

# Turkey's Accession Process to the EU

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**Abstract:** After a long period of almost frozen accession negotiations, the accession process of Turkey into the European Union is finally back in the spotlight because of the current migration crisis. This paper presents a concise overview of EU-Turkish political relations and the Turkish accession process between 1999 and the present day. Due to the breadth of the topic, the paper will focus on issues of a political character, with economic and other relations mentioned only tangentially. The paper opens with a brief history of Turkish attempts at integration prior to 1999, then describes the main challenges it had to face once it became an official candidate in 1999 until negotiations were frozen in 2006. After that, the paper will focus on Turkey-EU relations after the freeze, Turkish alternatives to EU integration and the reasons for Turkish disillusionment with the EU. Finally, the article will discuss the renewal of mutual relations after the consequences of the Arab Spring, especially the migrant crisis. The paper will focus on the point of view of Turkey; thus the internal divisions within the EU will be deemphasized.

**Keywords:** Acquis Communautaire, AKP, Davutoğlu doctrine, European Economic Community, Erdoğan (Recep Tayyip), EU-Turkey Relations, European Enlargement, European Union, Harmonization, Migrant Crisis, Turkey.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This article will focus on Turkish efforts to become a member of the EEC/EU. The paper is written in a roughly chronological order instead of being strictly thematic, so continuity can be observed. It will begin with a brief overview of the Turkish integration efforts from in the forty years before it became an official candidate country. Many of the dynamics and problems which characterized the Turkish accession process took shape in this era. A watershed year was 1999 when Turkey became an official candidate to join the EU. What followed was an intense period of harmonization of Turkish laws and regulations with European ones, which was aided by the victory of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) in the 2003 parliamentary elections. But problems like the Cyprus issue, principled opposition to Turkish membership within the EU and a slowing pace of reform led to the freezing of negotiations in 2006. Since then, relations between the two were mixed, with Turkey seeking other foreign policy options. Relations picked up again since the Arab spring, and especially since the current migrant crisis.

This article is mostly written according to the realist paradigm of International Relations, which will manifest itself by treating Turkey as a unitary actor, and internal politics and debates on the European issue will not be taken into account. The same will apply to the EU, meaning that the internal divisions and political debates on Turkey within the EU, its institutions and member states will only be touched upon. The reason for that is that the article is written mainly from the point of view of Turkey. Similarly, following the realist paradigm, emphasis will be on the political level of the EU-Turkish relationship, in keeping with the realist focus on high politics. For that reason, only the political Copenhagen criteria will be emphasized. Human, civil and minority rights issues will also be explored, as their importance in in the EU accession process since the formulation of the Copenhagen criteria has elevated them to the status of a political issue. This is especially true in Turkey, where they have become part of the debate on state sovereignty. A large part of the article will focus on the implementation of the most important legislative reforms to this effect. Other important issues explored in this paper are the Cyprus dispute between the EU and Turkey, Turkey's alternatives to EU membership, and the current migration crisis. But the economic relationship between the two actors will only be mentioned tangentially.

The methods involved in creating this article were mainly the study and comparison of the available literature, the use of content analysis to identify the main issues, processes and trends involved and their synthesis. The literature is mainly in the form of online versions of scientific journals, though the newest information was retrieved from online news sites, since it is too recent to appear in the electronic journals. Primary sources include treaties and EU institutional press releases.

## II. TURKEY'S INTEGRATION AMBITIONS TO 1999

Ever since Mustafa Kemal Atatürk came to power, Turkey has looked toward the west. But the beginnings of Turkey's efforts at formal integration with European and Western countries lie in the immediate postwar period, as a reaction to the expansionist aims of Stalin's USSR. As part of these aims, the Soviets tried to gain influence over the Turkish Straits of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. As a reaction, Turkey became a member of the Council of Europe in 1949 and NATO in 1952. The next step was applying for associate membership in the European Economic Community (EEC), which Turkey submitted in 1959. The association agreement, known as the Ankara Agreement, was signed in July 1963 and came into force 12 December, 1964 (Republic of Turkey Ministry for European Affairs, 2011). It contained provisions for financial assistance to Turkey and harmonization of Turkey's laws and regulations with EU's internal market policy. It was expanded by an Additional Protocol in 1970, but the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and the ensuing frosty relations between the EC and Turkey prevented the agreement to live up to its full potential. Relations soured even more after the 1980 military coup in Turkey. In 1982, Turkey, under military rule, adopted a new constitution which would be a long-term source of problems for Turkey's European ambitions because of its clauses restricting human and civil rights. For example, Article 26 banned the use of certain languages, such as Kurdish, in the expression and propagation of ideas; Article 49 stated that Turkish is the only language of instruction in schools; while article 68 enabled the prohibition of political parties supporting activities in conflict with the indivisible nature of the state, and was used against minority parties (Akbaba et al., 2005).

Relations warmed up again after the return of democracy to Turkey in 1986. The next year, on 4 April 1987, Turkey applied for full membership in the EEC. But the EEC, which was going through a delicate phase of deepening integration after admitting Spain and Portugal and adopting the Single European Act, denied this request in 1989. The reasons given by the Community included the economic backwardness of Turkey, slow democratization, unresolved problems with Greece, and a repressive policy towards minorities as laid out in the 1982 constitution (Fiala et al., 2001). The EEC did support the creation of a customs union between it and Turkey, which was finalized on 31 December 1995.

An important step in the future course of mutual relations was the adoption of the Copenhagen criteria as conditions that potential members must fulfill, at the European Council summit in Copenhagen in June 1993. It was mainly the political criteria – rule of law, stable institutions, human rights and protection of minorities – that gained importance. This was reflected in the decisions of the European Parliament (EP), which demanded that Turkey strengthen the human and minority rights situation, reform the constitution and abolish Article 8 of the anti-terrorism law. According to Article 8, even written and oral propaganda, meetings and demonstrations aimed against the unity of Turkey can be considered acts of terrorism, notwithstanding the methods and goals of such activities (Gunter, 2007). This formulation was seen by many as a threat to minority rights. The unwillingness of Turkey to tackle these problems almost led to the failure of the ratification process of the customs union in the EP. Yet in the end Turkey made several modifications to its constitution to widen political participation and softened Article 8. In response, the EP ratified the customs union in 1996; however it also warned that a deterioration of the human rights situation in Turkey could lead to freezing of financial assistance to Turkey (Celik 2005).

Despite the activities of the EP, Turkey expected to be in the first wave of candidates for membership in 1997. But at the Luxemburg summit of the European Council the Turkish candidacy was refused, citing a need for Turkey to improve relations with Greece and carry out further economic and political reforms, especially in the human and cultural rights of minorities. It also demanded the lifting of the state of emergency in Kurdish areas (Celik 2005). The fact that the Turkish government had to resign in the face of threats of a coup must have also increased the wariness and mistrust of the European leaders. But fears of Turkish retrenchment on reforms helped convince the EU to include Turkey in the second wave of candidates at the Helsinki European Council summit.

### III. DEVELOPMENTS 1999-2006

Turkey became a candidate for EU membership at the Helsinki summit in 1999. But unlike the other candidates in the Helsinki wave, accession negotiations were not opened with Turkey. As was mentioned above, only now was Turkey compelled to carry out substantial political reforms. The main reason for this was evidently the higher emphasis of the EU on democracy and human rights, as expressed in Article 6 of the Amsterdam Treaty, which was a condition for membership. It was not enough for Turkey to only develop economic cooperation as per the Ankara Agreement, but it was bound to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria. In November 2000, the EU formulated a document on Accession Partnership, which highlighted the chief problems Turkey had to resolve, mainly minority rights, the use of torture, the role of the military in politics and the issue of Cyprus. The evaluation reports of the European Commission of 1998-2001 stressed the importance of fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria (Celik, 2005).

Starting with amendments to the constitution in 2001, the first half of the decade of the 2000s was time of intense Europeanization reforms in Turkey. In February, March and August 2002, Turkey adopted a series of legislative reform packages of which the last one was the most significant. Among other things it abolished the death penalty and legalized education and media transmission in minority languages (Akbaba et al., 2005). Furthermore, on 16 September 2002 Turkey ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, albeit with reservations about the competence of the International Court of Justice to hear complaints in this area without the approval of Turkey (United Nations Treaty Collection, 2016). Another stimulus for reforms came with the victory of the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in elections in November 2002. The AKP itself was interested in curbing the power of the military and security establishment, dominated by traditional nationalist and secularist elites. This common interest of the EU and the AKP helps explain how a conservative party with roots in political Islam became the main carrier of a progressive pro-European agenda. The new government adopted four more harmonization packages in 2003 and another in 2004, focusing e.g. on strengthening civilian control over the military and the powerful National Security Council. The next evaluation report of the European Commission in October 2004 stated that despite certain shortcomings, Turkey has made substantial progress. This, combined with pressure from Turkey, which wanted the EU to set a date for opening accession talks, led the EU member states to agree reach a decision in December 2004 at the Brussels European Council summit. But attached to that was the claim that negotiations do not guarantee eventual membership, as the accession process is open-ended (Acikmese, 2012).

At the Brussels summit in December 2004 the European Council decided on the basis of recommendation by the European Commission that Turkey has fulfilled the Copenhagen criteria and that accession negotiations with Turkey will be opened on 3 October 2005, 18 years after Turkey applied for membership and almost six years after it became a candidate country. But practically immediately, the problem of Cyprus brought the accession process almost to a halt. Cyprus has become the main hurdle in Turkey's accession process. Turkey had hoped that the issue of Cyprus would not be an issue in negotiations, and since the application of the (Greek) Republic of Cyprus for EU membership in 1990, Turkey has claimed that there is no connection between the accession processes of both countries and their mutual relations, especially since Turkish recognition of Cyprus was not an explicit criterion for membership. When it became clear in the mid 1990s that the Republic of Cyprus would be part of the next enlargement, Turkey threatened in 1995 to incorporate the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) if the EU accepted the south. When in 2004 the Annan Plan on the reunification of Cyprus was submitted to a referendum in both parts of Cyprus, Turkey supported it with the explicit expectation that in return, the EU will ease sanctions on the TRNC. Even before the opening of accession negotiations, on 29 July 2005, the EU and Turkey signed an Additional Protocol which expanded the EU-Turkey customs union and the Ankara Agreement to the ten new EU members admitted the previous year. The EU voiced its expectation that Turkey will open its harbors and airports to Cypriot ships and planes, and in time it will recognize the Republic of Cyprus. Turkey accepted the protocol with the exceptions of the requested trade relations with the Republic of Cyprus, and stated that acceptance of the protocol does not mean recognition of the Republic of Cyprus. Despite pressure from the EU, Turkey refused to budge until the EU adopts the same approach towards the TRNC and accused the EU of breaking its promise towards Turkish Cypriots. This attitude of Turkey led the European Commission to recommend suspension of accession negotiations with Turkey in its evaluation report of November 2006. Another reason for the suspension was the ascertainment that the rate of the adoption and implementation of reforms in Turkey has slowed down.

The suspension of negotiations became a reality at the Brussels European Council summit in December 2006 with the EU deciding to block 8 of the 35 accession chapters of the *acquis communautaire*, until Turkey starts implementing the Additional Protocol (Acikmese, 2012). Turkey refused, and the slowing down of the reform process meant the end of the intensive Europeanization period in Turkey (Sadik, 2013). In response to the freezing of accession chapters, Turkey hit back in its capacity as a NATO member, by preventing the inclusion of the Republic of Cyprus in the Berlin Plus arrangement between the EU and NATO, thus vetoing closer cooperation between NATO and the EU (Dinçer, 2013). For its part, the Republic of Cyprus decided to block six chapters of the *acquis* in 2009. This, along France's blocking of three additional chapters in 2005, meant that of 35 chapters of the *acquis*, 17 were frozen and only one was successfully, albeit provisionally, closed – Chapter 25 (Science and Research) on 12 June 2006.

But Cyprus was not the only sticking point between Turkey and the EU. In 2005 a new penal code was adopted by Turkey, which did away with the most controversial provisions of the previous one, which had long been a problem in the eyes of the EU. But at the same time, the new code included the now infamous Article 301, according to which “insulting Turkishness” was a crime punishable by three years in prison, and which was seen as a tool of the state to silence dissent and critical intellectuals like Orhan Pamuk and Hrant Dink. Dink's murder in 2007 by a Turkish nationalist was seen as a consequence of his prosecution under Article 301, and it led to president Abdullah Gül of the AKP, then an ally of Erdoğan, to call for a revision of the article. This reform happened in 2008, though the only party that voted for it in the Turkish parliament was the AKP. According to the revised Article 301 it is a crime to insult the Turkish Nation (so no longer “Turkishness”), the maximum sentence was reduced to two years and the Ministry of Justice must consent to any prosecution under this article, to prevent its excessive use or abuse. The EU rated this as an acceptable compromise at the time, though in 2011 the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) stated that the scope of the article was too wide and vague and meant a threat to freedom of speech. As such it did not meet the quality of European law, notwithstanding the substitution of “Turkish Nation” for Turkishness (European Court of Human Rights, 2011). There was also controversy over the antiterrorism law adopted in 2006, mainly Article 6, which was seen as the „heir“ to the aforementioned Article 8. According to critics, Article 6 is too vague and there is a risk that it may be used to level accusations of terrorism against anyone with opinions contrary to the ideology of the state and the ruling classes and party (Gunter, 2007).

Furthermore, Turkey had to contend with rising opposition within the EU to Turkish membership, led by German chancellor Angela Merkel and French president Nicolas Sarkozy, both elected in 2005. Sarkozy blocked another three accession chapters, stating that Turkish membership in the EU is an impossibility. Merkel, for her part, has long claimed she would prefer a „privileged partnership“ for Turkey instead of full membership.

#### IV. DEVELOPMENTS 2006-2015

Apart from these issues, a new dynamic began to emerge in the latter part of the decade. A sense of “enlargement fatigue” in the EU added to the above problems. There was much talk in the EU about “absorption capacity”, mainly aimed at Turkey, being a large, relatively poor and culturally different country. But all these issues and the resulting unwillingness of the EU to move negotiations along damaged the most important incentive for Turkey's democratization – the promise of full membership in the EU. For its part, Turkey, in the midst of strong economic growth, which brought it into the G-20 nations, stopped looking to the EU as its guarantor of prosperity and became more self-confident. This was expressed in what some have called the “Davutoğlu doctrine”, after the then foreign minister (and prime minister since August 2014) Ahmet Davutoğlu. He claimed that Turkey is not a regional, but a “central power”, and a Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian Caspian, (Persian) Gulf and Black Sea country. As such, it can and should be active in all these regions. For that, Turkey must resolve all bilateral issues with its neighbors and use its considerable soft power as the only successful Muslim democracy in the region, rather than rely on its traditionally strong military. Turkey's influence should then be used to mediate regional disputes, such as between Israel and Palestine, or the Iran nuclear program issue. This became known as the “zero problem policy with neighbors” policy (Grigoriadis, 2010). Turkey should not try to distance itself from its neighborhood (e.g. by EU accession), but embrace it (Dinçer, 2013). It was seen in action by an improvement of relations with Syria, Iran and Armenia, all bitter rivals of Turkey. The most dramatic improvement was with Syria, with the two countries going from the brink of war to visa-free travel for tourists and several highest-level mutual visits in the mid-to-late 2000s. In the case of Iraq, in contrast to its past confrontational stance towards Iraqi Kurds because of ties with the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) active in Turkey, Turkey decided to engage the Iraqi



Kurds by recognizing the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Davutoğlu even visited the KRG President Massoud Barzani in October 2009, the highest-level such meeting to take place. Relations with the central Iraqi government in Baghdad were also expanded. As for Iran, apart from close cooperation in the energy sector, Turkey also attempted to mediate between the west and Iran in the dispute over Iran's nuclear program. Turkey also became more active in Africa, organizing several Turkey-Africa summits, and Latin America. On the other hand, relations with Israel worsened dramatically, caused mainly by increased Turkish support for Palestinians, particularly Hamas. This came to a head in 2010, when Israel seized the Gaza flotilla at the cost of eight Turkish lives (as well as one Turkish American). And relations with the most important neighbors of Turkey for its European ambitions, Greece and southern Cyprus, remained stagnant (Grigoriadis, 2010).

Relations with Russia also developed rapidly, mainly in the energy sector, with Russia becoming Turkey's second largest trade partner after Germany (Sadik, 2013). Russia also gained a mammoth investment project to build a nuclear power plant in Turkey, and there was talk of setting up a joint bank to handle trade and investment between the two countries. So according to the Davutoğlu doctrine, EU membership is only one of many strategic priorities or even alternatives (Grigoriadis, 2010). Turkey's trade also became more diversified. In 2000, the EU accounted for 55 % of Turkish foreign trade, by 2010 this had fallen to 40 %, while for trade with the Middle East the numbers went from 8 % to 15 % in that period (Dinçer, 2013).

These policies and trends were reflected by popular opinion – in 2010, 43% of Turks had a favorable view of the EU compared to 80 % in 2005, while 43 % of Turks considered relations with the Middle East and North Africa as more important than with the EU, with 33% thinking the opposite (Sadik, 2013). A Eurobarometer survey in 2010 found that only 42 % of Turks support EU integration, 19 % less than in 2005 (Acikmese, 2012). Many reasons were put forward for this drop in enthusiasm. Turkey's economic boom left many people feeling that they do not need the EU for economic development. But a more important reason is a perceived unfairness in the treatment of Turkey by the EU. This includes "moving the goalposts" by adding new criteria for Turkey to fulfill, such as the Copenhagen criteria, closer cooperation with international courts, the benchmark system of accession negotiations, normalization of relations with southern Cyprus or resolution of territorial disputes (Usul, 2014). Turks are especially irked by the double standard on the Cyprus issue – while Turkey is required to normalize relations with the Republic of Cyprus, no such requirement was placed on the southern Cyprus in its own accession negotiations. Not to mention that many of the reforms were seen by Turks as a threat to Turkish sovereignty, especially those on minority rights, a volatile issue in Turkey. And due to the EU's claim of the accession process being open-ended, there was not a guarantee that Turkey would become an EU member even after fulfilling all the conditions. The emphasizing of absorption capacity by the EU and the words and actions of top level European politicians skeptical about Turkey's membership further convinced Turks that the EU was not serious about granting Turkey membership. And even if membership was granted, decisions taken on the 2004 Brussels summit assumed that there would be permanent limitations on EU funds available to Turkey and restrictions on the movement of people, effectively making Turkey a second-class member. Erdoğan also began a rapprochement with Putin's and Medvedev's Russia even to the point of joking that unless the EU unfreezes the accession process, Turkey will drop its membership bid and instead seek entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, where Turkey is already an observer. More seriously, Erdoğan stated in 2011 that he expects Turkey to join the EU by 2023 (the centenary of the founding of the Republic of Turkey) at the latest, indicating he would withdraw Turkey's bid for membership. Turkish president Gül stated that Turkey would hold a referendum on membership once negotiations were completed.

The 2011 opinion of the ECHR on Article 301 mentioned above came on top of a March 17 2011 report by the EP criticizing Turkey for curtailing freedom of thought and expression and imprisoning journalists (Usul, 2014). There was also condemnation from the EU of the Turkish police crackdown on protesters in Gezi Park, Istanbul, in May and June 2013. Chancellor Merkel led the drive to postpone a resumption of accession negotiations for several months due to the heavy-handed Turkish police response (Reuters, 2013). And when the new European Commission led by Jean-Claude Juncker took office on 1 November 2014, Juncker stated that Turkey, as a country which restricts freedom of speech by e.g. blocking the internet service Twitter, is not ready for membership and is in fact still far away from achieving it (Juncker, 2014). This was a position shared by EP president and Juncker's former chief rival for the post of European Commission president, Martin Schulz. According to observers, in recent years the crackdown on journalists, whistleblowers and opposition politicians has become even more severe.

But there were also positive aspects of EU-Turkish relations. In 2008 a new Turkish television channel, TRT, started transmitting in minority languages. Also in 2009 a new law was passed which gave civilian courts the right to try crimes committed by members of the armed forces. This was meant to prevent the military from covering up crimes and shielding its members from responsibility. Then in 2010, plans of an army coup codenamed *Sledgehammer* were uncovered, which led to the arrest of many high-ranking officers and great loss of prestige for the military. This enabled the government to call a referendum on constitutional reforms limiting the power of the military and the judiciary. The referendum took place on 12 September 2010 and resulted in a victory for the government, which was also congratulated by the EU (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, 2010). And Turkey gained a boost in 2012 when French president Sarkozy was replaced by François Hollande, who was carefully supportive of Turkish EU membership. More tangibly, Accession Chapter 22 (Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Investments) was unfrozen by France in November 2013. This last one was to be opened in June, but it was postponed after Turkish police crackdown on the Gezi Park protests. Nevertheless, it was the first reopened accession chapter, and the first open chapter since 2010. More recently, a High Level Energy Dialogue and a Strategic Energy Cooperation have been launched in Ankara on 16 March 2015 (Euractiv, 2015b).

An important change with great potential effects is taking place in Cyprus. The election of Mustafa Akıncı as president of the TRNC on 26 April 2015 paved the way for reopening reunification negotiations with the south. Negotiations are to be finalized by March 2016, with a referendum to be held in May, along with elections in the south (Euractiv 2016). There are still many hurdles to overcome, but the current talks are the first serious attempt at reunification negotiations since the failure of the Annan plan in 2004.

The Arab spring changed the nature of the EU-Turkey relationship once again. Both of them were united in their support of the protesters in the affected countries, with each of them having different strengths. While the EU had the resources and the technical capacity to aid in the transition to democracy, it was hurt by a loss of legitimacy in the eyes of the local populations because of its close relationship with the previous ruling elites, and placing energy security and stopping migration before human rights in these relationships. This sometimes turned the locals towards Islamist movements, as in Tunisia and Egypt. Turkey, on the other hand, relied on its image as a relatively successful Muslim democracy, and on its resulting soft power as noted above. Another result of the Arab Spring was the great deterioration of Turkish relations with its southern neighbors because of the Syrian Civil War. The most severe and obvious breakdown in relations was with Syria, with Turkey supporting certain opposition forces, but also to a lesser extent with Syria's allies Iran and Iraq. Relations with Iraq were also worsened by Turkish activities against the Kurds and the stationing of Turkish troops in Northern Iraq. Relations with Russia cooled in relation to Syria, and hit their lowest point after the downing of the Russian bomber on 24 November 2015 near the Turkish-Syrian border (though on which side of the border remains a point of contention). As a result, the Turkish "zero problem policy with neighbors" was in a shambles and Turkey found itself rather isolated in the immediate region. This isolation along with shared support with the EU of the Arab Spring democratizing movements and the Syrian opposition may have helped reinvigorate Turkey's EU ambitions.

But the greatest effect the Arab Spring and resulting Syrian Civil War had on Turkey-EU relations was the migrant crisis, which reached its peak (so far) in late 2015. Most of the more than one million migrants and refugees that entered the EU in 2015 came via Turkey and Greece. Once the EU decided to engage Turkey in the solution, mutual relations intensified rapidly. At an emergency EU summit in Valletta, Malta, the EU members decided to give aid to transit countries in Africa, which Turkey asked for as well. Erdoğan also demanded visa liberalization for Turkish citizens in return for halting migrants (Euractiv, 2015a). Similar negotiations took place on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Antalya on 15-16 November. A deal was finally reached at a joint EU-Turkey summit (the first such summit) in Brussels, on 29 November 2015 (Consilium, 2015a). As part of the deal, Turkey would implement measures to halt the flow of migrants. In return the EU would provide Turkey with 3 billion Euros to be spent on these measures, with the possibility of giving more later on. As Turkey initially demanded 3.5 billion Euros and another 3.5 billion a year later, it may seem as a defeat, but Turkey received several commitments from the EU. The EU promised visa liberalization for Turks from October 2016, if Turkey will implement the readmission agreement. This should happen by June 2016, so the autumn progress report of the European Commission could state if Turkey implemented the agreement. Also, the EU-Turkey summits were to become permanent, taking place twice a year, along with high-level meetings on various issues, mainly foreign and security policy. Furthermore, negotiations to upgrade the customs union were planned for 2016. But the main prize was

the EU's promise to unfreeze the accession negotiations. On December 14, Accession Chapter 17 (Economic and Monetary Policy) was reopened, the first since Chapter 22 in 2013, with at least five more chapters expected to follow (Euractiv, 2015b). There was criticism of the deal from within the EU, notably by the chairman of the liberal faction ALDE in the EP and former Belgian prime minister Guy Verhofstadt, who claimed that the EU was bribing Turkey to take care of its problems, and rewarding Turkey despite the poor civil rights situation in the country, the vagueness of Turkish commitments and the general unfeasibility of the plan (Politico, 2015). But Donald Tusk, president of the European Council, stated that the EU's emphasis on human rights continues (Consilium, 2015b). However, worries about the feasibility of the agreement persist.

## V. CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to add to the body of knowledge on Turkey's aspirations and possibilities for EU membership by taking into account the most current events and discussing how they will affect the long-term issues, and vice versa. Hopefully, this paper put the recent evolution of Turkish-EU relations into a broader historical and thematic context.

In light of the recent unfreezing of accession negotiations, there is a debate on whether the EU is backtracking on its commitment to uphold democratic values and human rights. The problem is that the state of democracy and rule of law in Turkey seem to be worsening, while the EU seems to ignore this in return for practical gains, i.e. the migration deal. The EP is still the EU institution that is the most critical towards the situation in Turkey, but that can be seen as a sign of the EP's relative weakness in the decision-making process, with it compensating by being more principled. The EU has long known that the promise of membership is the most important motivator for an aspiring candidate to carry out difficult political and economic reforms. Indeed, this was an important reason for the adoption of the Copenhagen criteria by the EU, and it had considerable success in the accession of the post-communist countries. The obvious reason it does not work as well with Turkey is the reluctance of several top European politicians and political parties to accept Turkey as a potential EU member. One problem is that the political climate in the EU is becoming less favorable to Turkish membership. In the long-term, right-wing parties are on the rise, feeding on increasing public fears of immigration (mainly from Muslim countries) and a perceived clash of cultures and threat of terrorism. The recent migration crisis has only exacerbated this trend. Most worryingly for Turkish ambitions, it has strengthened especially in Germany, with the rise of the AfD party and the PEGIDA movement, and in France, where the Front National is on the rise. Even on the moderate center-right, chancellor Merkel, still skeptical of Turkish membership, retains most of her popularity, while in France, there is a possibility of the victory of former president Sarkozy, an opponent of Turkish membership, in the 2017 presidential election over current president Hollande. These two most powerful EU countries hold the keys to Turkish membership.

But this situation may change in the coming years. As the European population ages, immigration of a young a cheap labor force from Turkey may be seen as a benefit, not a threat. And other benefits of Turkish membership should be taken into account as well – its strategic location on the Turkish straits and major energy pipeline corridors or its credit in the Muslim world as a fairly successful Muslim democracy. Turkish EU membership may bolster democratization in other Muslim countries (though, in line with the above, whether this would work without the promise of EU membership is up for debate).

The problem is, the Turkish political scene is too antagonistic for European-style democracy in line with the Copenhagen criteria to take hold without the perspective of EU membership. There are several reasons for this. First of all, there is no firm consensus on the identity of the Turkish state. This precludes the sort of consensual politics possible in Western and even post-communist Europe, where most relevant parties share this consensus on the character and goals of the state, e.g. political pluralism, secularism, liberal capitalism, the welfare state, or EU and NATO membership. But in Turkey, the gulf between the Islamist AKP and the secular nationalist opposition is greater than what Europe is used to. Furthermore, Turkey has to overcome its national trauma of defeat and almost dismemberment of World War One, and its consequent heavy handed approach to minorities. A related problem is the PKK-led Kurdish insurgency, which keeps the country and its elites polarized and radicalized. This problem deserves to be given more attention, especially in light of the fight of the Turks and Kurds with the Islamic State, where mutual antagonism hampers the war effort.

Right now, the initiative is with the EU. The alternatives seem to be accepting an ambitious and semi-democratic Turkey as a strategic partner, or moving forward with negotiations that would hopefully bring a more democratic Turkey into the EU. Another factor to keep in mind are the Turkey's other options. At the moment, it seems the Davutoğlu doctrine of zero problems with neighbors has failed, as thanks to the Syrian Civil War, Turkey's relations with its southern neighbors are the worst they have been in a long time, not to mention relations with Russia. This isolation may push Turkey towards the EU and make it more amenable to pursue further Europeanizing reforms. Though there are still many hurdles to closer integration, and Cyprus remains the most important of them. While the Cyprus situation is the most promising it has been in the past decade, negotiations are yet to begin, and they may stumble or even fall apart on many issues. And even if they go well, the resulting agreement may be voted down in a referendum by either part of the island, as happened in 2004 with the Annan plan.

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