership

In the ongoing EU–Turkey relationships agenda, asymmetric interdependence concept is mostly evident through trade concentration and institutionalized economic integration without political inclusion. One practical example of this could be the Customs Union. While Turkey has deeply been integrated into EU markets, not being a member limits the capacity to influence the decision-making process. This asymmetry generates a situation in which Turkey bears substantial adjustment costs without acquiring the institutional leverage typically associated with membership. A comparable but institutionally distinct pattern emerges in the BRICS–Turkey relationship. While overall trade dependence is lower, Turkey’s engagement with BRICS members exhibits selective and sector-specific relationship especially in energy, finance, and geopolitical coordination. In both cases, asymmetric interdependence sustains cooperation while reducing incentives for full institutional inclusion.

2.2. Institutional Gatekeeping: Formal and Informal Barriers to Membership

Institutional gatekeeping constitutes the second mechanism through which Turkey’s hybrid position is repeatedly observed. In the EU context, gatekeeping is explicit and codified within accession criteria, unanimity rules, and veto points. The persisted suspension of negotiation chapters and the absence of credible timelines illustrate how formal institutional rules function as barriers, even in the presence of deep economic integration.

By contrast, BRICS operates without formal accession procedures or codified membership criteria. Yet the gatekeeping is embedded in informal and discretionary forms such as consensus among existing members which lacks transparent benchmarks.

Despite institutional differences, both contexts exhibit gatekeeping mechanisms that prevent automatic progression from partnership to membership, producing similar exclusionary outcomes.

2.3. Strategic Flexibility: Joint Reasons for Partial Integration

The third mechanism, strategic flexibility, captures the incentives of both Turkey and existing members to maintain cooperation without committing to irreversible institutional integration. In the EU–Turkey relationship, this flexibility is reflected in functional cooperation arrangements—such as migration management, customs union, and sectoral alignment—that allow collaboration while maintaining political distance on both sides.

Turkey benefits from market access and selective policy coordination, while the EU retains strategic cooperation without confronting the political costs of enlargement. This mutual flexibility stabilizes Turkey's intermediate status and reduces incentives to resolve accession blocks.

A similar logic applies in the BRICS context. Turkey's engagement is characterized by issue-based participation, including summit attendance, development finance discussions, and diplomatic coordination. These arrangements provide visibility and strategic alignment without obligations. Ambiguity regarding membership status becomes a characteristic rather than a flaw, enabling all parties to adjust cooperation levels as geopolitical conditions evolve.

3. DISCUSSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS: SIMILAR OUTCOMES ACROSS DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS

In summary, the analysis in this paper shows that Turkey's "neither fully in nor fully out" position is not an anomaly tied to a specific institutional setting. Instead, it emerges from the joint operation of asymmetric interdependence, institutional gatekeeping, and strategic flexibility, which operate across both formal and informal groupings.

Even though the EU and BRICS differ essentially in structure, decision-making rules, and legalization, the similar mechanisms generate comparable outcomes. This convergence suggests that partnership arrangements should not be interpreted as temporary deviations or transitional phases, but as "stable institutional equilibria" shaped by incentive alignment and cost distribution.

Headlines often question why a NATO member, Turkey, seeks to join BRICS while maintaining its alliance with NATO. This attempt was ultimately rejected, largely due to India's refusal, and Turkey was instead offered the status of a partner country. As a result, Turkey is neither fully part of the EU nor BRICS. One may ask whether its "zero problems with neighbours" approach has rendered it a misfit for both blocs. The question of whether the Turkish Republic belongs to the East or West has long been debated, and currently, neither NATO nor BRICS appears fully satisfied with Turkey's positioning—yet it aligns closely with the principle of maintaining minimal regional conflicts.

Turkey appears relatively better positioned along certain institutional and economic dimensions compared to several BRICS as well as EU members, especially the peripheral ones that admitted in the last 20 years. This suggests that exclusion cannot be explained solely by formal criteria or economic performance. Those behaviours reflect the interaction of political considerations and institutional constraints rather than purely rule-based decision-making.

These patterns have clear policy implications. Strategic partnerships enable Turkey to exercise economic and geopolitical leverage without formal obligations, while targeted institutional reforms could enhance credibility and facilitate selective cooperation with both blocs (Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson, 2005; Coccia, 2020; Vedres & Nordlund, 2017; Inotai, 2003). Trade, investment, and diplomatic initiatives should be carefully calibrated to maximize the benefits of partial alignment while mitigating the constraints imposed by structural divergence. The main policy implications can be discussed under three points.

First, the role of asymmetric interdependence in explaining this particular case of Turkey's accession is indispensable. In both EU and BRICS membership matters Turkey's economic and strategic contribution to the groups are sufficient enough to provide the cooperation yet not strong enough to bargain over the full institutional inclusion.

Second, institutional gatekeeping is observed as a potential block as opposed to formal rejection. Namely, some precautions including setting less achievable targets and requiring unanimity in the votes are the way of gatekeeping rather than formal rejection burden. This is observed in the EU case in the form particularly strong enforcement of Maastricht criterion whereas in BRICS case this is applied as lack of consensus among the members.

Third, given the cases complexity, the intention to get membership to EU as well as keeping strong ties and ally positions with the BRICS, as well as low possibility, given they are almost contradictory rather than complementary, the role of strategic flexibility in the institutional arrangements becomes even more important. Both Turkey and the other parties may derive benefits from maintaining cooperation without committing to full institutional integration and by avoiding irreversible obligations.

In addition to Turkey, the results of our analysis provide implications for both EU and the BRICS. For the EU, exclusion and strong barriers to entry seem to stabilize the short-term engagement with the potential members however, this creates an increase of ambiguity over the long term, that signal the lack of systematic evaluation of the candidate countries. For BRICS, while informal cooperation enables adaptive engagement, the absence of clear accession pathways may limit the alignment of the international profile expands.

In general, future research could benefit from investigating the potential sustainability of partial membership models for middle powers and could provide broader lessons for global governance for nations with similar structural constraints. Taken together,

these insights illustrate Turkey's "neither fully in nor fully out" approach, highlighting both opportunities and limits in a multipolar world.

4. CONCLUSION

The globalisation is an immerse act that both influence and navigates the potential poles of the world. In this context, taking part in the most beneficial side in terms of economic, institutional as well as political is significantly important. Especially, since 1980's along with the trade liberalisation actions, the interrelations between countries became more crucial and thus taking a side became crucial. Despite the on going attempts to EU accession of Turkey in thirty years along with relatively new venture of trying BRICS membership, Turkey remains to persistently positioned as a strategic partner rather than a full member in both groups which are clear institutionally distinct groups.

The results have shown that Turkey's "neither fully in nor fully out" position is a result of combination of three rationales: asymmetric interdependence, institutional gatekeeping, and strategic flexibility. Across both the EU and BRICS contexts, these mechanisms generate durable hybrid arrangements that allow cooperation to deepen without leading to full institutional inclusion, that would limit the liberty of taking free foreign policy actions, which is especially important in countries like Turkey. The comparison shows that similar outcomes can emerge not only in highly legalized organizations with formal accession rules, namely EU, but also in informal and flexible groupings lacking codified membership criteria, such as the BRICS. The main takeaway from this paper is that we treat the partnership arrangements as stable institutional equilibria, rather than temporary unconventionalities or incomplete processes.

Several limitations could be addressed in the future research papers. The analysis focuses on a single country case. While this approach is appropriate for theory-building and mechanism tracing, additional cases should be examined to see how economic asymmetries and geopolitical conditions affect the partnership or membership accession over time.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of moving beyond binary conceptions of inclusion and exclusion in international institutions. By foregrounding the mechanisms that sustain hybrid integration outcomes, it offers a more nuanced understanding of how contemporary regional and global governance arrangements manage participation, access, and institutional boundaries.

Finally, the findings indicate that Turkey's partial integration reflects the joint operation of asymmetric interdependence, institutional gatekeeping, and strategic flexibility, as opposed to the perceptions of potential temporary political frictions.

AUTHOR DECLARATIONS

Declarations of Research and Publication Ethics: This study has been prepared in accordance with scientific research and publication ethics.

Ethics Committee Approval: Since this research does not include analyzes that require ethics committee approval, it does not require ethics committee approval.

Author Contributions: The author has done all the work alone.

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