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How the EU Membership Has Affected Turkey's Political Environment

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Master's Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis aims to analyze and argue how the membership process for the European Union has affected Turkish politics and to what outcome it led Turkey. Starting with the EU candidacy, Turkey has gone through radical political changes, most of which have proved negative given the history of the country. Such changes included the weakening of the Turkish Army, strengthening of Kurdish separatism, the rise of Islamic-oriented parties, and Turkey's political shift away from western-orientation. First, the EU and its history will be analyzed analyzed as a way to illustrate the requirements for Turkey as a candidate nation. Afterwards, I will analyze the fundamentals of the modern Republic of Turkey that consists of Atatürk's ideals. The analysis helps the reader better grasp the political status quo in Turkey to make it possible to understand how the EU reforms can in fact lead Turkey to a different direction. The remainder of the thesis consists of chapters that contain the political changes as a result of the EU membership process and the arguments for those changes.

Introduction

Since its formation in 1993 the European Union has determined certain requirements for prospective candidates outlined in the Copenhagen Criteria. Some of these requirements include “Stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for minorities”.¹ Because of these requisites that candidate countries have to fulfill, they often have to modify or reform laws, seek to solve internal conflicts and work towards a democracy that will allow uniformity with the Union. A few examples include, Greece restoring democracy in 1974 after a military dictatorship and improving its economy to match that of the EU, and Spain and Portugal, which were in similar conditions before joining the union, following the paths of Greece in a stable membership process.²

This has also been the case for Turkey. Since applying for candidacy in 1987, Turkey, in the process of filling these requirements, has modified many of its laws and sought to reform the country to satisfy the EU’s demands. However, given its historical and cultural background, there have been many obstacles that have made the possibility of joining the Union difficult. Turkey’s candidacy has always been controversial because it is a special case in comparison to other European countries that have joined the EU. This peculiarity of the Turkish case has induced many arguments, both in favor and against Turkey’s candidacy. These arguments range from the geographical and population aspects of the country, to the cultural and religious characteristics of its people who are, in the majority, Muslim. Therefore, these requirements have impacted Turkish political life regarding its conflicts, its history and its values.

¹ Rezler, Paulina. 'The Copenhagen Criteria: Are They Helping Or Hurting The European Union'. *Touro International Law Review* 14.2 (2011)

² 'The Accession Of Greece'. *CVCE* (2012)

In this thesis I will argue that because of Turkey's past, many of the EU's demands for candidacy have adversely impacted the country's politics, including its secular tradition and the possible resolutions to its internal conflicts. First, I will explain the EU's history with Turkey in regards to its candidacy and will touch upon many of the arguments both in favor and against it. I will also offer a context for the political reality of Turkey as paralleled by that of the EU. Secondly, I will talk about the rise of conservative religious party AKP and its arbitrary reforms to fit the demands of the EU. I will focus on the weakening of the Turkish Army given its historical role in Turkish secular politics. Thirdly, I will talk about the influence of the EU in the resolution of the long-held conflict between Turkey and its Kurdish minority.

The EU's beginning and on

The EU originally began as an alliance amongst Western European countries to bring peace and stability to a war-wrecked Europe in both politics and economics. French politician Robert Schuman first introduced the idea in 1950 and it was immediately established in Paris in 1951 under the European Coal and Steel Community Treaty (ECSC). His idea initially emphasized the partnership of Germany and France as both countries' economies were based on coal and steel production. Therefore, rather than fighting each other as they hurt the economy of one another, both sides have found it reasonable to work together to energize their economies. They were going to achieve this by working and raising the living standards together through a stark economical bond. At the same time, other European nations were free to join this economical partnership as well.³

Schuman believed that this treaty needed a Higher Authority under which the entire free movement could be scrutinized and regulated. The first member countries that came together to form this union was the Federal Republic of Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. The goal of this treaty was free movement of coal and steel. Only six years later in March of 1957 the same countries came together to sign the Treaty of Rome, which formed the foundation of today's EU. This treaty established the European Economic Community (EEC), through which the trading materials took on a broader spectrum, consequently including a whole range of goods not limited to coals and steels.⁴

No other countries joined the EEC until 1973 when the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark joined. Such lack of membership activity for sixteen years showed the lack of

³ Archick, Kristin, and Vincent L. Morelli. 'European Union Enlargement'. *Congressional Research Service* (2015).

⁴ Stivachtis, Yannis A, and Mark Webber. *Europe After Enlargement*.

trust and abundance of hesitation in a post-World War II Europe, having suffered millions of casualties and having been burdened with an almost unpayable amount of damage. These reasons precisely portray why these three European countries joined the EEC later on, especially in the case of the UK and Ireland. The United Kingdom was already called the “the sick man of Europe” as their struggle in the post-World War II world and their resistance towards Soviet influence over Europe, had weakened the country’s economy. Ireland, on the other hand, was already one of the poorest countries of Europe with an economy based predominantly on agriculture and heavily dependent on the UK, which was the only trading market open to them.⁵

The expansion continued with the membership of Greece in 1981 and Spain and Portugal in 1986. The EEC simply appeared as an attractive model for developing economies. However, throughout the 1970s and the 1980s there was an uncertainty with where the EEC was going. Although it had been successful carrying out its plans under the basis it was established, there were a lot of doubts as to if the EEC was going to continue to function since it had weak institutions and was highly dependent on individual nations’ policies and decisions. This side of the EEC played a restrictive role in the betterment and the overall functionality of the Union’s economy. In other words, it was still in a way anarchical. Due to these conditions, the European heads of states approved the Single European Act (SEA) in 1986. This decision was based on a document that contained nearly 300 proposals, which aimed to establish “an area without internal frontiers in which the free movement of goods, persons, services, and capital is ensured in accordance with the provisions of this Treaty”.⁶

⁵ Stivachtis, Yannis A, and Mark Webber. *Europe After Enlargement*.

⁶ *Treaties Establishing The European Communities Treaties Amending These Treaties: Single European Act (Resolutions -Declarations)*. 1987.

- The removal of physical barriers to the movement of people and good (such as border immigration and customs posts).⁷
- The removal of technical barriers. That is, freedom of movement, Labor, skills and professions.⁸
- Capital and financial services⁹
- Technological and intellectual property¹⁰
- Public procurement¹¹
- Common testing and certification of product standards¹²
- Transport – de-regulation of the transport markets.¹³
- The removal of fiscal barriers (VAT and Excise duties)¹⁴

The introduction of SEA was quite revolutionary for a Europe that had always functioned on individualistic terms, namely, as multi-entities which had had numerous wars with one another in the course of history. Since Europe's goal was to forget about the bitter past that each European country (centered on Western Europe) experienced with one another, they set their intention to grow together through economical cooperation. The Treaty of Rome marked the beginning of this era by commencing an economical and political integration process among the member states. However, during the era of the EEC the economy of the Community led to an unexpected downfall. Starting in the 1980s Europe's economy started to go through an economical crisis as the unemployment rates

⁷ *Treaties Establishing The European Communities Treaties Amending These Treaties: Single European Act (Resolutions -Declarations)*. 1987.

⁸ IBID

⁹ IBID

¹⁰ IBID

¹¹ IBID

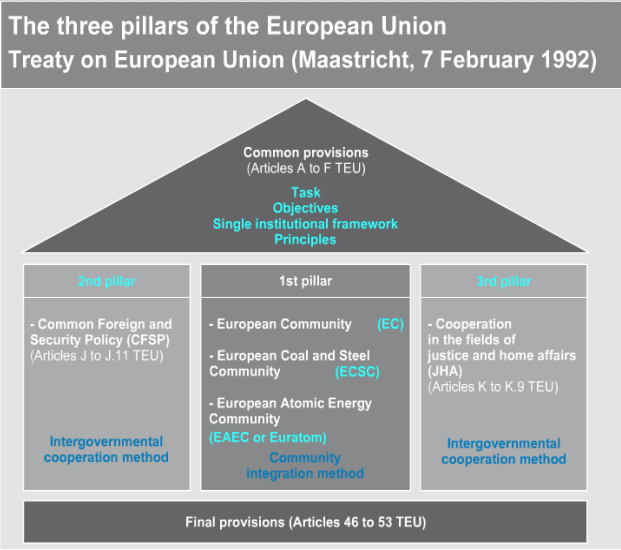
¹² IBID

¹³ IBID

¹⁴ IBID

were rising rapidly. But as much as the idea of a unified Europe seemed like an utopic, unreachable idea, the introduction of the SEA showed to the public arena the emergence of a rapidly expanding and integrated Europe.¹⁵

The ultimate goal of the SEA was to set the environment for a transition process to what was going to be known later as the European Union. In 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht opened a new page in the history the continent by fully integrating all of the institutions of the EEC, along with new ideas such as European Union citizenship and a single monetary union. The European Union was going to be based on three pillars. As shown on the picture below, the EU was the meeting point of all the institutions that had been formed and used between the years of 1957 and 1992. However, the three pillars rule came to an end in 2007 with the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon which disabled its basis on these concepts. The Treaty of Lisbon’s most significant modifications were centralizing the EU’s power, giving more power to the European Parliament, and improvement of its legal system.¹⁶



¹⁵ Swann, Dennis. *The Single European Market And Beyond*. London: Routledge, 1992.

¹⁶ IBID

*Image: Steunenber, Bernard. *Widening The European Union*. London: Routledge, 2003

The expansion of the EU continued with Austria, Finland, and Sweden in 1995. Nine years later in May 1st of 2004, the Union saw its widest expansion with the inclusion of 10 new member countries: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Malta, and Cyprus. Bulgaria and Romania joined this list in 2007 and lastly the list was engrossed in 2013 after Croatia joined the Union. On the other hand, Turkey first applied to the EU when it was still the EEC back in 1959 and officially applied in 1987. After so many years the first step close to a membership came in 1999 at the Helsinki Summit when it was officially accepted as a candidate country for the EU. However, the EU continues to stall Turkey's membership due to certain political reasons.¹⁷

¹⁷ Rezler, Paulina. 'The Copenhagen Criteria: Are They Helping Or Hurting The European Union'. *Touro International Law Review* 14.2 (2011)

The Copenhagen Criteria

The Copenhagen Criteria became the basis of EU membership in the year 1993 in the city where the European Council was held. The Council strictly emphasized on a new strengthened set of criteria for prospect member countries. The members of the Council further stated that “accession will take place as soon as an associated country is able to assume the obligations of membership by satisfying the economic and political conditions required.”¹⁸In order to become a full European Union member the candidate countries needed to meet these requirements:

- Stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities¹⁹
- The existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union.²⁰
- The ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic & monetary union.²¹

Perhaps what made the Copenhagen European Council even more relevant was the decision to start the expansion of the EU into Eastern and Southeastern Europe. In a region where politics and human rights have had a dark past this was rather an unexpected and a significantly considerable step to start the annexing of eastern European countries. The largest EU expansion took place on May 1st 2004 where as much as 10 nations became new members. Some countries such as Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were already part of the

¹⁸ Buskjær Christensen, Mette. 'Mobilizing Local Networks For A Better Informed Dialogue On Turkey's Accession To The EU'. *Danish Institute for International Studies* (2015).

¹⁹ IBID

²⁰ IBID

²¹ IBID

Soviet Union and the rest (with the exception of Cyprus and Malta) were part of the “iron curtain” countries during the Cold War. Many of these countries had had a stark record regarding the strength of their democratic institutions and the freedoms of its citizens, two of the main tenets and requirements of the Union. The collapse of the Soviet Union surely liberated what became later known as the independent nations of Eastern Europe. However, their independence did not certainly signify an automatic embracement of democracy, as much as it meant tighter ties with the West.²²

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the Copenhagen Criteria was to require the prospect members to not only to adapt to a democratic system, but to also alter their institutions in order to maintain a stable democracy and an uniformity of government within the union. Regardless of a country’s record in supporting democratic values, certain countries only apply a democratic system on paper that does not transfer to a real transformation in their institutions. This often results in democracy being overruled to a certain extent by anti-democratic practices from the past. With the strengthening of democracy fueling institutions in prospect member countries, the Copenhagen Criteria aimed to help candidate states to take a leap further in the process of Western-democratization. After all, democracy is a process that can take many years to come about effectively in all its aspects.²³

The Copenhagen Criteria is part of the transitional process that started with the SEA. When the Council came together in Copenhagen there were only 12 member

²² Hughes, James, Gwendolyn Sasse, and Claire E Gordon. *Europeanization And Regionalization In The EU's Enlargement To Central And Eastern Europe*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

²³ Emerson, Michael. 'Has Turkey Fulfilled The Copenhagen Political Criteria?'. *Centre for European Policy Studies* 48 (2004)

countries in the EU. It had taken almost 40 years to reach this number of members. The post-millennial expansion of the Union was so vast that it was able to include the same amount of countries that had joined gradually within 40 years in only 3 years with the 2004 and 2007 expansions. It's evident that the EU went through a mentality change since the generally slow process of membership was sped up tremendously. The EEC mostly meant economical agreement amongst the western-oriented European countries, but the EU went beyond and added further prospects to create a culturally and geographically unified Europe. This rapid annexing of former soviet countries on Eastern Europe shows the determination of the EU's desire to unify Europe both culturally and geographically.²⁴

The Copenhagen Criteria and Turkey's Candidacy

Turkey's Europeanization process began at the Helsinki Summit in 1999 when the Council decided to accept Turkey's candidacy for the EU. This was the first time Turkey had received an official recognition to be a prospect member nation after half a century of a political adventure with Europe. The Council further stated that the accession talks with Turkey could only start once the Copenhagen Criteria were met.²⁵

“Building on the existing European strategy, Turkey, like other candidate States, will benefit from a pre-accession strategy to stimulate and support its reforms. This will include enhanced political dialogue, with emphasis on

²⁴ Emerson, Michael. 'Has Turkey Fulfilled The Copenhagen Political Criteria?'. *Centre for European Policy Studies* 48 (2004)

²⁵ 'Helsinki European Council'. *European Parliament* (1999)

progressing towards fulfilling the political criteria for accession with particular reference to the issue of human rights”²⁶

Although the Helsinki Summit brought a positive outcome for Turkey, the Turkish government of that time was not able to implement much political reforms within the next two years until 2001. There were two main reasons behind this. The first reason was the fact that Turkey found itself in the midst of a crucial financial crisis. During this time the government became preoccupied with the economical state of the country more than anything else. The second reason was the lack of efficiency amongst the three main parties, the Democratic Left Party (Demokratik SolPartisi-DSP), the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi-ANAP) and the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetci Hareket Partisi-MHP), all of which formed the coalition government. Due to the differences of opinion each political reform was a long bargaining process. Although the changes were gradual and at a slow pace, the government at the time did take some steps to get closer to a possible membership as the European Commission report for Turkey showed in the year 2001:²⁷

“The basic features of a democratic system exist in Turkey, but a number of fundamental issues, such as civilian control over the military, remain to be effectively addressed. Despite a number of constitutional, legislative and

²⁶ 'Helsinki European Council'. *European Parliament* (1999)

²⁷ Baç, Meltem Müftüleri. 'Turkey's Political Reforms and The Impact Of The European Union'. *South European Society and Politics* 10.1 (2005): 17-31

administrative changes, the actual human right situation as it affects individuals in Turkey needs improvement.”²⁸

According to the above report that was prepared by the European Commission, Turkey seemed to have needed improvements on political and legal levels only.⁽¹⁾ Existence of citizen control over the military, on the other hand, is one of the significant requirements of the EU for membership. Since the government is the institutional representation of the citizens the government should always be supreme in democratic societies. When the military gets too involved in the political affairs the country starts to lose its democratic aura. For example, even when coups and coup warnings were taking place in Turkey, the country was still officially a democratic. It had the traits of how a democratic country would be considered. However, the Turkish military’s scrutiny over the government has restricted the citizens to rule themselves. The military is also an institution that exists to protect its citizens and its borders. In a true democratic society the military should follow orders from the government (or the people).²⁹

²⁸ The European Commission, '2001 Regular Report On Turkey's Progress Towards Accession'. *Commission of the European Communities* (2001): 32.

²⁹ Baç, Meltem Müftüler. 'Turkey's Political Reforms and The Impact Of The European Union'. *South European Society and Politics* 10.1 (2005): 17-31

Changes with the coalition government

Considering the situation of Turkey from 1999 to 2001 with its coalition status in the government plus the economical crisis, it's evident why Turkey's integration process into the EU was slowed down. However, the Turkish government of then was able to take positive steps to pass new laws. One of the main requirements by the EU was to enhance the human rights conditions in Turkey, as it needed more improvements. Freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of association and peaceful assembly were some of the human rights issues addressed by the constitutional amendments. One of the important that steps that the government took was to delete a number of restrictions in Article 13 and 14 which overruled the constraints on fundamental rights and freedoms.³⁰ In addition, the principle of proportionality also added that "These restrictions shall not conflict with the letter and spirit of the Constitution and the requirements of the democratic social order and the secular republic and the principle of proportionality".³¹ This clause is also located under Article 5 of the Treaty of the EU: "The limits of Union competences are governed by the principle of conferral. The use of Union competences is governed by the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality".³²

The principle of proportionality basically defines the inner philosophy of the EU. According to Europa.eu "the principle of proportionality regulates the exercise of powers by the European Union. It seeks to set actions taken by the institutions of the Union within specified bounds. Under this rule, the involvement of the institutions must be limited to what is necessary to achieve the objectives of the Treaties." Proportionality helps maintain

³⁰ Baç, Meltem Müftüler. 'Turkey's Political Reforms and The Impact Of The European Union'. *South European Society and Politics* 10.1 (2005): 17-31

³¹ The European Commission,. '2001 Regular Report On Turkey's Progress Towards Accession'. *Commission of the European Communities* (2001):

³² 'Treaty Of Lisbon'. *Article 1: Treaty on the European Union*.

a stable democracy as it functions as a mechanism of refrainment in the government. On a legal level it is a safeguard to keep legislative and administrative powers under control. In other words, it helps weigh the legitimacy of an action of interference on a particular matter. The high authority in a government can act only in proportion to the matter taken at hand and take enough measures if the situation necessitates it to be.³³

When the EU accepts a nation as a candidate certain outcomes and changes are expected from the nation. Candidacy is a type of contract that is signed by both sides to show their dedication in the process. After the EU announces the candidacy of an European nation the rest will be up to the candidate nation. In order for the accession talks to start the EU needs to see some sort of progress in the candidate. Surely in the end, all the prerequisite conditions to be fulfilled for the membership must be met. In order to keep good track of the progress in the country, the EU requires each candidate country to prepare a report called the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis.³⁴

No major amendments had taken place after the introduction of the 1982 Constitution. A possible EU membership brought up the possibility of an amendment on the Constitution. This was going to be the first time in the history of the Republic of Turkey to make changes on the Constitution on an international arena. The Turkish government introduced the NPAA. The NPAA showed Turkey's commitment to the EU norms and standards, and was going to act as a guideline on the way towards becoming a member.³⁵ Turkey's EU Secretariat took up the responsibility to scrutinize the NPAA by implementing, coordinating, and monitoring. Public units now had to carry out their duties

³³ Barnidge, Jr., Robert P. 'The Principle Of Proportionality Under International Humanitarian Law And Operation Cast Lead'. *Columbia University Press* (2010)

³⁴ Gönenç, Levent. 'The 2001 Amendments To The 1982 Constitution Of Turkey'. *Ankara Law Review* 1.1 (2004)

³⁵ IBID

in comparison to the NPAA and had to take into account the EU side of the decision-making process.³⁶

Between October 2000 and June 2001 as much as 117 new laws were adopted along the lines of the *acquis*.³⁷ Compacting so many laws into such a short amount of time was a true success by the government. The new laws in the judiciary system stood out with their changes. The law of May 15 2001 “established criminal enforcement judges as a new judicial function. These judges will be responsible for reviewing complaints by prisoners concerning their rights.” 140 judges were appointed to all over the country to become part of criminal courts. Twelve sections were established concerning issues in intellectual property rights on March 26 2001. The government also added sections about consumer protection in courts in Ankara, Izmir, and Istanbul on December 25 2000.³⁸

One of the EU’s requirements is definitely a stable economy. The stability of the economy will reflect on the country’s progress and will not necessarily be a burden to the EU economy. Another requirement, which is closely tied to economy, is anti-corruption law. After all, corruption often leads to a bad economy and thus to a possible crisis. Therefore, it is crucial to have laws in the country to prevent corruptions. President Sezer made a statement claiming that corruption was one of the most serious problems affecting Turkey and decided to give full support to fight against it. Some of the anti-corruption laws that the Turkish government introduced in its economic program of April 2001 were:³⁹

³⁶ Salehi Esfahani, Hadi, and Esra Çeviker-Gürakar. 'Fading Attraction: Turkey's Shifting Relationship With The European Union'. *The Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance* 53.4 (2013): 364-379.

³⁷ IBID

³⁸ Gönenç, Levent. 'The 2001 Amendments To The 1982 Constitution Of Turkey'. *Ankara Law Review* 1.1 (2004)

³⁹ The European Commission,. '2001 Regular Report On Turkey's Progress Towards Accession'. *Commission of the European Communities* (2001)

1. To ensure transparency and accountability in resource allocation in the public sector.⁴⁰
2. To prevent politically motivated interventions in the management of the Economy.⁴¹
3. To strengthen good governance and the fight against corruption.⁴²

Around the same time the Turkish government also worked on complying to certain human rights laws as required by the EU. According to the European Commission's 2001 report on Turkey, Turkey took positive steps focusing the attention on the freedom of expression, the freedom of the press, and the freedom of association and peaceful assembly. In Article 13 and 14 of the Turkish Constitution a good number of restrictions were deleted. Some proposals prepared by the Turkish government introduced the possibility of some future constitutional changes in the area of freedom of expressions and thoughts. Some of these proposals ended up in changes in Articles 159 and 312 of the Penal Code and of Articles 7 and 8 of the Anti-Terrorist Law.⁴³

In the process of adopting the EU laws that are stated on the *acquis*, Turkey achieved a considerable amount development in the area of human rights. In a very short time major human rights bodies were formed to enforce the practicality of this system in the country. Some of these bodies were the Human Rights Presidency, the High Human Rights Board, the Human Rights Consultation Boards and the Investigation Boards. Each one of them had its own unique responsibility to function the scrutiny over the issue of

⁴⁰ The European Commission, '2001 Regular Report On Turkey's Progress Towards Accession'. *Commission of the European Communities* (2001)

⁴¹ IBID

⁴² IBID

⁴³ IBID

human rights. For example, the Human Rights Presidency was responsible for the implementation of legislation in human rights.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ The European Commission,. '2001 Regular Report On Turkey's Progress Towards Accession'. *Commission of the European Communities* (2001)

Kemalism vs. Conservative Politics

Kemalism

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who was in charge of the military that saved Turkey from the invading countries, established the Republic of Turkey out of the Empire's ashes. To erase traces of the Ottoman past Atatürk completely transformed the country by implementing a myriad reforms. The most important change was dissolving the caliphate, which was directly connected to the Islamic past of the Ottoman Empire. Having experienced an Ottoman era that was socially and technologically more backward than Western Europe due the restrictions that the religious government body applied, the ruling elites came to a common agreement that religion was slowing down progress.⁴⁵ He further continued the process with the westernization of the country by replacing the Arabic alphabet with the Latin alphabet, and banning both Islamic education and Sufi brotherhoods.

Atatürk believed that Turkey's place was in the Western world. His desire was to create a state that was integrated to Europe with adopted Western values and a political system around an ethnic identity (being a Turk), through the unification of the country through Turkish identity rather than an Islamic one. Further westernization process included adopting Western holidays (Saturday/Sunday weekend system), the Western Gregorian calendar and Western dress. Turkey adopted legal codes from countries like Germany, Italy, and Switzerland.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Reynolds, Michael A. 'Echoes Of Empire: Turkey's Crisis Of Kemalism And The Search For An Alternative Foreign Policy'. *The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings* 26 (2012)

⁴⁶ Wright, Robin B. *The Islamists Are Coming*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012

In parallel to the westernization process, a “Turkification” process was also under way. Since the Ottoman Empire was based on religion rather than ethnicity, the Ottomans introduced other languages to Turkish, especially Arabic and Persian. These were the languages of religious literature in Islam in those times. In order to become part of the Islamic civilization the Ottomans exposed Turkish to Arabic and Persian. Although these two languages were very different from Turkish, not learning them would have isolated the Ottomans from the Muslim world. Numerous words started flowing into the Turkish language from Arabic and Persian through Islamic literature and Ottoman Divan poets. These poets even borrowed grammatical rules from Arabic and Persian, which gradually also started reflecting on the way the Ottoman elites started talking. This process slowly started forming the Ottoman Turkish, which included mostly Arabic and Persian words with basis in Turkish. Therefore, the “Turkification” process was a language revolution that took away the domination of Arabic and Persian words from Turkish literature replacing it with pure Turkish words if not completely.⁴⁷

This process proceeded with the rewriting of Turkish history from a different perspective. The new education system brought a new meaning to Turkish history from an approach that glorified pre-Islamic Turkic civilizations rather than the Islamic ones. Even daily azan prayers were chanted in Turkish instead of its original form in Arabic due to a restriction that was brought by the government. The concept of being a Turkish citizen was slowly forming in the minds of people who were living in Anatolia and Thrace.⁴⁸

To provide education to all the citizens of Turkey was the utmost priority of Atatürk. He believed that in order not to repeat the mistakes of the past there was a

⁴⁷ Reynolds, Michael A. 'Echoes Of Empire: Turkey's Crisis Of Kemalism And The Search For An Alternative Foreign Policy'. *The Saban Centerfor Middle East Policy at Brookings* 26 (2012)

⁴⁸ Wright, Robin B. *The Islamists Are Coming*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012.

necessity for a widespread education. Having been established as a brand new country out of the remnants of the former Ottoman Empire, 80% of the population lived in rural areas where education was scarce due to the lack schools. This is the reason why a noticeable split of ideologies was taking place in Turkey between the urban and rural areas. Urban areas had plethora of schools that were providing education to large amounts of people. It was not yet possible to create the same environment in Anatolia's rural areas as this would be a process that would take long years since the country did not have enough teachers to educate the rural peoples. In order to increase the amount of teachers there was a need for thousands of more schools to train thousands of teachers, which would be a long process.⁴⁹

On the other hand, the conservativeness and religiousness that was left from the Ottomans times was still existent in the rural areas. There was a heavy influence of the Sufi culture of the religious order tarikats over the rural peoples of Anatolia. A great number of them opposed Atatürk's decision to overthrow sharia law and replace it with secular laws that overruled the Islamic laws which had been official for hundreds of years. Atatürk viewed these tarikats as a "strict hierarchical organization [that posed a] threat to the authority of the state, with students surrendering their own thinking to their shaykh's spiritual, political, and social teachings."⁵⁰ Partly because of this he gave a lot of importance to the education of the rural areas. In fact, in the year 1922 Atatürk stated that the education policy should prioritize the education of the villagers. With this mindset he embarked on a mission to travel through towns and villages all around the country with a blackboard, in order to introduce the new Latin alphabet and educate them to the best he

⁴⁹ 'The Rise Of Political Islam And The AKP'. *The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University*. (2010)

⁵⁰ IBID

could. He became known as the Turkish leader who had the soul of a teacher due to such actions he took along with his ideas.⁵¹

After travelling around Turkey and witnessing the conditions of the rural people of Turkey, Atatürk came to the conclusion that there needed to be an educational reform which would pave the way to the establishment of a new institution that would provide education to the mentioned 80%. Atatürk gave a speech in Samsun in 1924 in which he stated: “For success in life, the safest guides are science and techniques, and if one looks for a guide elsewhere, ignorance, error, and aberration shall be the result.”⁵² Atatürk’s political party, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (The Republican People’s Party), established “village institutes” (köy enstitüleri) and “people’s houses” (halk evleri) all over Turkey. Their goals were to give primary education to children and adult education in villages. These were centers that provided free access to books, educational programs, vocal, radio, instrumental music, and popular dances education. In addition, there were vocational trainings in handcrafts, housekeeping, technology plus agricultural trainings that helped modernize the agricultural work that villagers made a living out of.⁵³ These schools also attempt to modernize the rural population of Turkey while embracing Western and secular traditions along with the preservation of Turkish traditions.⁵⁴

Until the 1950s there was a single-party system in Turkish politics. As the only ruling party, CHP brought numerous changes since the establishment of the republic. Turkey started a multi-party system in the year 1945 with the establishment of a second

⁵¹ Vexliard, Alexandre, and Kemal Aytaç. 'The "Village Institutes" In Turkey'. *COMP EDUC REV* 8.1 (1964): 41-42

⁵² IBID

⁵³ IBID

⁵⁴ 'The Rise Of Political Islam And The AKP'. *The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University*. (2010): 37

party. Shortly after in 1950, Demokrat Parti (the Democrat Party) became the governing party. It became to be officially known that village institutes and public houses were in fact promoting Atheistic and Communistic ideas to the rural Turks. Therefore, one of the first things that the Democrat Party did when they came the ruling party was to close these village institutes and public houses thus ending an era of educational uplifting of Anatolian villagers. The Democrat Party was a center-right conservative party that was for the preservation of religious characteristics of the rural Turks. The ruling party also changed the daily calls to prayers (athan) from Turkish back to Arabic and supported the re-opening of religious schools. These actions set the base for the rise of religious politics in Turkey.⁵⁵

The Rise of AKP

In the elections of 2002 Turkey witnessed the surprising rise of a newly established party. The AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi- *Justice and Development Party*) were announced as the victors with 35.7% of the votes, which was the highest number of votes for a single party in many years. The AKP was then able to form a majority government thus ending the hegemony of coalition-based governments. While many secularists in Turkey welcomed this new political change especially followed by an economical crisis, there were also others who feared such a radical renewal of the government by Islamic-oriented politicians.⁵⁶

The AKP politicians had formerly been members of an Islamist-oriented party called Refah Partisi (Welfare Party), which was known for its pro-Islamic and anti-Western views. The Welfare Party came into office in the year 1996 after winning enough votes to

⁵⁵ 'The Rise Of Political Islam And The AKP'. *The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University*. (2010)

⁵⁶ Rezler, Paulina. 'The Copenhagen Criteria: Are They Helping Or Hurting The European Union'. *Touro International Law Review* 14.2 (2011)

be a part of the coalition government. The leader of the Welfare Party, Necmettin Erbakan, came in office as the prime minister and had radical campaigns that threatened to change the foreign policy of Turkey. His campaigns included an end to interest rates, a declaration of Jihad (holy war) on Jerusalem, and had announced that his plan was to take Turkey out of NATO and form an “Islamic NATO”. Although he did not necessarily carry out his campaign vows, he gave a signal to show the direction of his policies that he wanted to shape up Turkey with. His first official foreign visit after being elected was to travel to Iran, which was a country that the United States had encouraged the ally countries to avoid. Moreover, he also signed a \$20 billion agreement with Iran to buy oil from them. His next destination was Qaddafi’s Libya. Upon his visit to Libya, Erbakan announced that Libya was in fact not a country of terrorism, but it was rather a country that was suffering from it.⁵⁷

Although Erbakan was in office for only a year he was able to make slight changes in the foreign policy of Turkey. One of the main reasons was the military’s leverage on the political governance of the country. The military in Turkey was pro-Western and acted as the protector of secularism against various political threats that might come from the political parties in power. This is the reason why Erbakan’s actions were very limited. In the case of any violation of secularism, security, stability in Turkey, the military will be there to protect those essential values of the republic. In a way, that is what happened during Erbakan’s prime ministry. The military officials subsequently started criticizing Erbakan’s trips to Iran and Libya and condemned his military agreements since he pursued them without consulting them. These actions that the prime minister took in a short amount of time led the military to give warnings. Additionally, there were some other conflicts

⁵⁷ Çelik, Yasemin. *Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, (1999): 159

between the government and the military over some domestic issues including the governing party's support to religious schools and their reluctance to restrict the operation of Quran schools. The inability of the government to cooperate with the military encouraged the military to further condemn the government and issue a warning to imply the possibility of taking action to interfere. Consequently, Necmettin Erbakan could not bear with the pressure anymore and finally issued his resignation.⁵⁸

The Welfare Party's political orientation was widely known both by the Turkish citizens and within the political environment in Turkey. However, Erbakan's actions once again showed to the entire country their strong intentions to further pursue their non-secular and non-Western approaches. Upon taking up the position of prime minister through the coalition government the Welfare Party, oriented actions were too strong and straightforward rather than a slow process of gradual acceptance by all the institutions in Turkey. Some members of the Welfare Party including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (the current president of Turkey) and Abdullah Gül (former president of Turkey) did not agree with Erbakan's strategy that consisted of rapid actions to pursue his agenda. On the contrary, they had a different strategy where the political agenda was pursued in a more transitional way in accordance with the status-quo in the country. As a result, they branched off of the Welfare Party and formed the AKP.⁵⁹

The members of this party (which included former members of the Welfare Party whose names were Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül, Bülent Arınç, and Abdullatif Şener) sought to be part of a party that followed the same political agenda, but in a subtler manner. The prominent co-founder of the AKP, Erdoğan, started his rise during his term as the mayor of Istanbul in the mid 90's. However, when the AKP won the elections as the

⁵⁸ Çelik, Yasemin. *Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, (1999): 160

⁵⁹ IBID

majority party in the government, concern and worry started dominating the secularists both in Ankara and throughout the country. However, his political past in the Welfare Party was not the only concern, but what the real concern was some of his quotes in his speeches, which clearly showed his political stance.⁶⁰

Erdoğan made his most-known anti-democratic and anti-secular speeches as mayor of Istanbul. His idea was that democracy could never be applied in a Muslim country, as sharia would be the best system that is compatible with Islam. His famous quotes on democracy include: “Democracy is like a streetcar. You ride it until you arrive at your destination, and then you step off,” and “we believe that democracy can never be the objective; it’s only a tool.”⁶¹ His famous quotes on sharia include: “The statement that sovereignty unconditionally belongs to the people is a huge lie. Sovereignty unconditionally belongs to Allah,” “Praise to God; we are all for sharia,” and “one cannot be secular and a Muslim at the same time. You will either be a Muslim or a secularist.”⁶² Many government officials did not only see him as a danger to the future of Turkey, but he was also a threat for the Kemalist (secularists who follow Atatürk’s principles) regime in Turkey. However, the continuation of his radical statements put an end to his political life with a speech that he made at a rally in December 1997, which made him get convicted of subversion. In his speech he quoted; “The mosques are our barracks, the domes are our helmets, the minarets are our bayonets, and the faithful are our soldiers.” This was quoted directly from a poem and made him guilty for “praising fundamentalism and violating a law that bans ‘provoking enmity and hatred among the people.’” Thus, he was sentenced to 4 months in jail.(10)(Page 45-46)

⁶⁰ “The Rise Of Political Islam And The AKP”. *The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University*. (2010)

⁶¹ IBID

⁶² IBID

The judges made this decision since his speeches included statements that threatened the future of Turkey's secular regime. He basically made his intentions and ideology clear by stating that democracy could only be used as a tool. One of the main duties of the judges is to protect a democratic Kemalist regime, which is why their decision led to his imprisonment and took away his right to become an elected politician again. However, after the AKP won the elections in 2002, with the help of the opposition party the constitution was modified to allow him to run in a by-election that took place on March 2003 from the Siirt constituency. Through this way he was able to take over the Prime Ministry title from his deputy Abdullah Gül and thus, he became the new Prime Minister of Turkey.⁶³

The AKP basically proceeded with the EU membership process from where it had left off. There was no time to lose since the accession talks with Central and Eastern European candidate countries were coming to a conclusion, even though Turkey had applied first much before them. This put some pressure on the Turkish government to expedite the required reforms. As the single ruling party in the government it did not take long until the AKP enacted new EU integration laws. The ruling party enacted two laws immediately after they came to power and within the first three months, the AKP introduced 5 reform packages, which included laws that would impact the future of Turkish politics. One of these packages demanded the retrial of all the State Security cases, one of which was the case of the Demokrasi Partisi (the Democracy Party). The parliamentarians of this party had been in jail due to their support for Kurdish separatism and terrorism. Following the retrial of their cases, they were all released on June 9 2004.

⁶³ Baykal, Arda. 'Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'. *International Affairs and Defence Section* (2009)

The release of the DEP parliamentarians played a beneficial role in the credibility of Turkish politics during the membership process. According to Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.”

This article provides protection to all citizens of the EU in terms of expressing their thoughts freely without any restriction. However, the article also included the following:

“The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.”

Democratic rights, in other words, are subject to restriction when they threaten national security, territorial integrity and public safety. Although releasing the politicians from jail sounded appealing to the EU for the membership process, it was not an obstacle to

fulfill the requirements by the Copenhagen Criteria. The following paragraph is from Article 26th of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey under the chapter of freedom of expression and it shows extreme similarities with the article on freedom of expression from the European Convention on Human Rights:

“Everyone has the right to express and disseminate his/her thoughts and opinions by speech, in writing or in pictures or through other media, individually or collectively. This freedom includes the liberty of receiving or imparting information or ideas without interference by official authorities. This provision shall not preclude subjecting transmission by radio, television, cinema, or similar means to a system of licensing.”

Ergenekon and Sledgehammer Cases

Ever since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey the military played a dual role: protection of secularism and the state, along with all the other founding principles of the country. Consequently, the Turkish military has always shaped the course of Turkish politics due to the actions that it took, either through intervention in government control or behind the scenes in a political manner. In fact, the Turkish military committed three coups in the 20th century and all of them took place within a span of twenty years. The reason for such surprising quantity was due to the political conflict that arose as a result of governments threatening the political principles on which Turkey was built. These governments have mostly been right wing political parties which try to impose their

conservative values on the Turkey's progressive and modern norms. As a matter of fact, 2 of the 4 interventions were from conservative political parties.⁶⁴

Although Turkey is deemed a democratic country, according to the EU, the presence and influence of the military has been a threat to democracy. To become a full EU member, the military's ties with the domestic politics had to be cut off completely. Although the Turkish military has always taken on an observant role (but interferes when necessary), it has always had the power to shape the future of Turkish politics independent of the public's decision. In the 2000s under the leadership of the AKP the military's power came to an end to comply with the demands that were coming from the EU. This process began with the "Ergenekon case".⁶⁵

The "Ergenekon case" contains almost 100 individuals who allegedly came together to form an organization to topple the ruling party the AKP. These 100 individuals include politicians, media representatives, civil society leaders, and most surprisingly, retired army generals. The official name of this case in fact is "case against the infringement of article 313 of the Turkish Penal Code: establishment of a criminal organization". The name Ergenekon was only brought up during the police investigation on this so-called organization. The court also decided that the "until a verdict has been made, the organization in question must be referred as 'the alleged Ergenekon terrorist organization'".⁶⁶

The Ergenekon investigation completely opened a new page in Turkish history. For a supreme institution such as the military in Turkey, being tried by the government in such

⁶⁴ Haugom, Lars. 'The Turkish Armed Forces In Politics'. *Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies* (2012)

⁶⁵ IBID

⁶⁶ Ünver, H. Akin. 'Turkey'S "Deep-State" And The Ergenekon Conundrum'. *The Middle East Institute Policy Brief* 23 (2009)

a great expand was not only unheard of, but since they had their own military courts which were independent of the civil courts, the military's reputation was greatly damaged. It also created a new wave of confusion in Turkey where people were split in their approach towards the Ergenekon case. The people who believed in the military to be the protectors of the values of the Republic of Turkey that were left from Atatürk either lost their trust or thought that this was a big conspiracy prepared by the conservative AKP government. This case became a big part of the media where all newspapers and tv channels talked about, further damaging the Turkish military's reputation as well as weakening it.⁶⁷

The government's pressure on the military continued in a similar fashion. It started in January 2010 when an anti-military newspaper, *Taraf*, several voice recordings, CDs, and a trunk full of documents from a retired military officer. The recordings were from a workshop that was led by the 1st Army General of then, Çetin Doğan, in March 2013. The workshop's aim was to deal with future threats, which included a potential Islamic uprising. Other discussed topics were the creation for a fictional scenario on the worsening of the situation in Iraq, a possible military confrontation with Greece, and the possibility of an Islamist uprising. However, what stood out the most was that three of the CDs that were sent to *Taraf* contained a covert operation led by the Turkish military in order to topple the AKP government and to destabilize the country. The operation basically planned "the bombings of two Istanbul mosques during Friday prayers and the downing of a Turkish jet, along with names of cabinet members to be installed following the coup, a detailed government program, a list of journalists to be arrested", and much more. Since the operation was named "Sledgehammer" the verdict was given the same name.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Ünver, H. Akin. 'Turkey'S "Deep-State" And The Ergenekon Conundrum'. *The Middle East Institute Policy Brief* 23 (2009)

⁶⁸ Rodrik, Dani. 'Ergenekon And Sledgehammer: Building Or Undermining The Rule Of Law?'. *Turkish-*

Although the evidences presented no direct proof of a possible coup on the AKP government, the allegations manipulated the situation to make it seem like this was the case. This became clear after the evidences were scrutinized. The experts discovered that the CDs contain verbatim extracts from a lecture that was given in the year 2005, which referred to an organization that was only founded in 2006. Moreover, in the lecture they also criticize the AKP government for the activities that they were not going to carry out until years later. The military language that was used in the recordings was also full of mistakes. The evidence was full of so many other inconsistencies, that it became obvious that the whole case was a setup. Regardless of the exposure to a false verdict, the case still continued and about 100 people were sent to prison. Since the media in Turkey was heavily government-friendly, most newspapers and tv channels constantly reported news that accused the defendants, turning public opinion regarding military influence in Turkey. This case strengthened the notion about Erdogan's desire to weaken the Turkish military.⁶⁹

Policy Quarterly (2015)

⁶⁹ IBID

The Kurdish Issue

PKK and Kurdish Minority Issues

The previous coalition government had established a solid ground for the EU membership process for AKP since significant reforms had been completed to put Turkey on the right track towards a full membership with the EU. One of the most controversial reforms was the abolition of death penalty.⁷⁰ This reform was one of the top requirements of the EU from its candidate states. However, at the same time this decision created an immense controversy in Turkey due to the sensitivity of Turkey's domestic security. The leader of the terrorist organization, PKK (Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan), had been caught in February of 1999 through a big operation of the CIA and Milli Istihbarat Teskilati (National Intelligence Organization). Abdullah Öcalan, as the leader of PKK, was responsible for over 30,000 perished lives with the works of his organization's terrorist activities in Turkey.⁷¹ Therefore, the abolition of death penalty sparked an outrage amongst the families of martyr soldiers.

PKK was established by Öcalan in the year 1978 as a Marxist-Leninist organization that sought to uplift Kurdish nationalism.⁷² Through this Kurdish nationalism he initially aimed to establish a separate and independent state called Kurdistan with partial lands from the territories of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Especially in the 1980s and the early 1990s PKK's terrorist activities were at their peak in Turkey. Their main targets included the

⁷⁰ Bal, İhsan, and Emre Özkan. 'PKK (Partiya Karkeren Kürdistan-Kürdistan İşçi Partisi) Terör Örgütü Kronolojisi (1976 – 2006)'. *Dünyada Önemli Olaylar Kronolojisi* (2015)

⁷¹ Çarkoğlu, A., and Eder, M. 'Domestic Concerns And The Water Conflict Over The Euphrates-Tigris River Basin'. *Middle Eastern Studies* 37.1 (2001): 41-71

⁷² Kutschera, Chris. 'Mad Dreams Of Independence: The Kurds Of Turkey And The PKK'. *Middle East Report* 189 (1994)

military locations, villages in Southeast Turkey that were pro-government, and urban locations. PKK has been responsible for the deaths of over 30,000 people, including Turkish military soldiers, ethnic Turks, Kurds in Southeast Turkey and PKK militants. However, as Turkey's political environment evolved over time so did PKK's. PKK's goal has become to achieve autonomy for the Kurds living within Turkish territories and to improve their rights along with the recognition of their ethnicity officially.(21)

Table 1 Turkish political reforms, 2001–2004

Date	Type	Major Changes
3 October 2001	1st Constitutional Package	34 Amendments to the 1982 Constitution
November 2001	New Civil Code	Gender equality in marriage
February/March 2002	2nd Constitutional Package	Constitutional amendments
2 August 2002	3rd Constitutional Package	Abolish death penalty/revised anti-terror law, allowed broadcasting in languages other than Turkish
3 December 2002	4th Constitutional Package	Operationalize previous reforms/revise Penal Code for torture
4 December 2002	5th Constitutional Package	Retrial of all cases decided in State Security courts
May 2003	6th Constitutional Package	Adopt Protocol 6 of the ECHR, convert all death sentences to life imprisonment/peel Article 8 of Anti-Terror Law
July 2003	7th Constitutional Package	Revise the National Security Council
7 May 2004	8th Constitutional Package	Ten amendments of the Constitution, freedom of press, and gave priority to supranational treaties over domestic law, abolish State Security courts.
24 June 2004	9th Constitutional Package	Change Article 46 of the Penal code, revise the Higher Education Board and the Censure Board.
25–26 September 2004	New Turkish Penal Code	Revise laws on violence against women and children/change the penalties for various offences and redefine offences.

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Ever since the Saddam Hussein's genocidal campaigns in Northern Iraq in the early 1990s, the Kurdish situation in Turkey has taken up an important position in the European Parliament. Especially after the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993 when the EP became a part of the decision-making bodies of the EU, the Kurdish issue became one of the top problems that Turkey was required to fix for a full membership. For example, in the year 1997 the EP was responsible for the rejection of Turkey's application for EU candidacy. The EP

⁷³ *Regionalization In The EU's Enlargement To Central And Eastern Europe*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004

managed to do take such action by including the issue in the negotiations for Customs Union. With the push from the EP the Kurdish issue started to be recognized officially in the political arena in Turkey. Followed by the acceptance of Turkey's EU candidacy in 1999 the Turkish government (both the coalition government and AKP) passed reforms until 2004 to contribute to the Kurdish issue.⁷⁴

Some of the key reforms that the Turkish government passed between February 2002 and July 2004 are as below. The Turkish government:

- Abolished the death penalty.⁷⁵
- Liberalized the political parties, press, and associations laws.⁷⁶
- Improved imprisonment and custody regulations.⁷⁷
- Facilitated broadcasting and education in languages other than Turkish (i.e. Kurdish)⁷⁸
- Recognized the legal standing of the European Court of Human Rights.⁷⁹
- Increased civilian control over the military.⁸⁰
- Reduction of the scope of the military courts.⁸¹
- Abolished the State Security Courts.⁸²
- Extended greater rights to non-Muslim minorities.⁸³

⁷⁴ Kutschera, Chris. 'Mad Dreams Of Independence: The Kurds Of Turkey And The PKK'. *Middle East Report* 189 (1994)

⁷⁵ Tezcur, G. M. 'When Democratization Radicalizes: The Kurdish Nationalist Movement In Turkey'. *Journal of Peace Research* 47.6 (2010): 775-789.

⁷⁶ IBID

⁷⁷ IBID

⁷⁸ IBID

⁷⁹ IBID

⁸⁰ IBID

⁸¹ IBID

⁸² IBID

- Revoked a highly restrictive sentence of the Anti-Terror Law.⁸⁴

There are two reforms from this list that directly contributed to the Kurdish situation both negatively and positively: the abolishment of the death penalty and the broadcasting and education in languages other than Kurdish. The abolishment of the death penalty kept the head of PKK alive since he had been convicted to the death penalty for terrorist actions with his militias in Turkey for over a dozen years. This meant that it was going to be rather easier for the head of PKK to maintain the unity of PKK. However, as the PKK are an illegal terrorist organization that carry out guerilla warfare in Turkey, their terrorist activities do not only impact the country's politics and economy, but also create more questions about the legitimacy of what they actually fight for since they seek the solution in combatting with the state rather than discussions. Therefore, the abolishment of the death penalty before their leader's sentence not only encouraged the guerilla militias, but also started a gradual process of the strengthening of the terrorist organization. The latter reform on the other hand had a positive outcome since it was a big step in the recognition of the Kurds as a minority in Turkey. The reform was passed not only in favor of the Kurdish population, but for all populations of different ethnic background in the country. The Copenhagen Criteria require that the candidate country; along with democracy, the rule of law, and human rights; has achieved respect for and protection of minorities. Therefore, this reform proved itself to be a significant step for the resolution of the Kurdish issue and for EU membership.⁸⁵

⁸³ Tezcur, G. M. 'When Democratization Radicalizes: The Kurdish Nationalist Movement In Turkey'. *Journal of Peace Research* 47.6 (2010): 775-789.

⁸⁴ IBID

⁸⁵ Emerson, Michael. 'Has Turkey Fulfilled The Copenhagen Political Criteria?'. *Centre for European Policy Studies* 48 (2004)

It was a two-way gain for the AKP since the Kurdish population in Turkey played a strategic role for the ruling party. While fulfilling the EU requirements for minority rights, Erdogan also increased his Kurdish support in Southeast Turkey. When Erdogan visited Diyarbakir, which is a city in Southeast Turkey that has a large Kurdish population, the city welcomed him with joy and open arms due to the more tolerant approaches he took on the Kurdish issue. However, it did not take a long time for the discontent over AKP's actions to grow rapidly. Although the reforms had been passed, due to the slowness of the bureaucratic procedures with the implementation of the minority reform, it took some time for it to be put to use. It took the state two years to make the regulatory changes that were going to pave the way to Kurdish broadcasting by Turkish state-run televisions. Private television stations had to wait another two years to get approval for Kurdish broadcasting. Moreover, the broadcasting was later limited to only 45 minutes per day. Teaching in Kurdish faced similar issues too. Such delays soon started raising questions amongst the Kurdish population about the AKP's sincerity about the Kurdish situation. As a result, when Erdogan went to Diyarbakir again 3 years later this time he was faced with an immense boycott by the locals of Diyarbakir. Most of the shops in the city were closed and the transportation system stopped to boycott his arrival in the city. This outcome started showing the frustration of the Kurds over the slowness of democratic reforms in favor of their population.⁸⁶

The Kurdish Opening

The municipality election put the overall Kurdish frustration into statistics, which showed the level of discontentment in the Kurdish community. For example, in the national

⁸⁶ Larrabee, F. Stephen, and Gonul Tol. 'Turkey's Kurdish Challenge'. *Survival* 53.4 (2011): 143-152

elections in 2007 the AKP won most of the pre-dominantly Kurdish provinces. However, in the 2009 elections the AKP lost dreadfully to the Kurdish party Demokratik Toplum Partisi (DTP), formerly HDP. Such a quick change in such a short amount of time put the AKP's future in the Southeast of Turkey under risk. This would hinder the possibility of the AKP to become a single-party government (which recently it did). Therefore, the AKP commenced a state project called the "Kurdish Opening".⁸⁷

The "Kurdish Opening", what later became to be known as the "Democratic Opening", was basically an expansion of the Kurdish issue by its entirety. Previously, there had been some improvements in the betterment and the recognition of the Kurdish community in Turkey, but they were very few and it was a delayed process that made the Kurds lose trust in the sincerity of the government's intention to bring the Kurdish issue to a resolution. Therefore, this democratic package easily showed the Kurds that the government does actually take the Kurdish identity seriously even though its real intention can be open to questions.⁸⁸

Its significance was the name the government addressed to the issue by naming/titling it, which made it official. Although spreading out the democratic reforms in favor of the Kurdish community over a span of years without representing them with an official political package name never showed any success, a vague democratic package could be more effective. It was vague due to the fact that the process served a purpose to touch on the Kurdish issue as a whole rather than specific steps or reforms to be introduced to meet the demands of the Kurdish community. This would mean that the "Democratic

⁸⁷ Larrabee, F. Stephen, and Gonul Tol. 'Turkey's Kurdish Challenge'. *Survival* 53.4 (2011): 143-152

⁸⁸ Çandar, Cengiz. 'The Kurdish Question: The Reasons And Fortunes Of The 'Opening''. *Insight Turkey* 11.4 (2015)

Opening” entails the topics of freedom of expression, cultural rights, and governance for the Kurds.⁸⁹

The initial idea of the Kurdish Opening is to recognize the Kurdish population in Turkey as a whole as AKP wins back their votes from the Kurds. However, the Opening also had a long-term goal, which was the disarmament of the PKK. Although the PKK initially started off as a separatist terrorist organization, over the years their stance became concentrated on the rights of the Kurdish population. So it’s been assumed that once the demands of the PKK are met, the goal that this process seeks is the end of years-long insurgency conflict.⁹⁰

The PKK members quickly took advantage of the situation during this process by requiring the state cooperate with their demands. The vagueness of the Kurdish Opening package in fact played an inclusive role with the Kurdish PKK militants. The ruling party AKP sent out government officials to interview a great share of PKK militants including their leader Abdullah Öcalan. The state officially commenced negotiations with the PKK’s terrorist leader although not declared. During this time the government prepared a report as part of the Kurdish Opening initiatives to present it to Öcalan. To contribute to the report, the government made more interviews with other PKK executives as well such as Murat Karayılan, Cemil Bayık, Duran Kalkan, and Mustafa Karasu. Mustafa Karayılan was basically the second most important militant in the PKK after Öcalan and during this process he gave his longest interview ever, which lasted as long as 8 hours.(27) However, these negotiations with the PKK militants received strong criticisms and condemnations

⁸⁹ Çandar, Cengiz. 'The Kurdish Question: The Reasons And Fortunes Of The 'Opening'. *Insight Turkey* 11.4 (2015)

⁹⁰ IBID

from a large amount of the Turkish population since what the state seemed to be doing was negotiating with a terrorist organization.⁹¹

⁹¹ Çandar, Cengiz. 'The Kurdish Question: The Reasons And Fortunes Of The 'Opening'. *Insight Turkey* 11.4 (2015)

Clash of Cultures

Since the declaration of the European Union, which had transitioned from what was originally established as the EEC, the Union has made a considerable amount of improvements on a cultural level. The definition of European unity has over the years changed from economical towards cultural. The EU's motto even became "united in diversity" and has been in use ever since the year 2000. However, in reference to Turkey's membership process, the EU politicians often bring up the term "clash of cultures". Certain EU politicians have said in the past that Turkey does not belong in the EU due to its Islamic background especially since all the EU countries come from Christian backgrounds.

The former president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, has made many statements about his opposition to Turkey's membership. Sarkozy had two main concerns: the possibility for the French culture to disappear with the integration processes in the EU and a Muslim Turkey's membership to the EU. His statements over the years especially during his term in office showed that a country as large as Turkey would shift the norms on which the EU was established. The below excerpt from his book *Testimony* summarizes his overall views on Turkey's EU membership.⁹²

"I oppose the views regarding the entry of Turkey to the EU. I fully understand the strategic expectations. However, these expectations can be fulfilled through a strategic partnership agreement. However, entry of a country, whose 98% land is outside European continent, who will be the most populous country of the Union in the coming 20 years, and

⁹² Lagro, Esra. 'Why Is President Sarkozy Actually Against Turkish Accession To The EU? Facts And Challenges'. *Perceptions* (2008): 71-73

moreover whose culture mainly carries several aspects of Islam into the EU, will create an overall transformation within the EU, thus will weaken the initial idea of founding fathers of the EU in terms of a political union eventually leading to a chaos... However, if we are late to tell the Turks that they cannot be members; this will be a very impolite behaviour.”

As a co-founder nation France has always been an influential country that shaped the direction of European politics. As one of the biggest economies both in Europe and in the world, France has played a significant role in political decisions due to a proportional leverage weight. The French have at many times taken the leadership in influencing and preserving the European values. Sarkozy believed that the French culture has had a strong bond with the overall EU culture and on what it should be based on. Thus, as a politician who has been devoted to the conservation of the French culture with his conservative background, Sarkozy has seen Turkey as a threat to the EU.⁹³

The foreign policy of France has shown over the years that the future of France depends heavily on the future of the EU. Therefore, many French politics tend not to be very supportive of further EU eastward expansions; especially regarding Turkey given the size of the country and the population. For Sarkozy, full EU membership of Turkey would weaken the EU. However, the French are mostly concerned about a cultural weakening, which would then affect France completely. In the eyes of Sarkozy, Turkey takes a different view among all the European countries due to its distinctive characteristic.

⁹³ Lagro, Esra. 'Why Is President Sarkozy Actually Against Turkish Accession To The EU? Facts And Challenges'. *Perceptions* (2008): 75

Sarkozy still thinks of Turkey as a Middle Eastern country that cannot separate Islam from politics, thus lacks secularism.⁹⁴

There are also those who reject Turkey's membership from a political perspective. Due to the massive population of the country, Turkey would be the largest country to join the union. The politicians who point this factor out believe that the EU does not have the capability to accept a member country at Turkey's size since the organization does not have the institutions that are capable enough to absorb such a massive country. There are also others, along with Sarkozy, claim that with the addition of Turkey the EU's geographical frontiers would extend to problematic Middle Eastern countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Having borders with these countries would mean dealing with new problems such as the Syrian civil war, the Iraqi civil war, and radical Iran. These are some of the reasons why Croatia's membership was not a problem due to its small size, or Bulgaria and Romania's membership regardless of having unstable economies and a distinct culture from that of Western Europe.⁹⁵ Some other reasons that have been posed against Turkey's membership:

- Accession would increase regional economic disparities, which would represent a major risk for cohesion policy. This would lead to Turkey enjoying from structural and cohesion funds over a long period of time.

Current Member States benefiting from these funds could lose eligibility.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Lagro, Esra. 'Why Is President Sarkozy Actually Against Turkish Accession To The EU? Facts And Challenges'. *Perceptions* (2008): 75

⁹⁵ Segers, Mathieu, and Jan Van der Lingen. 'Turkey, The EU And Sarkozy: Economic Policies Or Power Politics?'. (2015)

⁹⁶ IBID

- The joining of Turkey to the EU could lead to strong migration emerging upon accession. Estimates vary, but fears remain that this could seriously disturb the labour market.⁹⁷
- Agriculture in Turkey would not be able to compete and would require strong support from the EU to participate in the Common Agricultural Policy.⁹⁸
- The budgetary impact to the EU would be substantial, although no estimates can be made until negotiations have proceeded further.⁹⁹
- Turkey's accession would significantly alter the distribution of European Parliament seats of current member states. Large and medium states would be affected most by this change. Turkey would also gain an important say in the European Council based on her population.¹⁰⁰

Such statements and points of view misrepresent the one of the main pillars of the EU policies. As the Copenhagen Criteria points out, the EU's purpose is not only to have economical liberty within the EU, but also to promote cultural exchanges. The EU's goal is to create "unity in diversity" regardless of cultural differences. Turkey's exclusion can lead to a lack of trust in the principles of the EU both by Turkey and the world. These statements can also shift the way the rest of Europe thinks about Turkey's membership by negatively changing their views. This can eventually prolong the accessions, which can

⁹⁷ Segers, Mathieu, and Jan Van der Lingen. "Turkey, The EU And Sarkozy: Economic Policies Or Power Politics?". (2015)

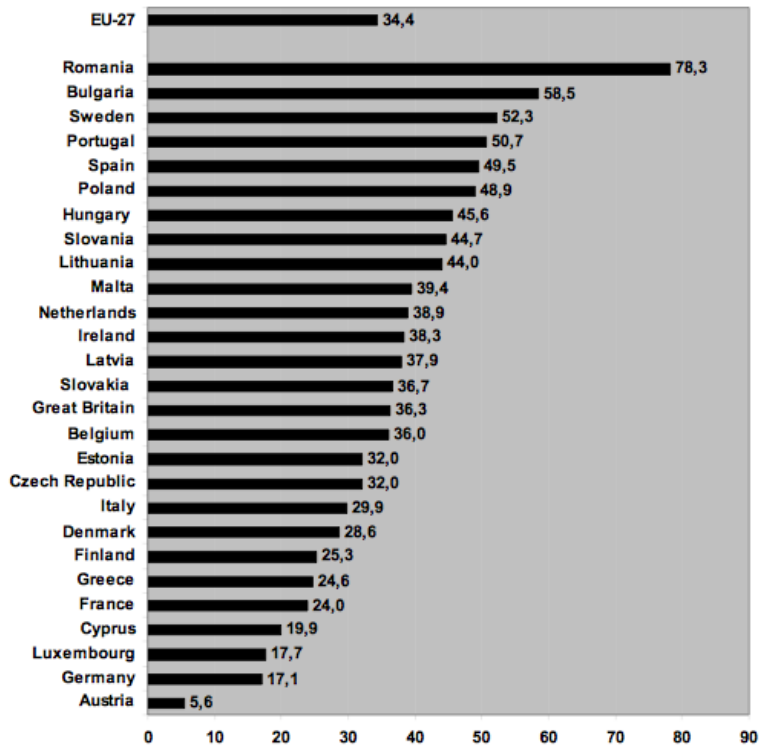
⁹⁸ IBID

⁹⁹ IBID

¹⁰⁰ IBID

push Turkey politically away from the EU. As the below image shows, the EU's overall support for Turkey's membership is only at 34.4%, which definitely includes a partial influence of such statements.

Figure 1: Support of Turkish membership in the EU in 27 countries (per cent)



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Alternatives to the EU

Turkey has been drifting away from Europe due to the reluctant approach of the EU towards the membership. The statistics in the chart above present clearly that there is little support from the leading countries of the EU. There are still many more chapters to discuss for the membership to be accepted as the accession talks are taking longer than expected. The slow pace of the accession talks might even come to stopping point with the authoritative measures of Erdogan as discussed in Chapter 4 during the Ergenekon and the

¹⁰¹ Çandar, Cengiz. 'The Kurdish Question: The Reasons And Fortunes Of The 'Opening'. *Insight Turkey* 11.4 (2015)

Sledgehammer cases. As a result, Turkey has recently commenced a new political process, which involves finding alternatives to the European Union.

In November 2013, Erdogan, who was then the Prime Minister, announced that Turkey wants to join the Eurasian Union. With its official name being Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), the EEU was inspired greatly by the EU. Rather than cultural, the union is more focused on economic partnership and looks more like the earlier version of the EU when it was still EEC. Due to Turkey's geographical and economic stance Turkey would indeed be a beneficial country especially in transporting Russian and Kazakh hydrocarbons into the European Union. Russia's recent visa agreement with Turkey and the fact that the main contractor of the building of the first nuclear power plant in Turkey is Russia are clear signs that the political balance in the region is changing.¹⁰²

Euroskepticism has been growing in Turkey exponentially with Islamphobia in Europe. According to İhsan Dağı at Ankara's Middle East Technical University an "irreversible" process has started between Brussels and Ankara. The decrease of the flow of EU investment funds into Turkey and decline in the share of EU countries trading with Turkey are part of this transformation. For example, while more than 55% of Turkey's trade was with the EU in 2003, today it is only 40%.¹⁰³

Whether oppositionists or the ruling party, majority of the Turks have come to a common ground on the EU and the West. Surely, each side has its own version of approach to the EU story. A week before General Kılınç was detained as part of the Ergenekon Case, he stated that Turkey should leave NATO. This showed the Turkish Armed Forces'

¹⁰² Segers, Mathieu, and Jan Van der Lingen. 'Turkey, The EU And Sarkozy: Economic Policies Or Power Politics?'. (2015)

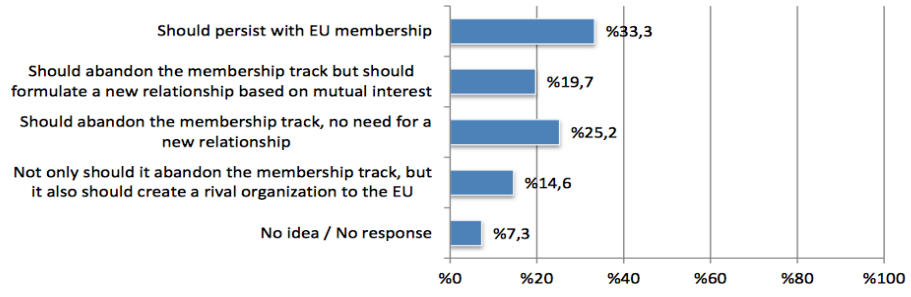
¹⁰³ Lin, Christina. 'A New Eurasian Embrace: Turkey Pivots East While China Marches West'. *2013-2014 Paper Series 3* (2014)

growing negative sentiment towards the West even though the military has always been pro-Western in Turkey. There is even a common thought about the EU in country that is shared by many Turks which is that the EU's ultimate goal is not to make Turkey a member state. The common belief is that the EU giving membership promises as they lure Turkey into making "concessions over the Kurds, Cyprus, and territorial disputes with Greece in the Aegean". According to a leading political figure in Turkey's left-wing world and the founding chair of the Worker's Party (İşçi Partisi), Doğu Perinçek, believes that Turkey could be stronger both politically and economically with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). It consists of China, Russia, and the Central Asian Turkic states. As the ruling party AKP also sees China as a great potential for the future, Turkey even joined the SCO as a Dialogue Partner in 2012 with the prospect of full membership.¹⁰⁴

The Turkish public's negative sentiment towards the EU has grown parallel to that of politicians. A survey that was conducted in 2013 on the Turkish public showed that the positive views on the EU had decreased. When the percentages of votes that are against the EU membership are added up it comes out to be 59.5%, whereas the EU supporters are only at 33.3%. The highest percentage out of the anti-EU questions was from: "Should abandon the membership track, no need for a new relationship". This shows that majority of the people who are against the EU and who, in fact, also think that Turkey should not continue the partnership with the EU.

¹⁰⁴ Lin, Christina. 'A New Eurasian Embrace: Turkey Pivots East While China Marches West'. *2013-2014 Paper Series 3* (2014)

"In the next 5 years, Turkey..."



Conclusion

This thesis has argued how the steps that Turkey took to comply with the EU measures have affected the status quo within its political environment. These changes, however, have had negative impacts on Turkish politics and society, thus the society as well. These measures did not necessarily show the functionality on an institutional level of the EU or the Turkish government. The irony is that while the membership process would bring more stability to the country, the EU's criteria heavily changed the direction of politics in Turkey political direction of Turkey unintentionally.

As a geographically strategic predominantly Muslim country Turkey continues to play a significant role in the leadership of its region. As a modern Muslim nation that based its political and social roots in the West, Turkey creates a bridge between Europe (and therefore the entire western world) and the Muslim world. It is crucial for Turkey to keep its ties close to the European Union while maintaining a determined position in the Middle East affairs especially as the tension in Syria rises more each day.

Turkey's case has shown that the EU should approach each candidate country not by imposing the Copenhagen Criteria strictly, but by dealing with each of them in a proportional manner. Each country has its unique history and political background, which should not be neglected. The Kurdish issue in Turkey has been an example for a proportional approach by the union. Due to the existence of a Kurdish guerilla organization that has been active for dozens of years the approach to this issue should be closely scrutinized. The crucial action to take in this matter is to pinpoint the social problems that the Kurdish population experiences. The PKK and its supporters have been benefiterers of the Kurdish Opening more than the ordinary Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin. If more

support were given by the EU to expand the criteria for each candidate country especially concerning delicate political matters, the less possibility there would be for political turmoil to take place, which then would affect the future of the country and therefore the EU.

Turkey's improvement in its treatment of minorities and freedom of expression were in the end beneficial for Kurds in general, but more for the Kurdish separationists who support the PKK. Most of the marches and protests that are done by the Kurds in Turkey always involve the PKK banners. These are happening even though within the last dozen years there have been crucial improvements in the recognition of the Kurdish community. There is now an official Kurdish TV channel that is broadcasted in Kurdish, books are being printed and sold in Kurdish, and there are now schools that give education in Kurdish. In a short period of time Kurds in Turkey have gotten more rights with their ethnic identity than they ever did before. On the other hand, PKK's terrorism has increased correspondingly as more rights have been acquired by Kurds.

The EU membership also contributed to the demise of status quo in Turkey through the long-lasting clash of modern Turkey with its Islamic past. There are still a considerable number of conservative Islamists in Turkey who are now led by Erdogan's AKP. The Turkish military, which serves as the protector of secularism in the country, has always been the biggest obstacle for such Islamic-oriented factions. The EU sees military influence as a threat to democracy and thus a risk for membership. With this in mind, the AKP's operation on the military mainly served the purpose of joining the EU as well as getting rid of the most significant obstacle for Islamic politics.

The Ergenekon and the Sledgehammer cases have affected the direction that Turkey is going in tremendously. These were indeed the biggest impacts that the Turkish military had received since the beginning of the establishment of the Turkish Republic. These cases

are very crucial for both the future of Turkey and the course of the Turkish membership in the EU. Many of the arrested suspects were important army generals and officials who are extremely experienced. In fact, the Sledgehammer case even included one of the former Chiefs of General Staff of the Turkish military and he was sentenced to a life-long imprisonment.

The power of the Turkish military was weakened staggeringly in the aftermaths of these cases. After the crackdown on the military Turkey perhaps became more democratic in the course of the EU criteria, but the path the government took was completely the opposite. Especially because of the restrictions within the military, many rights of Turkish people have been violated. Even a simple protest at Gezi Park in Istanbul was met with extreme repression that then in turn became a massive widespread wave of uprising all over the country due to the harsh police treatment on the citizens. The level of freedom of expression had already hit rock bottom with regulations on alcohol consumption and the banning of Facebook and Twitter. It is in such situations does the Turkish military normally step in. However, the role of military is not the same currently and a possible coup warning to the government could be another reason for retaliation by the government. This situation shows that while democracy in Turkey was patched from one side it was ripped from the other side.

Many of the EU politicians are already against Turkey's membership due to its characteristics. The widespread of Islamophobia within the EU has placed an "outsider" status on Turkey as a Muslim country. Moreover, Turkey's border with politically chaotic countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Iran is another factor that puts the membership possibility at stake especially with the growing tension in the region. Therefore, if Turkey becomes an EU member this would mean that the EU's borders would extend to the Middle East. The

idea of bordering Middle Eastern countries does not sound pleasant to a significant number of EU politicians and now that the tension in the Middle East keeps rising, any involvement of Turkey in any of those matters would make the complicated Middle Eastern political dilemmas domestic issues of the EU.

With the recent visa-exemption agreement between Turkey and Russia, and inaugurating the building of a nuclear power plant in Turkey with Russia already have shown how the Turkish political axis has slipped towards the east. Erdogan's recent announcements about joining the EEC, which is under the leadership of Russia, have already started creating a wave of concern in the west. Turkey is not only a candidate country for the EU, but also is a major political role player in the Middle East as it represents the western world. The EU membership has surely affected the political environment in Turkey, but the future will show how this effect could in fact influence the EU whether positively or negatively.

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