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**Master's degree in  
European and Global Studies**



**A Comprehensive Analysis of Türkiye's Accession to the  
European Union:  
An In-depth Analysis of Compliance, Challenges, and  
Implications**

*Supervisor:* Prof. David Burigana

*Candidate:* İlgim Şuyun

Matriculation No. 2042164

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## Abstract

This study analyzes Türkiye's membership in the European Union (EU) from 1999 to 2010, emphasizing the influence of reforms and negotiations. The accession process reshaped Türkiye's political, economic, and social institutions while posing several problems. The report examines significant milestones in this process, Türkiye's reform initiatives, and the EU's enlargement policy.

The thesis covers the period beginning with the 1999 Helsinki Summit when Türkiye was given candidate status and continuing until 2010. To offer background, it also looks at the pre-1999 period to better comprehend the events leading up to the accession process. During this period, Türkiye implemented changes to line with the Copenhagen Criteria, with attempts to democratize, protect human rights, and uphold the rule of law affecting EU ties. However, progress was uneven, and both sides encountered internal and external problems that complicated discussions.

The study's analytical focus is on the regional and political dynamics that impacted Türkiye-EU ties. Long-standing issues, such as the Cyprus Issue and the Kurdish Question, posed substantial challenges. The Cyprus issue, in particular, presents a significant political hurdle to Türkiye's EU admission. Furthermore, enlargement weariness inside the EU and changes in Europe's political environment hampered discussions. The study examines Türkiye's attempts to fulfill EU standards and highlights important problems, drawing on European Commission progress reports, national plans, and Accession Partnership Documents.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of Türkiye's EU accession process. The 1999-2010 period stands out as one where Türkiye's relations with the EU gained momentum despite significant challenges. Reforms implemented during this time deeply influenced both domestic policies and Türkiye-EU relations. Finally, the study offers insights into the future of Türkiye-EU relations, shedding light on potential developments and strategies moving forward.

# Table of Content

Acknowledgments	2
Abstract	3
List of Abbreviations	6
Methodology	7
I. Introduction	9
II. Historical Overview	15
2.1. <i>Overview of Türkiye's Europeanization Process: Pre-1999 Perspective</i>	15
2.1.1 <i>Republic of Türkiye's Early Relations with Europe</i>	15
2.1.2 <i>The Transformation of Türkiye's Political Structure</i>	17
2.1.3 <i>Türkiye's Europeanization Process in the Shadow of Military Coups and Democratic Struggles</i>	22
2.2. <i>European Union Developments Shaping Türkiye's Path to Membership: Pre-1999 Perspective</i>	34
2.2.1. <i>Key Treaties and Institutional Changes in the EU</i>	35
2.2.2. <i>Early Waves of EU Enlargement (Pre-1999)</i>	37
III. Türkiye's Accession Process: Key Developments between 1999 and 2010	40
3.1. <i>Helsinki Summit (December 10-11, 1999)</i>	41
3.2. <i>Copenhagen Criteria</i>	44
3.3. <i>Key Findings of the 2000 Regular Report from the Commission on Türkiye's Progress Towards Accession</i>	48
3.4. <i>Main Insights from the Accession Partnership Document (March 8, 2001)</i>	51
3.4.1. <i>Short-term Priorities</i>	52
3.4.2. <i>Medium-term Priorities</i>	53
3.5. <i>Key Findings of Türkiye's 2001 National Programme for Adopting the EU Acquis</i>	54
3.6. <i>The AKP's Ascension to Power and the Momentum in EU Affairs</i>	56
3.7. <i>2004 Regular Report from the Commission on Türkiye's Progress Towards Accession and 2004 Brussels European Council Presidency Conclusions</i>	61
3.8. <i>Turning Points on the Road to Europe: Cyprus, the Kurdish Initiative, and Accession Negotiations</i>	64
3.9. <i>Main Insights from the Accession Partnership Document (February 18, 2008)</i>	69
3.9.1. <i>Short-term Priorities</i>	69
3.9.2. <i>Medium-term Priorities</i>	70
3.10. <i>The EU Enlargement Agenda Amid the Global Financial Crisis</i>	71
3.11. <i>Key Findings of Türkiye's 2008 National Programme for Adopting the EU Acquis</i>	73
3.12. <i>Key Findings of the 2010 Regular Report from the Commission on Türkiye's Progress Towards Accession</i>	75
IV. Compliance Challenges and Implications of EU Accession	78
4.1. <i>Political Challenges and Domestic Policy Implications</i>	79

4.1.1. <i>Cyprus and Kurdish Issues as Key Political Obstacles</i>	80
4.2. <i>Economic Challenges and Economic Implications</i>	86
4.3. <i>Social and Cultural Challenges and Foreign Policy Implications</i>	87
V. Conclusion	90
Bibliography	93

## List of Abbreviations

AKP	<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i> , Justice and Development Party
BDP	<i>Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi</i> , Peace and Democracy Party
CHP	<i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i> , Republican People's Party
CoE	Council of Europe
DP	<i>Demokrat Parti</i> , Democrat Party
DTP	<i>Demokratik Toplum Partisi</i> , Democratic Society Party
EC	European Communities
ECB	European Central Bank
ECSC	The European Coal and Steel Community
EEC	The European Economic Community
EEC	The European Economic Community
EPC	The European Political Co-operation
EU	European Union
EURATOM	The European Atomic Energy Community
EURES	European Employment Services
EUSG	Avrupa Birliği Genel Sekreterliği, General Secretariat for the EU
FPÖ	<i>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs</i> , Austrian Freedom Party
FTA	Free Trade Agreements
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OECD	The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PKK	<i>Kürdistan İşçi Partisi</i> , Kurdistan Workers' Party
RP	<i>Refah Partisi</i> , Welfare Party
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TBMM	<i>Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi</i> , Turkish Grand National Assembly
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFSC	<i>Kıbrıs Türk Federe Devleti</i> , Turkish Federated State of Cyprus
THY	<i>Türk Hava Yolları</i> , Turkish Airlines
TRNC	<i>Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti</i> , Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
TRT	<i>Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu</i> , Turkish Radio and Television Corporation
TSK	<i>Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri</i> , Turkish Armed Forces
TÜPRAŞ	<i>Türkiye Petrol Rafinerileri Anonim Şirketi</i> , Turkish Petroleum Refineries Corp.
UN	United Nations

## Methodology

This thesis uses a comprehensive and multidisciplinary methodology to examine Türkiye's EU membership process from 1999 to 2010. The study uses qualitative analysis and comparative policy assessment techniques to examine Türkiye's reform initiatives, the difficulties faced, and the effects of these processes in the sociopolitical setting. The goals of this approach are an in-depth comprehension of the internal dynamics of Türkiye's political, economic, and legal changes, as well as their implications for the country's relations with the EU.

Thematic and content analysis techniques form the basis of the study's framework. Key sources include progress updates from the European Commission, Türkiye's National Programmes, Accession Partnership Documents, and related legal provisions. These resources provide a more comprehensive comparative analysis of Türkiye's reform effort. This research also highlights particular difficulties in fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria by contrasting Türkiye's alignment process with other candidate countries. One of the core research questions addressed in this thesis is: "In which areas does Türkiye carry out the reforms to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria concentrated, and in which aspects have the successes and shortcomings of these reforms manifested themselves?" Between 1999 and 2010, Türkiye undertook important reforms in vital areas such as democratization, human rights, the rule of law, and the growth of the market economy.

A secondary data-based method has unique problems, such as potential biases in original sources and difficulty monitoring rapidly evolving developments. Data from various sources have been methodically cross-analyzed to improve the validity and reliability of the results in order to mitigate these constraints. This approach ensures a more thorough and credible assessment. The research is based on secondary data and draws on the following key sources:

- Official EU Publications: Progress reports, accession partnership documents, and Türkiye's national plans are essential data sources for understanding Türkiye's EU alignment activities.
- Academic Literature: Books and articles about democratization processes, enlargement policies, and relations between Turkey and the EU complement the study's theoretical framework.

- International Reports: Reports from international organizations offer a chance to assess Türkiye's changes in a global setting and enable parallel observations.

The study integrates both qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis methods. The thematic analysis identifies recurring themes and patterns within the collected data, providing insights into the evolution of reform processes over time. This method reveals the areas where Türkiye has achieved success and the challenges it has faced. Content analysis systematically examines policy documents, progress reports, and national programs to uncover Türkiye's strategic priorities and the obstacles encountered during the alignment process.

Ethical considerations have been given particular attention throughout the research. Türkiye's performance in human rights, the rule of law, and minority rights is assessed against the EU's ethical and political standards. Furthermore, the impact of reforms on individual freedoms, social rights, and democratization is analyzed in detail.

This methodology has certain disadvantages. Considering the study depends on secondary sources, it does not gather primary data, which may undermine the research's currency and make it difficult to track quick changes in reform processes. However, the findings have been validated by comparative analysis of data gathered from diverse sources, assuring the validity of the conclusions.



## I. Introduction

The process in which Türkiye has been trying to join the European Union (*EU*) represents a significant transformation process. This transformation process has significantly influenced Türkiye's alignment with European standards, its efforts toward democratization, adjustments in its economic framework, and developments in its foreign policy dynamics. This study covers Türkiye's introduction to the European Union from 1999 to 2010. However, understanding the current relationship between Türkiye and the EU necessitates examining their historical background. This study seeks to understand the impact of various factors on the EU's accession process of Türkiye and its consequences for internal and external policy.

This thesis focuses on Türkiye's EU accession process between 1999 and 2010, a period marked by intense reforms and negotiations. However, understanding this process in isolation would limit the analysis, as the roots of these developments lie in pre-1999 events. Thus, this study also briefly reviews the historical trajectory leading up to 1999 to contextualize the developments during the accession period. This thesis focuses on the period 1999-2010, which is critical in Türkiye-EU relations for several reasons. First, the 1999 Helsinki Summit was a historical turning point when Türkiye gained official candidate status, and a new era began in the EU accession process. Gaining candidate status led Türkiye to initiate a series of reforms in order to comply with EU standards in political, economic, and legal areas. For this reason, 1999 can be regarded as the point of departure for the transformative shift Türkiye underwent in its EU accession process. The year 2010, however, represents the end of a decade of intense negotiations and reforms. During this period, Türkiye took important steps such as strengthening democratic institutions, improving human rights, and liberalizing its economy. However, various difficulties also emerged on the Turkish and EU sides during the same period: enlargement fatigue increased within the EU, doubts about Türkiye's membership grew, and political changes in Türkiye made the reform process difficult.

1999-2010 was also a period in which the EU's enlargement policy reshaped the Union's identity and global position. During this period, the acceptance of Central and Eastern European countries to membership also affected Türkiye's negotiation process through regional developments. However, political, cultural, and strategic obstacles influenced Türkiye's accession process, unlike other candidate nations. The purpose of

this thesis is to thoroughly investigate the period's particular issues. This decade, Türkiye's foreign policy began to change, and the EU's responses to regional issues such as migration, the fight against terrorism, and energy security were shaped. The period 1999-2010 allows us to analyze a critical decade in which Türkiye-EU relations gained momentum but also encountered various obstacles. The reforms carried out during this period and within the EU shaped the negotiations and provided dynamic important clues about how to make sense of today's relations.

Although the main focus period is from 1999 to 2010, we must examine the period before 1999 to establish cause-and-effect relationships. It is apparent, however, that historical analysis will ease understanding of the present nexus between Türkiye and the EU, the actors' present engagement, and, given the case of Türkiye as the distinctive case of EU Enlargement, why it still is not the EU member state. To these arguments relating to the temporal analysis, the pre-1999 history of Türkiye helps to appreciate some of the factors that shaped her relations with the EU, including others such as her internal and external challenges. Early political reservations and economic concerns from Europe, along with cultural differences, laid the groundwork for many of the difficulties seen in the 1999-2010 period. A comprehensive analysis of Türkiye's EU membership process necessitates a study of historical dynamics that have influenced these ties, going beyond the present political environment. Analyzing Türkiye's historical perspective offers the opportunity to understand more about how such ties have changed and evolved over time, as well as the policy courses taken throughout various times and their influence on the current state.

At the 1999 Helsinki Summit, the EU officially recognized Türkiye's candidacy, marking a watershed moment in their relationship. However, the process has been affected by the complicated interaction of numerous both internal and external variables, such as the EU's internal crises and Türkiye's complex political dynamics, and it has not been linear. This non-linear trajectory has progressed under the influence of changing motivations and has been interrupted by various obstacles, thus gaining a cyclical and fragile nature. The historical process is crucial as it helps to understand the relations between Türkiye and the EU as well as the factors that shaped this relationship. Past decisions, agreements, and periodic changes in this process provide a comprehensive picture of Türkiye's progress toward EU membership.

Moreover, the historical review offers essential guidance in planning future steps and determining strategies toward Türkiye's EU membership goal. From 1999 to 2010, Türkiye made significant efforts to meet EU standards, with occasional major difficulties and pauses in the process. However, factors such as EU enlargement fatigue, economic crises, and increasing populism in Europe made the negotiation process difficult. This thesis examines these dynamics and assesses how both sides navigated the challenges. Exploring historical processes becomes critical in comprehending the relations between Türkiye and the EU. Türkiye is considered a unique case in EU enlargement. Türkiye, which has a crucial position, is an essential strategic partner for the EU on geopolitics, climate, migration, security, and the fight against terrorism. This study will explore how Türkiye's geopolitical position and strategic importance influence its relations with the EU. Beyond political and economic dimensions, Türkiye's EU accession journey reflects the complexities of promoting universal values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law at the intersection of Europe and the Middle East.

The foreign policy of the Republic of Türkiye has formed on the axis of 'Full Independence, National Sovereignty, and Westernization'<sup>1</sup>. Since its establishment, the Republic of Türkiye has strived to reach the level of contemporary civilizations and to go 'further' in every respect. For this reason, it has closely followed developments in the international arena. It has been an active member of organizations such as The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (*OECD*) and The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (*NATO*). Again, in line with this goal, it was applied to join the European Economic Community (*EEC*), which was described as a significant peace project, on July 31, 1959. This thesis will focus on the 1999-2010 period, examining both the domestic reforms that Türkiye undertook and the external obstacles that it faced. Analyzing the balance of power relations between Türkiye's strategic goals and the evolving enlargement policy of the EU seeks to clarify their somewhat nonlinear ties.

In this context, Türkiye's turn towards the West reflects not only its modernization efforts but also a wish for effectiveness in international relations and a strategically plumed effort at regional stability. The Republic of Türkiye adopted cultural and economic values closely aligned with Western states' values. Thus, Türkiye's Western orientation, deeply rooted in historical, strategic, and cultural ties, is a carefully chosen

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<sup>1</sup> Dilan, H. B. (1998, November 30). *Türkiye'nin Dış Politikası/Atatürk Dönemi (1923-1939)*. Alfa Press.

path that continues to evolve. The goal of membership in the EU stems entirely from these reasons. The Republic of Türkiye's efforts toward democratization, paying more attention to human rights, and its desire to reach Western standards in economic development have brought the country closer to the EU. Türkiye's goal of membership in the European Union stands out as a fundamental goal for the country's strategic, economic, and democratic development. This goal is critical in Türkiye's transformation and strengthening its position in the international arena over time. Since the establishment of the modern Republic of Türkiye, the country has made efforts at various times to improve its relations with the West and reach European standards. Türkiye endeavored to maintain close relations with Western countries, but European states always remained reserved during the negotiations on Türkiye's accession process.

The late 1950s also negatively affected Europeans' perception of Türkiye due to economic recession and political factors. After Türkiye's application to the Common Market, news titled "European Bank is Extending Credit to Us" began to appear in the Turkish Press (Cumhuriyet Newspaper, 1959, p.1)<sup>2</sup>. Due to this news appearing in the Turkish press, the perception in European states that Türkiye -and Greece, which applied at the same time- would be an economic burden on the development of Europe was further reinforced<sup>3</sup>. In the historical overview chapter of the thesis, the evolution of EU-Türkiye relations over time will be examined in light of Türkiye's internal and external challenges. Türkiye's EU membership process has encountered various difficulties. In addition to political, economic, and cultural differences, multiple crises experienced during the membership process affected relations. Türkiye's internal political dynamics progress on issues such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, which have been some of the most critical discussion topics of the process. The EU Enlargement process, its internal dynamics, and the differences between member countries have affected Türkiye's membership process. Events such as the EU experiencing internal problems, struggling with economic crises, or immigration crises have determined the course of Türkiye-EU relations and affected the course of the process.

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<sup>2</sup> Cumhuriyet Newspaper. (1959, August 15). ‘‘Avrupa Yatırım Bankası Bize Kredi Açıyor’’ . p.1.

<sup>3</sup> Gaytancıoğlu, K. (2009). Türkiye'nin Avrupa Ekonomik Topluluğu'na Üyelik Başvurusu'nun Basına Yansımaları. *Ankara Avrupa Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 8(2), 47-64. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/847772>

Türkiye's accession process to the EU, which has been quite fluctuating and even stagnant at times, with the negotiations going on for more than sixty years and the summits held with the participation of member and candidate countries, still maintains its importance today. The interaction between the EU and Türkiye traces its roots in the application concerning the EEC and does not have a linear continuum assessable up to the present moment. A complex interaction of numerous interrelated factors has shaped Türkiye's reluctance to join the EU. Among these, the most important are political issues, economic fears, cultural barriers, terrorism, and concerns brought about by EU membership. Combining these reasons led to a negative attitude among broad segments of society toward Türkiye's integration into the EU. The perspective of Türkiye's unique EU membership process can exemplify an understanding of the diversity within the EU, the challenges of its enlargement, and the shaping of the EU's foreign policy. Consequently, Türkiye has always been a case apart in the timeline of the enlargement of the European Union. The relationship between Türkiye and the EU is necessary for stability, prosperity, and peace on both the parties' sides and on regional and global levels.

The EU shaped its structure around fundamental values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The geographical location of Türkiye is such that the ground between Europe and the Middle East occupies a middle, functioning as a bridge between the two regions. Therefore, concerning economic or political circumstances and the dissemination and safeguarding of universal principles like democracy and the rule of law, the relations of Türkiye with the EU stand out as one of the focal issues. The level of Türkiye's effort and commitment to the EU accession process is an essential indicator of regional stability, economic integration, and democratic ideals. Evaluation of this process is critical for both Türkiye's domestic policy and the EU's enlargement policies. Türkiye's EU accession process is remarkable because of its historical depth and transformation. Thus, this usually refers to appraising historical, cultural, and modern rationale for viewing Türkiye's integration into the EU. Türkiye's EU membership process should be considered a modern reflection of the deep-rooted historical socio-political ties between Türkiye and Europe since the Ottoman Empire.

In conclusion, this study's main objective is to analyze the impact of Türkiye's EU accession process between 1999 and 2010, focusing on how the process has shaped both domestic reforms and EU-Türkiye relations. Understanding this period helps to

interpret today's affairs and imagine how this tangled relationship will evolve in the coming years.

## II. Historical Overview

### 2.1. Overview of Türkiye's Europeanization Process: Pre-1999

#### *Perspective*

Türkiye's aspiration to become a "European State" has been a long-standing objective. According to İlber Ortaylı (1995), a prominent Turkish historian, Türkiye's journey towards European identity predates the Republic itself, beginning with the Paris Conference in 1856 (p. 175). After the Crimean War, the Ottoman Empire signed the Treaty of Paris and voluntarily declared itself a European state. According to Bernard Lewis (1984), the Ottoman Empire was called Europe's "sick man" due to its deteriorating situation: In order to recover and preserve its territorial integrity, the empire sought acceptance as a European state and support from the European nations (p. 116). The Reform Edict (*Islâhat Hatt-ı Hümayûnu*) was the most significant step taken by the Ottoman Empire, which wanted to move towards European Harmony. Thanks to the Reform Edict declared on February 18, 1856, the perception of the Ottoman Empire as a 'European State' was created at the Paris Congress held in 1856<sup>4</sup>. Other European States also confirmed the 'Europeanness' of the Ottoman Empire.

#### 2.1.1 Republic of Türkiye's Early Relations with Europe

Following the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye after the Ottoman Empire, the country, under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's leadership, embraced modernization and secularism by turning towards the West. Türkiye's geographical location supports its identity as a 'European state.' Serving as a bridge between Asia and Europe, Türkiye holds significant strategic importance due to its geopolitical position.

Although the Republic of Türkiye rejected many inheritances from the Ottoman Empire, it has carried the European State's perspective to the present day. The rapid growth and strengthening of the European Communities (*EC*) was an unmissable opportunity for Türkiye, which targeted the West after the Second World War. Joining the EC was very important for Türkiye to preserve its Western-based democracy and to develop and strengthen its position within Western countries. At the same time, Türkiye's adoption of this approach would significantly enhance its security in the global system.

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<sup>4</sup> Abadan, Y., & Savcı, B. (1956). Türkiye'de Anayasa Gelişmelerine Bir Bakış (p. 73). Faculty of Political Science, Ankara University Press.

Established after the Second World War, the Council of Europe (*CoE*) is Türkiye's first institutional bond with Europe. The CoE counts Türkiye among its founding members (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

The pursuit of security becomes evident in Türkiye's endeavors to join NATO. Türkiye's security ambitions are evident in its persistent efforts to join NATO. Turkish policymakers asserted that NATO membership would provide Türkiye with access to a strong network of like-minded nations committed to ensuring the safety and protection of their citizens. Türkiye turned further towards the West to get rid of the threat of the Soviets. Soviet Russia, which emerged more assertive and populous despite the crisis caused by the Second World War, began to follow an expansionist policy after the war. Turkish politicians started to seek an alliance because of Russia, which demanded land (*Ardahan and Kars*) and a base in the straits from Türkiye. Unable to resist these threats, Türkiye has already begun to exchange alliances with Western states from which it has already turned away. Jamil Hasanlı (2011), one of the great Azerbaijani historians, stated that the Soviets demanded at least two bases from Türkiye, in the Bosphorus and Çanakkale, and then Ardahan and Kars (p. 75).

The United States ended its isolationism policy by implementing the Monroe Doctrine on December 2, 1823, and then introduced the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan<sup>5</sup>. This alteration marked the commencement of the USA's collaboration with states beyond the continent. The United States believed that empowering Western nations, particularly those perceiving threats, was imperative to counter Soviet pressure. President Truman requested the implementation of the Truman Doctrine, which was designed to offer economic and military aid to nations under Soviet threat. To effectively curb Soviet expansionism, European states needed to bolster their financial prowess. Only by doing so could they stand up to the Soviet threat and protect their sovereignty and independence. That was the reason they introduced Marshall Aid. By all means, Türkiye, which benefited little from Marshall Aid in the first years, was more successful in its primary aim: to stop the expansionist and expansive ambitions of the Soviets in Eastern Anatolia and the Straits. Thanks to Türkiye, which made its economy and army stronger

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<sup>5</sup> Whitney, F. (1994). *An Outline of American History* (p. 137). *U.S. Information Agency*.



thanks to this aid, the Soviets' expansionist ambitions in Eastern Anatolia and the Straits could not be realized<sup>6</sup>.

Despite being initially excluded from NATO, established on April 4, 1949, Türkiye continued its efforts to join, even under Soviet pressure. Türkiye responded positively to the United Nations' (*UN*) call to send military troops to Korea on July 25, 1950. This action garnered positive feedback from Western countries, owing to its notable successes in the Korean War. In this way, on May 15, 1951, the USA officially initiated the negotiations required to include Greece and Türkiye in NATO. In this way, Türkiye officially became a member of NATO on February 18, 1952<sup>7</sup>.

Thanks to these successful foreign policy moves made by the Republic of Türkiye, relations with European states have also improved. The soldiers Türkiye sent to the Korean War and its entry into NATO made progress towards its integration with Europe. By being included in NATO, Türkiye was saved from the Soviet risk and included in the European Defense System. After this chaotic period in which two major world wars occurred, Türkiye's acceptance within the political borders of the Western Bloc and Europe brought many advantages to Türkiye. Like a European country, Türkiye became a member of the Council of Europe, thus joining other European institutions. However, the 1960s were a challenging period for Türkiye.

### 2.1.2 *The Transformation of Türkiye's Political Structure*

On May 14, 1950, Türkiye's political structure changed, and the government changed hands for the first time in 27 years. At its establishment, the Republic of Türkiye did not have a parliamentary system based on political parties. Despite attempts to transition to multi-party life in 1925 and 1930, single-party rule persisted until the end of the Second World War<sup>8</sup>. After entering NATO, it became necessary for Türkiye to take more liberal-democratic steps in the name of Westernization. Nihal Kara İncioğlu (2009), a Turkish Scholar, stated about the actions taken in Türkiye after the Second World War

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<sup>6</sup> Tüter, M. (2015). Türk Amerikan İlişkilerinin Kökenleri (p.163). *Uludağ Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 34(2), 153-176.

<sup>7</sup> Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi. (1952, November 18). Official Publication, 9th Term, 18th Volume, 41st Session, 2nd Meeting. <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d09/c013/tbmm09013041.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Çavdar, T. (2008, September). *Türkiye'nin Demokrasi Tarihi 1839-1950* (pp. 282-296). İmge Kitabevi Press.

that there was a transition to multi-party political life rather than a transition to democracy (p. 307).

After establishing the Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*, **DP**) in 1946, Türkiye shifted to a multi-party political system. After 27 years, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, **CHP**) left power to the DP. This process was essential in Türkiye's Westernization efforts and political transformations. Examining the period when DP came to power and the problems that came with the transformations will help us understand why the Western States and the EC criticized Türkiye. The establishment of DP and what happened during that period are two of the most important indicators of the weak infrastructure of Türkiye. The political and socioeconomic crises provide an environment for military coups<sup>9</sup>. Türkiye's democracy, subject to frequent democratic interruptions, does not give confidence in European states. Therefore, it is essential to examine the period when Türkiye first adopted a multi-party system, and the power changed hands. Although the DP government was considered a process of "learning democracy by experiencing" for Türkiye, it failed<sup>10</sup>. This process, which led to the first political coup of the Republic of Türkiye, also turned the EC's perspective into a negative one.

In the 1950s, Türkiye's political leaders, policymakers, and elites realized the importance of transitioning to multi-party life as part of their Westernization projects. Türkiye's democratization process is linked to the EU accession process to understand the difficulties and lessons experienced during the DP period. However, DP's rule failed in the process of experiencing democracy. Despite the transition to multi-party life, the "single party" mentality within the parliament continued among the political parties in Türkiye. With the DP coming to power, a period began in which the opposition faced harsh measures, and allegations that all state institutions were under the government's command emerged. After DP came to power, the government implemented harsh measures against the opposition party; it enacted laws that granted the government the authority to prevent opposition parties from benefiting from state radio and temporarily

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<sup>9</sup> Uyar, H. (2020, June 23). Türkiye'de Askeri Darbeler ve Nedenleri Üzerine Bir Analiz Denemesi (p. 77). *Journal Of Modern Turkish History Studies, Special Edition*, 77-96.

<sup>10</sup> Özdemir, A. U. (2021, March 14). Demokrat Parti'nin 1950'ye Kadar Devlet Kurumlarının İzlenmesi (p. 440). Pamukkale Üniversitesi Atatürk İlkeleri ve İnkılap Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Yayını, *Belgi Dergisi*, 22, 425-452.

dismiss or retire civil servants<sup>11</sup>. These repressive policies and internal disagreements paved the way for Türkiye's first political coup.

The negativities within the DP emerged with the leadership changes. As stated by Academician Hüseyin Şeyhanlıoğlu (2011), who wrote detailed research on the Institutionalization of Turkish Political Conservatism and the history of the DP, when Menderes became Prime Minister, firstly, he stated that the primary goal of the Republic of Türkiye was 'national development'; after that, he started to receive support from his party and people (p. 212). However, with the economy deteriorating in 1955, Adnan Menderes began to attract adverse reactions.

Economic policies during the DP era were among the most notable and problematic. Upon the DP's rise to power, the emphasis shifted to a free-market economy and private-sector development. Reforms in agricultural policies encouraged land ownership among peasants. However, the liberal policies soon proved unsustainable for the population, leading to a reversion to the statist practices of the Atatürk period<sup>12</sup>. When the DP government failed to gain the anticipated support from domestic entrepreneurs, it turned to foreign capital investments. The government facilitated foreign investment in energy resources, mining operations, transportation, and infrastructure projects. According to Kocabaş (2011), despite all the incentives provided by the DP, which even enacted the 'Foreign Capital Encouragement Law', which provided facilities for foreigners in terms of investment, foreign investments did not reach sufficient levels to contribute to the country's development (pp. 191-195). Although foreign investments are not as much as expected, the inflow of foreign capital into the country has increased due to incentives. This situation has reduced the competitiveness of local businesses and put them in difficult situations in some sectors.

Economic imbalances, foreign trade deficits, and foreign exchange problems during the DP period weakened economic stability. The growth in the agriculture-based economy has deepened income inequality and increased the inequality of income distribution between cities and rural areas. After mechanization in agriculture, the villagers who had enough land became richer. In contrast, the villagers who did not have enough land either remained as workers in the agricultural field or began to migrate to

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<sup>11</sup> Çaylak, A. (2010). *İktidar Muhalefet İlişkileri Bağlamında Türkiye'nin Siyasal Hayatında Osman Bölükbaşı ve Siyasal Hareketi* (p. 208). Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Press.

<sup>12</sup> Yılmaz, A. (2019). *Bir Dönem Türkiye 1938-1960 Dönemini Anlama Rehberi* (p. 93).

cities due to the excess labor force in agriculture brought about by mechanization. The DP's economic growth process led to social unrest and the rise of opposition. During the DP period, more than economic growth was needed to resolve the social and economic imbalances. On the other hand, Türkiye-US relations developed rapidly during the DP period. The positive relations that started with the Marshall Aid became even stronger after joining NATO. Türkiye's foreign policy during the DP period progressed positively until the Cyprus Issue came to the agenda. The Cyprus Issue entered the agenda during the final years of the CHP government and remained neglected for an extended period. Like the CHP government, the public highly criticized the DP Government's stance on Cyprus. The public criticized DP's position on Cyprus, leading to political tensions.

After the DP came to power, it tried to maintain good neighborly relations with Greece by ignoring the Cyprus Issue. Due to the Balkan Pact signed between Greece, Türkiye, and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on February 28, 1953, Türkiye remained passive on the Cyprus Issue for a long time. However, disputes regarding the island's legal status have increased daily. Greece's attempts to annex Cyprus, along with the desire of the Greek Cypriots to join Greece and realize the ideal of Enosis (a term denoting 'Union' in Greek, which historically connotes the aspiration for Cyprus to unify with Greece), and their adoption of stricter attitudes has hastened the negative transformation of this process. This concept of Enosis evolved into a significant political and societal objective among the Greek Cypriots, particularly gaining prominence from the early 20th century onward, with most of the Greek Cypriot population advocating for its realization<sup>13</sup>.

The violent attacks of Greek Cypriots sparked public reactions in Türkiye. The Menderes government, which initially viewed the developments in Cyprus as an internal issue of England, determined Türkiye's position against Greece's interventions in Cyprus over time. Türkiye declared its intention to take a stance on the future of Cyprus and began asserting its rights on the island. During the process, Greece started working to bring the Cyprus Issue to the international platform. This effort culminated at the UN Meeting on September 24, 1954, where the Cyprus Issue was officially placed on the agenda by a vote of 30 in favor (including countries like Greece, Egypt, and Indonesia)

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<sup>13</sup> Oberling, P. (1982). *The Road to Bellapais: The Turkish Cypriot Exodus to Northern Cyprus*. Social Science Monographs.

to 19 against (including countries like France, the United Kingdom, and Türkiye), with 11 abstentions (including the United States and India)<sup>14</sup>.

Before the UN meeting, Türkiye's opposition accused the government of displaying a 'lack of attitude' towards the Cyprus Issue. As highlighted in the collaborative work by Serdar Sakin and Sabit Dokuyan (2013) on Cyprus and the 6/7 September Incidents, there was a significant amount of provocative news about the Greek Cypriots and the Cyprus Issue during this period (p. 155). Specifically, on September 6, 1955, an unfounded newspaper report incited large demonstrations in Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir; The Istanbul Ekspres Newspaper published an article with the headline 'A bomb damaged our Atatürk's house,' alleging that a bomb had exploded in the garden of Atatürk's birthplace in Thessaloniki on the night of September 5, causing minor damage to the house<sup>15</sup>. This report, despite being based on a minor incident, quickly spread and provoked masses in Istanbul to attack Greek-owned workplaces, houses, and holy places. Military intervention was necessary to halt the uncontrollable events of September 6-7.

While the DP government initially adopted a very status-quo attitude towards the Cyprus Issue, the Cyprus Issue has become quite problematic due to the attitude of the Turkish people. According to Kösebalan (2014), the Cyprus Issue was only resolved on paper at the Second London Conference in 1959; thanks to this agreement, Cyprus was shaped by a dual structure in which Greek and Turkish Cypriots were under a joint administration, and its independence was guaranteed by the three countries (p. 176). This agreement fundamentally changed the influence of Türkiye, Greece, and England on Cyprus by redefining the region's political balance.

The Cyprus Issue is among the most criticized by the Council of Europe. Despite resolving the Cyprus Issue on paper during the DP government, issues persisted, and the Cyprus Issue became a frequently discussed matter on the EU platform, mainly after Greece attained full membership in the EEC in 1981. Along with the Cyprus Issue, religious policies also attracted attention during the DP government. Taking steps against the principle of secularism, especially the addition of religious courses to schools, caused criticism. According to Kaçmazoğlu's statements (1988), DP tended to use religion more

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<sup>14</sup> United Nations General Assembly. (1954, September 24). 9th Session: 477th plenary meeting (p. 60). <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/737773?ln=en&v=pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Aslan, Z. (2020, September 5). '*Her şey bir haberle mi başladı? 6 Eylül 1955'e doğru*'. Independent Türkçe.

openly after the increasingly difficult economic conditions, and this attitude became a behavioral pattern that determined the religious policy of center-right parties after May 27 (p. 77). Despite initial regulation improvements, the DP's rule saw a limitation of media freedom. Control and censorship over the media increased. It became evident that the DP's libertarian discourse towards the press was restricted, and it became apparent that the DP could make interventions in line with its interests regarding the media.

### 2.1.3 *Türkiye's Europeanization Process in the Shadow of Military Coups and Democratic Struggles*

After the 1957 elections, the tension between the DP and the opposition increased with practices such as the seizure of CHP's assets and the closure of Community Centers and Village Institutes. This situation paved the way for coup attempts in military circles. DP's isolation due to the economic and political crisis was one of the main factors of the coup. As a result, the DP period stands out as a period where democratic discourses and promises of the implementation of freedom could not reach the desired level; on the contrary, it imposed various restrictions. Despite the economic transformation efforts, the DP's policies and problems in political politics domestic and fo led to the coup of May 27, 1960. The uncertainty caused by the coup and the following political turmoil continued for a long time in Türkiye and left deep traces in social memory. For these reasons, May 27, 1960, is considered a critical black mark in Turkish politics, targeting democracy, violating the rule of law, and causing political instability. Türkiye has made significant efforts to comply with European standards. Nevertheless, military interventions have constituted a serious obstacle to long-term democratization and slowed accession to the EU prospects.

The DP period best illustrates the reasons behind Türkiye's often criticized unstable political life. The DP period demonstrates that democracy cannot be achieved solely through legal regulations, as it attempted to implement democracy without establishing the necessary infrastructure, resulting in its incomplete implementation. The ongoing political polarization in all segments of society and the state is one of Türkiye's biggest problems. This political polarization has significantly slowed the country's modernization, replacing potential positive developments with political conflicts and impotence. The 1960 coup paved the way for the tradition of military coups. The executions following the coup (*Adnan Menderes, Fatih Rüştü Zorlu, and Hasan*

*Polatkan*) also provoked further social polarization. It is essential to examine the DP period in depth in order to understand other coups and democratic disruptions. The DP government, which ignored the deepening class differences and conflict between classes after a series of wrong economic policies, prepared the ground for the coup with the harsh measures it took to curb the rising opposition in society.

Despite the purpose of its establishment and the policies it has pursued since its establishment, the Republic of Türkiye has continued the traditions of the Ottoman Empire in many ways, and coups are one of these traditions. Although this state tradition, in which bureaucratic problems are at the center, is defended on the grounds of 'removing the bottlenecks in the regime', 'relieving the political crisis', and 'not being able to solve the problems created by the economic crisis within the boundaries of the current political regime', political coups always mean the interruption of democracy. Although the most basic way to prevent coup attempts is to democratize state institutions, it is necessary not to ignore the fact that many of the institutions Türkiye inherited from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic<sup>16</sup>.

In order to understand the origins of coups in Türkiye and their political and social dynamics, it is essential to examine the DP period and evaluate the political, economic, and social structure of the period. The political tensions and conflicts with the opposition that emerged during the DP's rule have also been reflected in the ongoing political tradition of the Republic of Türkiye, creating a political conflict and a destructive political environment that has always been constant between the opposition and the government. The military coup of May 27, 1960, was followed by the coups of March 12, 1971, September 12, 1980, and February 28, 1997. In addition to these military coups, there have been four failed coup attempts in Türkiye: Colonel Talat Aydemir's coup attempts (February 22, 1962, and May 20-21, 1963), the e-memorandum of April 27, 2007, and the FETÖ coup attempt of July 15, 2016<sup>17</sup>.

Türkiye, which applied for membership in the EEC in 1959, had its dialogues with the EEC strained by the coup. Following the executions during the coup, relations between Türkiye and the EEC, which were in the negotiation process, were frozen. At the time, French President General de Gaulle strongly condemned this human rights

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<sup>16</sup> Uyar, H. (2020, June 23). Türkiye'de Askeri Darbeler ve Nedenleri Üzerine Bir Analiz Denemesi (p. 94). *Journal Of Modern Turkish History Studies, Special Edition*, 77-96.

<sup>17</sup> *Ivi*, p. 84.

violation, and the growing international criticism led to the postponement of Türkiye's relations with the EEC for two years due to the execution of three politicians<sup>18</sup>. The EEC condemned the 1960 coup. The biggest reason for this was that many saw the 1960 coup as an intervention against democracy and the rule of law. The fact that democracy, which was the most fundamental sensitivity of the EEC, was interrupted by illegal means increased reservations towards Türkiye and led to criticism. The coup overthrew the elected government in Türkiye, suspended the democratic process, and violated the constitutional order and the rule of law. The EEC's commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law led to a clear stance against such incidents.

For this reason, the 1960 coup went down in history as an 'intervention that undermined democratic principles' by the EEC. The condemnations that resulted from this coup, especially in the context of Türkiye-Europe relations, caused Türkiye to continue its progress by paying a heavy price. One of the most outstanding examples is the completion of negotiations with the EEC on July 9, 1961, with the Athens Agreement, the 'rival' of the Republic of Türkiye with whom it had the most friction in foreign policy. Diplomatically, Greece strategically used its EEC membership as a balancing instrument against Türkiye in Europe. In this way, Greece gained a stronger diplomatic position against Türkiye within the EU, created difficulties in Türkiye's negotiations with the EEC, and used its influence to slow down the membership process. This situation caused Türkiye to encounter various obstacles in its integration process with Europe. This situation also severely affected the Cyprus Issue, which was briefly touched upon earlier and will be mentioned again in the following chapters, as it is one of the most critical harmonization difficulties.

The Cyprus Issue is one of the biggest obstacles for Türkiye to have a positive outcome in the negotiation process with the EU. This issue was opened to discussion in international platforms in the EU platforms, especially after Greece became a full member of the EEC in 1981, and this led to Türkiye being further isolated in global platforms and being in a weaker position in defending the rights of the Turkish Cypriots after its EEC membership. This situation contributed to the Cyprus Issue becoming a permanent obstacle in Türkiye's EU membership process.

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<sup>18</sup> Özer, M. A. (2009). Avrupa Birliğine Tam Üyeliğin Eşiğinde Türkiye (p. 91). *Journal of Management and Economics Celal Bayar University*, 16(1), 89-105.



The dialogue, which had been interrupted following the 1960 coup, was re-established in July 1962 through the efforts of the 26th Government October 15, 1961 elections, following a temporary period of governance by the National Unity Committee, composed of thirty-eight members of the Turkish Armed Forces (*Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri, TSK*). Afterward, the parties signed the Ankara Agreement in September 1963. The ultimate goal of this partnership agreement was to secure Türkiye's full membership in the EEC and to establish a Customs Union. This agreement envisaged three separate gradual processes for this purpose: Preparatory Phase, Transitional Phase, and Final Phase. Following Türkiye's integration into the EEC, this agreement, which aimed for Türkiye's full membership in the Community, constituted the legal basis of relations between Türkiye and the EU. İsmet İnönü, the Prime Minister at the time the Ankara Agreement was signed, defined the EEC as "the most courageous work of human intelligence throughout human history"<sup>19</sup>.

On the other hand, the most important goal of the Ankara Agreement in terms of the Community was to harmonize the interests between countries and create mutual dependency to ensure sustainable peace. In this context, for policies to be permanent and sustainable, the EEC focused on developing strong relations with countries in its immediate vicinity regarding economic and development policies. In this way, it was aimed to protect peace through regional cooperation and economic development. They demonstrated that they would move forward within the scope of this goal at the Ankara Agreement signing ceremony by stating that they are demonstrating political determination, not history, culture, and geography, in establishing the Europe of the future.

Turkey is part of Europe. That is really the ultimate meaning of what we are doing today. It confirms in incomparably topical form a truth which is more than the summary expression of a geographical concept or of a historical fact that holds good for several centuries. Turkey is part of Europe: and here we think first and foremost of the stupendous personality of Atatürk, whose work meets us at every turn in this country, and of the radical way in which he recast every aspect of life in Turkey and European Lines (Hallstein, 1963, p. 1).

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<sup>19</sup> Demirel, S. (1993, May 9). *Avrupa Günü münasebetiyle düzenlenen törende yaptıkları konuşma*. T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı. <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalari-suleyman-demirel/1718/4143/avrupa-gunu-munasebetiyle-duzenlenen-torende-yaptiklari-konusma>

Following the optimistic climate engendered by the Ankara Agreement, Türkiye's economic development accelerated, the trade volume with the EEC increased, and Türkiye's integration with the EEC accelerated in parallel with its westernization policies. However, in addition to these positive developments, political issues in domestic and foreign policy created shaking situations in Türkiye's goal of full membership in the EEC. The Cyprus Issue that flared up in 1964 is one of the most important examples. During this period, Türkiye's increasing tensions in Cyprus and the threat of military intervention for the security of the Turkish Community on the island were signs that problems would begin in its relations with Europe.

The crisis not only created new difficulties in Türkiye-European relations but also damaged Türkiye's relations with its NATO allies. While these events took place, the preparation period envisaged in the Ankara Agreement ended with the Additional Protocol signed between the EEC and Türkiye on November 13, 1970. The preparation period envisaged in the Ankara Agreement ended with the Additional Protocol; The protocol aimed to gradually adapt Türkiye to the EEC and complete the Customs Union<sup>20</sup>. While it was thought that this step would strengthen relations between Türkiye and the EEC, the domestic political instability in Türkiye and the intervention by the army dealt a blow to Türkiye-Europe relations. The military memorandum (*12 Mart Muhtırası*) in Türkiye in 1971 marked the beginning of a period in which domestic political crises increased. This incident also caused an inevitable cooling in Türkiye's relations with the EEC. Türkiye, heavily criticized by European states after the 1960 coup, began to be referred to as the "second intervention" in civilian politics after the 1971 coup. Europe was concerned about the suspension of democratic processes under military rule, and this situation initiated a debate questioning Türkiye's compliance with democratic values.

The Cyprus Issue, which had been growing in layers since 1950, had a deep impact not only on the balances on the island but also on Türkiye-Europe relations. While Türkiye and the Turkish Cypriots called this intervention the 'Cyprus Peace Operation' (*Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtı*), Greece and the Greek Cypriots called it the 'Turkish invasion of Cyprus' (*Τουρκική εισβολή στην Κύπρο*). This operation made the Cyprus Issue a permanent obstacle in European-Turkish relations and laid the foundation for diplomatic

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<sup>20</sup> Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (1970). *Katma Protokol* (p. 1). [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/ardb/katma\\_protokol.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/ardb/katma_protokol.pdf)

tensions that would last for many years. Following the operation in 1974, not only was no solution found in Cyprus, but the division between the two communities became permanent. In this context, the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus (*Kıbrıs Türk Federe Devleti, TFSC*) was declared by the Turkish Cypriot Administration Assembly on February 13, 1975, with the decision of the Turkish Cypriots to establish their administration. The United Nations Security Council, with its Resolution No. 367, declared that the council considered the declaration of a "Turkish Federative State" in Northern Cyprus as a unilateral move, condemned the military intervention carried out by Türkiye, and stated that it deepened the division on the island and made peace talks between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities difficult<sup>21</sup>. In addition, this situation led to reactions against Türkiye among the members of the EEC. In particular, the harsh stance shown by Greece on the Cyprus Issue negatively affected Türkiye's relations with the EEC.

Amidst these foreign policy developments, the 1970s in Türkiye were characterized by frequent government changes and unstable coalitions. The short-term governments established after the military coup in 1971 deepened political instability. The failure to establish a strong government in Türkiye, especially after the 1977 elections, power vacuums, and disagreements, made it difficult to find solutions to the country's problems. In addition, coalition governments consisting of ideologically polarized parties triggered conflicts between left and right ideologies among the people, leading to increased social tensions. Armed conflicts, bombings, and assassinations between right and left groups became familiar all over the country. All this political impotence and violence dragged Türkiye into another coup process. In order to end this chaotic situation in the country and restore order, the TSK carried out the third coup of the Republic of Türkiye on September 12, 1980. The 1980 coup is considered an event that deeply marks Türkiye's social and political history. The oppression, prohibitions, and human rights violations implemented during this period had long-term effects on Turkish democracy. Due to all this internal turmoil, Türkiye-EEC relations followed an unstable course due to political and economic reasons from the beginning of the 1970s until the

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<sup>21</sup> United Nations Security Council. (1975). *Resolution 367 (1975) of 12 March 1975* (p. 1, Article 2). United Nations Digital Library. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/93485?v=pdf>

second half of the 1980s. After the September 12, 1980 military coup, relations were officially suspended.

The human rights violations experienced in Türkiye after the 1980 coup and the disruptions in the transition to a democratic process increased the criticisms of European states towards Türkiye. The EEC demanded that Türkiye make progress in human rights, rule of law, and democracy during the membership process. On July 1, 1983, France, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Denmark filed an application to the Council against Türkiye based on Article 24 of the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>22</sup>. The EEC increased its criticisms of Türkiye and demands for democracy. Although Türkiye's democratization process started again with the 1982 Constitution, relations with Europe entered a cold period. The EEC stopped providing financial aid to Türkiye, and relations came to a freezing point. Following the new constitution formed in 1982, military rule in Türkiye ended with the elections held in 1983. Türkiye's democratization endured interruptions after each intervention, which strained ties with the European Community and delayed the integration process.

However, with Greece becoming a member of the EEC in 1981, another critical factor that would affect Türkiye's relations with the Community came into play. Greece's attitude towards Türkiye was seen as a balancing factor in Türkiye's membership process, and this caused relations to become even more difficult. Greece took a position that constantly opposed Türkiye's membership process, and this led to Türkiye's relations with the Community becoming more complicated. This situation deepened, especially due to the Cyprus Issue between the two countries and the disagreements in the Aegean Sea. Following these processes, the Cyprus Issue became one of the biggest obstacles to Türkiye's full membership path.

The Cyprus Issue, which became a major obstacle in foreign policy, was followed by Türkiye's domestic political problems. The period in 1984, when the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Kürdistan İşçi Partisi*, **PKK**) first took armed action, emerged as a new obstacle in Türkiye's relations with Europe. During this period, the PKK's armed actions in Southeastern Anatolia hardened Türkiye's domestic security policies, and the Kurdish

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<sup>22</sup> Council of Europe. (1985, December 7). *Report of the Commission: France v. Turkey (Application No. 9940/82), Norway v. Turkey (Application No. 9941/82), Denmark v. Turkey (Application No. 9942/82), Sweden v. Turkey (Application No. 9943/82), Netherlands v. Turkey (Application No. 9944/82)*. European Commission. <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/app/conversion/pdf/?library=ECHR&id=001-95690&filename=001-95690.pdf>

Issue began to attract more attention in the international arena. The EU increased its criticism of Türkiye on human rights and minority rights. The Kurdish Issue became a significant political obstacle in Türkiye's EU membership process. Türkiye, which was already heavily criticized for the coups that had become almost a tradition, was frequently criticized for human rights violations and disruptions in the transition to democracy due to the policies it implemented regarding the Kurdish Issues. Throughout the process, the EEC frequently demanded that Türkiye make progress in human rights, the rule of law, and democracy during the membership process.

In 1987, without waiting for the completion of the periods foreseen in the Ankara Agreement, an application for full membership to the EEC was made on April 14 under the leadership of the at that time Prime Minister Turgut Özal. This application was part of Türkiye's efforts to deepen its relations with Europe. Türkiye made its full membership application separately based on Article 237 of the Treaty of Rome, Article 98 of the European Coal and Steel Community (*ECSC*) Treaty, and Article 205 of the European Atomic Energy Community (*EURATOM*) Treaty<sup>23</sup>. These applications were made separately for each Community in order to deepen Türkiye's political and economic integration with Europe. Thus, Türkiye initiated the official processes to join the EC within the framework of the relevant articles of these important treaties. Özal believed Türkiye's development and modernization process should be crowned with EU membership<sup>24</sup>. This application strongly demonstrated Türkiye's desire for integration with the West.

The Commission's opinion on Türkiye's application for full membership was completed on December 18, 1989. The 1989 report titled "Commission Opinion on Türkiye's Application for Accession to the European Community" stated that Türkiye was suitable for membership but emphasized that its economic development was inadequate and that it would not be able to compete in Europe's newly emerging single market. It also warned that Türkiye's accession could strain the Community's resources. According to the general assessments made, the Commission considered that it would not be appropriate to enter into new accession negotiations at a time when the Community itself

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<sup>23</sup> Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs. (n.d.). *Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği ilişkileri kronolojisi* (p. 1). [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/5%20Ekim/turkiye\\_avrupa\\_birligi\\_iliskileri\\_kronolojisi.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/5%20Ekim/turkiye_avrupa_birligi_iliskileri_kronolojisi.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Danforth, N. (2008). Ideology and pragmatism in Turkish foreign policy: From Atatürk to the AKP (p. 89). *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 7(3), 83–95. <http://turkishpolicy.com/files/articlepdf/ideology-and-pragmatism-in-turkish-foreign-policy-from-ataturk-to-the-akp-fall-2008-en.pdf>

was undergoing major changes and the whole of Europe was in a period of uncertainty<sup>25</sup>. The Commission of the European Communities (1985) stated in its report that the political and economic situation in Türkiye led the Commission to believe that it would not be beneficial to start accession negotiations with Türkiye immediately (p. 8).

Nevertheless, Türkiye's accession process was not completely closed, and it suggested that some important steps be taken to ensure that both sides progressed towards greater interdependence and integration. The report gathers these recommendations under four main headings: Completing the Customs Union, resuming and strengthening financial cooperation, encouraging cooperation in industrial and technological fields, and developing political-cultural relations. It was stated that if Türkiye follows these recommendations given in the report, the two sides will embody their will to build a common future.

Previously outlined discussions indicate that Türkiye's full integration into Europe was hindered by persistent political and economic challenges, with the 1989 Commission's opinion serving as a definitive confirmation of these obstacles. However, as a positive step, the Customs Union Agreement signed on December 13, 1995, 'Türkiye-EU Association Council Decision No. 1/95 on the implementation of the last period of the Customs Union' was approved by the European Parliament; it entered into force in 1996 and ensured the free movement of industrial products<sup>26</sup>. The Customs Union was accepted as an essential step in Türkiye's integration process with the EU and deepened Türkiye's commercial relations. With the Customs Union Agreement, Türkiye began to implement EU common customs tariffs, and this process was accepted as a step towards EU membership; thus, the 'Last Period' of the Türkiye-EU Association Relationship was initiated.

In addition to these positive steps, Türkiye was going through a politically unstable period. The Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, **RP**) emerged as the first party in the RP was disturbing the secular segment and the army with its policies based on Islamic values. Erbakan's Developing-8 initiative, relations with countries such as Iran and Libya, and close contacts with Islamist groups were perceived as threats to the secular order.

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<sup>25</sup> Commission of the European Communities. (1985, December 20). *Commission opinion on Turkey's request for accession to the community* (SEC(89) 2290 final/2) (p. 8). Archive of European Integration. <http://aei.pitt.edu/4475/1/4475.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs. (n.d.). *Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği ilişkileri kronolojisi* (p. 2). [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/5%20Ekim/turkiye\\_avrupa\\_birligi\\_iliskileri\\_kronolojisi.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/5%20Ekim/turkiye_avrupa_birligi_iliskileri_kronolojisi.pdf)

During this period, social polarization increased, and discussions of secularism intensified. Türkiye's domestic politics became polarized during this period, and the army began to show a tendency to intervene in civilian affairs, saying, "Secularism is in danger." Unfortunately, all this polarization led to another interruption of democracy; the army continued the tradition of coups and carried out a military intervention known as the "post-modern coup" on February 28, 1997. The decisions taken on February 28 included a series of military and bureaucratic interventions aimed at weakening the government and limiting Islamic influences. While transformations in favor of secularism were made in education, media, judiciary, and business, the army assumed a political control role. The Refah-Yol Government (*a portmanteau of the Turkish names of the two parties in the coalition: Welfare Party and True Path Party*) was eventually forced to resign in June 1997.

This process increased secular-religious tensions in Türkiye and deeply affected political life. It also had economic and social consequences and caused significant reactions from many groups, especially the Islamic segment. The coup initiated a period in which democracy weakened in Türkiye, and human rights violations, restrictions on civil liberties, and discussions on secularism became the agenda. While the EU was expecting progress, especially on human rights and democratization, this intervention showed that Türkiye was moving away from European standards. For this reason, Türkiye's membership process was not advanced at the 1997 Luxembourg Summit, and Türkiye experienced incredible disappointment. Türkiye, which is at odds with the democratization, human rights, and rule of law criteria of the European Union, was not included among the decisions taken at the European Council Summit held in Luxembourg regarding the EU's Fifth Enlargement process. The Luxembourg Summit, which took place shortly after the February 28 coup, known as the post-modern coup, was quite negative for Türkiye. Türkiye's membership application was evaluated at the Summit. However, the EU did not accept Türkiye as a candidate country, claiming that the sufficient conditions for full membership were not met; the EU prioritized Eastern European countries in the enlargement process.

Following Türkiye's reaction, the European Commission prepared a document titled "European Strategy for Türkiye" in 1998 to develop Türkiye-EU relations. Then, it published the first "Progress Report" containing the Commission's views and

recommendations on Türkiye's Progress Towards Accession<sup>27</sup>. The independence of the judicial system in Türkiye was questioned in this report; the fact that the military tutelage and the tradition of coups in Türkiye were in a position to put pressure on the government was not considered to be in line with EU standards<sup>28</sup>. The structure of the State Security Courts, violations of civilian trial processes, and deficiencies in judicial independence are covered extensively in the report. The Commission's reservations regarding Human Rights and the Protection of Minorities in Türkiye are also included in this report; previously mentioned discussions indicate that policies towards the Kurdish population in Türkiye became increasingly repressive, particularly after 1984, to the extent that the term 'Kurdish Issue' came into common use.

The report touches on this situation, criticizing the oppression of the Kurdish population in Southeastern Türkiye, the villages to which they were forcibly displaced, and the state of emergency policies implemented in this region; Regarding minority rights, it is emphasized that Türkiye protects the rights of minorities recognized by the Treaty of Lausanne (Greeks, Armenians, Jews), but that Kurds do not have official minority status<sup>29</sup>. Restrictions on the Kurdish language and difficulties in the exercise of cultural rights are also discussed. The report also touches on the Cyprus Issue; Türkiye, which has controlled the northern part of the island since 1974, has been criticized for continuing its military presence despite UN resolutions, and it has been stated that the international Community's failure to recognize the independence of Northern Cyprus and Türkiye's relations with this region make the EU membership process difficult<sup>30</sup>. In addition to these fundamental problems, the 1998 Türkiye Progress Report drew attention to issues such as inflation and public debt in Türkiye's market economy and stated that more reforms were needed. It also suggested that Türkiye's industrial and agricultural sectors be brought into line with the EU and that the customs union be expanded, and it emphasized that progress should be made in areas such as environment, energy, and consumer rights in terms of harmonization with the EU acquis.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> European Commission. (1998). *Turkey 1998 Progress Report* (p. 8). T.C. Ministry of European Union Affairs.

[https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/ab\\_iliskileri/adayliksureci/ilerlemeraporlari/turkiye\\_ilerleme\\_rap\\_1998.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/ab_iliskileri/adayliksureci/ilerlemeraporlari/turkiye_ilerleme_rap_1998.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> *Ivi*, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> *Ivi*, p. 17.



The disappointment caused by the Luxembourg Summit reversed this negative course with the Helsinki Summit held in December 1999; the Helsinki Summit started a new era in Türkiye's relations with the EU. With the decision taken at the Summit, Türkiye was officially accepted as a candidate country for the EU. This paved the way for Türkiye to start full membership negotiations with the EU and gave new momentum to Türkiye-EU relations. Türkiye, accepted as a candidate country, was officially encouraged by the EU to implement the political and economic reforms necessary to start full membership negotiations. With the granting of candidate country status to Türkiye at the Helsinki Summit, it was emphasized that the Copenhagen Criteria determined by the EU (democracy, human rights, rule of law, and market economy) should be fulfilled.

These criteria covered the political and economic reforms necessary for Türkiye's accession to the EU. Two fundamental foreign policy issues that needed to be resolved during Türkiye's membership process were also brought to the agenda at the Summit. These were the Cyprus Issue and the Aegean issues between Türkiye and Greece. The Helsinki Summit encouraged the peaceful resolution of these problems and stated that Türkiye's progress in these matters would positively impact the EU process. In particular, the EU's plan to include Cyprus in the 2004 enlargement required Türkiye to focus more on the Cyprus Issue. Following the cold period following the Luxembourg Summit, the acceptance of Türkiye as a candidate country at the Helsinki Summit put Türkiye-EU relations back on track; this positive progress revitalized relations between the two sides and gave Türkiye hope on its path to full EU membership. The Summit encouraged Türkiye's efforts to bring its foreign policy and domestic reform processes into line with EU standards. The 1999 Helsinki Summit is considered one of the most critical turning points in Türkiye's EU membership process.

Amidst these developments, which played a pivotal role in shaping Türkiye's efforts to align with European standards and advance its internal reform process, the trajectory of the membership process was also significantly shaped by developments within the EU. In order to gain a thorough understanding of the factors that have contributed to Türkiye's journey toward EU membership, it is crucial to analyze the significant EU developments that occurred before 1999, as these events have significantly impacted and delineated the membership process. Developments within the EU not only created the conditions determined for the candidate countries but also affected the EU's

enlargement strategy and political identity. In order to better understand Türkiye's integration process with Europe before 1999, the EU's institutional reforms, political decisions, and enlargement policies are of great importance in terms of understanding the course of Türkiye's integration efforts with Europe.

## *2.2. European Union Developments Shaping Türkiye's Path to Membership: Pre-1999 Perspective*

Analysis of EU events is necessary to comprehend better the elements that have shaped Türkiye's long path to EU membership. Even if Türkiye is pursuing its own internal reform measures, the EU's political choices and institutional changes have considerably influenced the integration process's trajectory. These developments have significantly influenced the criteria for the acceptance of candidate countries while concurrently reshaping the European Union's enlargement policy and political identity. As a result, the EU's fundamental institutional reforms, treaties, and strategic decisions provide important insight into the background that has shaped Türkiye's European integration. In the aftermath of World War II, Europe saw integration not only as a mechanism for economic recovery but also as a political necessity to prevent future conflicts, foster unity, and preserve lasting stability.

... There will be no peace in Europe if the States are reconstituted on the basis of national sovereignty, with all that that entails in terms of prestige politics and economic protectionism. ... Prosperity for the States of Europe and the social developments that must go with it will only be possible if they form a federation or a 'European entity' that makes them into a common economic unit (Monnet, 1943).

Monnet's speech to the French National Liberation Committee in Algiers reflected his belief that only economic and political unity could prevent future conflicts and ensure prosperity for the region. This vision laid the ideological foundations for the European project. World War II, recognized as one of the most catastrophic conflicts in human history, inflicted widespread devastation across the globe. The profound impact of this destruction served as a crucial lesson for humanity. Leaders and policymakers in Europe realized that radical nationalism played a significant role in the start and spread of World War II. This determination led many leaders and policymakers to understand the need to cooperate in order to avoid a similar disaster again.

As expressed by Jean Monnet, one of the important political figures of the 20th century, the states in Europe understood the importance of unity and integration in Europe. European leaders and politicians adopted the idea of cooperating to repair the economic infrastructure damaged by the devastation caused by the war and to revive it in the post-war period. European states understood that working together and integrating were critical to ensuring peace and prosperity in the post-war period. After realizing the importance of economic cooperation, policymakers adopted the understanding that economic integration would form the basis of political integration; after the war, they discovered that trade and investments between countries should be encouraged.

### *2.2.1. Key Treaties and Institutional Changes in the EU*

As a result of the realization that there was no other chance for the people of Europe other than unity, the process of European integration was gradually initiated with the adopted understanding of harmony; raw materials that could cause war (*coal and steel*) were placed under international management with the Paris Treaty on April 18, 1951. The ECSC one of European history's most crucial integration projects, was established with the Paris Treaty signed between Germany, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Italy, and Luxembourg. The primary purpose of the ECSC was to prevent any conflict that might occur due to raw materials (*coal and steel*) among its members, primarily France and West Germany. Policymakers thought coal and steel, the period's raw materials, could cause a 'possible' war. They aimed to avoid the harms of extreme nationalism by establishing common interests through this Community, which they saw as the first step towards a European alliance.

After signing the Treaty of Rome on March 25, 1957, European states established the ECSC, EEC, and EURATOM. The economic and sectoral union formed by the ECSC was aimed not only at the coal and steel sectors but also at general economic integration with the establishment of the EEC, thus going beyond sectoral integration. Customs union, freedom of movement, free competition, successful implementation of community trade, and agricultural policies provided space for peacefully understanding and resolving 'possible' disputes on economic issues. Later, ECSC, EURATOM, and EEC institutions merged with the Merger Treaty signed in Brussels on April 8, 1965. Strengthened by their successes, European integration was named the European Communities (EC) by merging the judicial, legislative, and administrative bodies of the

three European Communities. Gordon L. Weil (1967) stated that, according to the preamble to The Merger Treaty, the member states considered that the unification of the three communities would contribute to 'progress towards European unity' (p. 57).

It was assumed that on this path to European unity, agreements on economic issues that did not cause problems would eventually become more comprehensive cooperation, bringing countries closer together economically and politically<sup>31</sup>. One of the most important steps towards this goal was the establishment of the Customs Union on July 1, 1968; customs duties were abolished entirely between the six countries in 1968, and common policies were established, especially in trade and agriculture. Rapidly growing trade ties were a turning point that strengthened the foundation of the EEC. The peaceful atmosphere that followed these successful processes facilitated the emergence of the fundamental characteristics of European integration: enlargement and deepening.

Through the policies of enlargement, the aim was to push the national attitudes of the member states to the background with allegiance to a supranational organization, thus facilitating reconciliation and solidarity among the members. The legal basis of the enlargement policy, which is shaped around the common interest and pursued in order to secure a peaceful atmosphere, is provided by Article 49 of the Treaty on the European Union. Article 49 (previously Article 49 TEU) states that any European country upholding the values outlined in Article 2 and showing a commitment to advancing these values is eligible to apply for Union membership<sup>32</sup>. In other words, being a European state requires a commitment to respect and promote the values specified in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (*TEU*). These values are respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law; respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities; and respect for a pluralistic society, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and equality between women and men<sup>33</sup>.

Through the policies of deepening, the aim was to establish a strong (especially supranational) institutional structure. European policymakers were aware that they had to keep the members and political situations in international politics, including developing

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<sup>31</sup> Çiftçi, S. (2005). Treaties, collective responses and the determinants of aggregate support for European integration (p. 475). *European Union Politics*, 6(4), 469–492. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116505057818>

<sup>32</sup> European Union. (2016). *Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union: Article 49*. EUR-Lex. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12016M049>

<sup>33</sup> European Union. (2016). *Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union: Article 2*. EUR-Lex. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12016M002>

common policies with the delegation of authority states together to adapt to the changing economy to strengthen the institutional structure and ensure political integration. In this way, they aimed to strengthen the EU's political unity and progress in the fields of common foreign policy, economy, defense, and law. The aim was to move away from the aggressive policies brought by nationalism with a deeper political and economic integration among the member states and a commitment to a supranational organization.

#### 2.2.2. *Early Waves of EU Enlargement (Pre-1999)*

This successful process led the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Ireland to apply for Community membership. The First Enlargement occurred on January 1, 1973, with Ireland, Denmark, and the United Kingdom -which had been rejected twice before-. At the same time as these countries, negotiations were held with Norway, but Norway could not join the Community due to the demand of the Norwegian people. The Second Enlargement wave took place on January 1, 1981, with the accession of Greece. Although Greece was not ready politically and economically, the member states agreed that a positive process for Greece could be carried out more effectively within the Union. As mentioned, Greece's accession to the Union negatively impacts Türkiye's membership aspirations.

As expected, besides all these successful initiatives, the global economic recession caused by the 1973 oil crisis and the internal conflicts over sharing the financial burden led to an atmosphere called "Eurosclerosis" in the early 1980s. German economist Herbert Giersch popularized the term after his article in 1985<sup>34</sup>. Eurosclerosis describes the economic stagnation that occurs due to the continuing high unemployment rates despite economic growth, rigidities in the labor market, excessive regulations, and generous social policies - the struggle against high unemployment rates and the slowdown in the integration process despite the EEC's growing economy, brought about this period of pessimism; this pessimism deepened as the EEC failed to remove trade barriers and fully ensure free movement. In an effort to eliminate this pessimism, the Community took action; based on the White Paper prepared by the Commission under the presidency of Jacques Delors in 1985, the preparation of the Draft Treaty on the European Union was initiated in February 1984. In order to eliminate the atmosphere of pessimism, first of all, the Schengen Agreement was signed on June 14, 1985, and the EC, which became even

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<sup>34</sup> Investopedia. (2011, January 5). *Eurosclerosis*. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/eurosclerosis.asp>

stronger in the process, followed an effective path by removing the "passport control" obligation between member states.

During this process, the Third Enlargement (also known as the Iberian Enlargement) took place on January 1, 1986, with Spain and Portugal. Due to the geopolitical importance of the Mediterranean region for the EU, the enlargement took place despite all hesitations. Germany, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain, Luxembourg, and Portugal signed the Single European Act on February 17, 1986, followed by Denmark, Italy, and Greece on February 28, 1986. The Single European Act aimed to complete the internal market of the EEC, eliminate borders, and achieve full economic integration by 1992. During this period, the EU carried out major reforms in its internal structure, but its enlargement policies caused candidate countries such as Türkiye to fall from the priority list. With the Single European Act, which entered into force in 1987, the Treaties establishing the European Communities underwent a comprehensive change. During this process, the European Flag was raised in Brussels on May 29, 1986, by the decision of the European Parliament. The European Community took one step further and started conducting effective commercial transactions, thereby establishing the European Political Cooperation (*EPC*).

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990, East and West Germany were united and became part of Germany. The member states enacted the Maastricht Treaty on February 7, 1992. They first used the term 'European Union' in the Maastricht Treaty. Then, the Copenhagen Criteria, determined at the Copenhagen Summit in 1993 and developed to be applied to candidate countries to join the Community, were also implemented. The Copenhagen Criteria, with which Türkiye faced the most significant challenges during its membership process and for non-compliance with which the Council criticized it, serve as a fundamental guide for countries aspiring to join the Union. The Copenhagen Criteria include many vital criteria such as the democratic status of states, socio-economic status, how they implement human rights, or the effectiveness of institutions protecting human rights, having a functioning market economy, and protecting minority rights<sup>35</sup>. The fourth enlargement process occurred in 1995, with Austria, Finland, and Sweden gaining access to the Union. This enlargement reflects the

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<sup>35</sup> Copenhagen European Council. (1993, June 22). *Presidency conclusions/Copenhagen European Council*. European Council. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/enlargement/ec/pdf/cop\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/enlargement/ec/pdf/cop_en.pdf)

end of the Cold War. These three countries, which preferred to remain neutral during the Cold War, applied to become members of the European Union after the end of the Cold War and were officially included in the Union on January 1, 1995.

The Fifth Enlargement, which took place after the Fourth Enlargement, was a historic step for the European continent, and this enlargement was a significant turning point. Although it was the most comprehensive enlargement in the EU enlargement, it was a painful process for both candidate countries and current EU members. Countries wishing to become members of the EU had to comply with the requirements of the Copenhagen Criteria in every field. For this reason, the EU followed every stage of the enlargement process with its guidance and monitoring mechanisms and required the applicant countries to reorganize many areas, from public policies to the economy. At the Luxembourg Summit in December 1997, the EU Council initiated the Fifth Enlargement process, granting candidate status to twelve countries, including Poland, Estonia, Slovakia, the Greek Cypriot Administration, Malta, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Despite Türkiye's request to join the EEC on April 14, 1987, it was not granted candidate status due to its failure to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria. The European Council stated that Türkiye should progress in democratization, protect human rights, improve relations with Greece, and find a fair solution to the Cyprus problem. However, as mentioned before, the Ankara Government did not give up its insistence. Thus, at the Summits of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe held in Helsinki in December 1999, the leaders officially approved Türkiye's candidacy.

This progress has created new responsibilities under the Copenhagen Criteria, changed the dynamics of relationships, and made structural discussions and reforms possible. The years 1999-2010, however, were far from smooth; these years were characterized by a complicated process that brought together regional issues, local political reforms, and shifts in EU objectives. Following the beginning of debates in 2005, Türkiye's development on the European route accelerated, yet it was nonlinear. The following chapter will examine the specifics of the 1999-2010 period, including the challenges faced, the process's impact on Türkiye and the EU, and efforts to adhere to EU standards.

### III. Türkiye's Accession Process: Key Developments between 1999 and 2010

The period between 1999-2010 was the most dynamic and transformative years in Türkiye's EU accession process. As mentioned in the Historical Overview Chapter, the historical importance of the Helsinki Summit forms the basis of Türkiye's accession process. It started with granting candidate status to Türkiye with the Helsinki Summit. This period was characterized by a non-linear trajectory in Türkiye-EU relations, marked by ups and downs, comprehensive reforms, and various obstacles. Türkiye's journey towards EU membership was not straightforward. Following these processes, especially with the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP*) that came to power after 2002, Türkiye moved away from the EU accession process today.

In this chapter, the Regular Reports from the Commission on Türkiye's Progress Towards Accession, Accession Partnership Documents, and Türkiye's National Programs published between 1999-2010 reveal the development of the country's EU membership journey. However, examining all the documents from this period in detail may fill the study with unnecessary information. Therefore, only the most essential documents reflecting the breaking points of the process have been considered in the analysis. In this thesis, the 2001 and 2008 Accession Partnership Documents were deliberately selected based on their significance to the EU accession process. While the 2001 document represents the beginning of the reform process, the 2008 document reflects the decrease in this momentum. Similarly, the 2001 and 2008 documents from the National Programs were examined with priority, while the 2003 program was included only as a brief reference to show the initial determination of the AKP government, which was a new breath. The 2004 and 2010 Regular Reports from the Commission on Türkiye's Progress Towards Accession were examined in detail. While 2004 represented the period when Türkiye decided to start negotiations with the EU, 2010 indicated when reforms slowed down, and criticism increased. The reports from other years were summarized thematically only in order to understand the main trends. This selective approach aims to clarify the essential dynamics of the process while ensuring that the study remains focused and analytical. This way, attention is drawn only to the most critical developments, ensuring that the reader focuses on the most important issues.



Following the Helsinki Summit, as part of the EU's enlargement strategy, Türkiye faced major criticisms in implementing political reforms and criteria such as the rule of law, and it reshaped its domestic and foreign policies, particularly within the framework of the Copenhagen Criteria. However, the slowdown in the harmonization process between the parties in the following years, domestic political developments, and the changing political atmosphere in the EU caused the process to become complex and multi-layered. This section will chronologically discuss the most critical developments between 1999 and 2010, and the obstacles Türkiye faced will be examined.

Although Türkiye's candidacy was officially accepted at the Helsinki Summit, this status was more than just a symbol; it brought concrete reform expectations and obligations; the Helsinki Summit, which was one of the most critical turning points in Türkiye's EU membership process, was not only a turning point but also a structural foundation for the process. The summit established a clear roadmap for Türkiye, reflecting its formalized candidacy status. This development will guide our forthcoming initiatives and strategies. Examining the summit's details reveals critical elements that have influenced both Türkiye's domestic dynamics and the EU's enlargement strategies. At the summit, Türkiye's candidate country status was recognized, and it stated that it would be evaluated under the same conditions as other candidate countries. In other words, this status did not remain only as the first step towards Türkiye's membership; it also brought with it the obligation to carry out comprehensive reforms and, in particular, to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria.

### *3.1. Helsinki Summit (December 10-11, 1999)*

At the Helsinki Summit held on December 10-11, 1999, a series of decisions were taken indicating a new stage in the enlargement process; steps were also taken to ensure the Union itself had effective, reformed institutions, a strengthened common security and defense policy, and a competitive, employment-creating, sustainable economy<sup>36</sup>. The Millennium Declaration adopted at the summit gave a new direction to the enlargement process of the European Union and determined the steps to be taken for the stability and prosperity of a more comprehensive European geography; it was aimed for the EU to both reform and strengthen its institutions and to develop its defense and

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<sup>36</sup> European Parliament. (1999). *Helsinki European Council: Presidency conclusions, 10-11 December 1999*. European Parliament. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hell\\_en.htm](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hell_en.htm)

security policies. In this summit, which focused particularly on the enlargement strategy, The EU decided to accelerate the negotiation process with Eastern European countries and the Baltic states; the EU confirmed the accession process covering 13 candidate states within a single framework, and it was stated that each country should participate in the negotiation process on an equal basis. In addition to all this, the EU Council emphasized at the summit that compliance with the economic and political criteria (democracy, human rights, rule of law, and market economy) determined in Copenhagen is a prerequisite for starting membership negotiations<sup>37</sup>. As previously emphasized in the Historical Overview Chapter, accepting Türkiye as a candidate country is one of the most striking decisions of the summit. A roadmap was presented to Türkiye to prepare for negotiations under the same conditions as other candidate countries. However, it was emphasized that it must meet the Copenhagen Criteria to start full membership negotiations.

Although Türkiye's candidate country status was criticized at the European Commission meeting in early December due to the Abdullah Öcalan case, it was concluded that these criticisms were not directly related to the candidacy issue<sup>38</sup>. There were various reasons for Türkiye received candidacy status at the Helsinki Summit. The earthquakes that occurred in Türkiye and Greece in the summer of 1999 and the Turkish-Greek earthquake diplomacy are among these reasons. First, both countries helped each other in the Gölcük earthquake (Türkiye) and the Athens earthquake (Greece) that occurred three weeks later<sup>39</sup>. Softening relations with Greece is a positive step for the European Commission. On the other hand, Türkiye's announcement as a candidate member was a step that would enable the EU to be freed from the criticisms of the EU as a 'Christian Club' that had risen in the international arena, especially after the rejection of Morocco in 1987 (the European Communities rejected Morocco because it was not a European country) and from the left, liberal and green views that had begun to see the EU as a project of common values (religion and culture).

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<sup>37</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyet Merkez Bankası. (1999). *Helsinki Zirvesi ve Türkiye* (para. 3). TCMB. [https://www.tcmb.gov.tr/wps/wcm/connect/db0f1c6e-03f2-48c7-8b8c-6c77706de889/Helsinki\\_Zirvesi\\_ve\\_Turkiye.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE-db0f1c6e-03f2-48c7-8b8c-6c77706de889-m3fBaDh](https://www.tcmb.gov.tr/wps/wcm/connect/db0f1c6e-03f2-48c7-8b8c-6c77706de889/Helsinki_Zirvesi_ve_Turkiye.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE-db0f1c6e-03f2-48c7-8b8c-6c77706de889-m3fBaDh)

<sup>38</sup> *Ivi*, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Kinzer, S. (1999, September 13). *Earthquakes help warm Greek-Turkish relations*. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/09/13/world/earthquakes-help-warm-greek-turkish-relations.html?n=Top%2FNews%2FScience%2FTopics%2FBirds>

On the other hand, Türkiye's independence of the infrastructure of terrorism in the Southeastern region from its neighbors was also evaluated positively by the council during the process. All these developments and factors effectively affected Türkiye's candidacy status at the Helsinki Summit<sup>40</sup>. Moreover, Türkiye's recent reform efforts, the political and economic developments experienced, and the fact that a more stable political power governs it influenced the candidacy decision.

In the final declaration published by the EU, it was stated that Türkiye has an equal status with other candidate states. Another important emphasis of the Helsinki Summit was the preparations for enlargement. In this context, attention was drawn to the unresolved border disputes between the candidate countries. This demand, which closely concerns Türkiye, was included in the declaration of the European Council, which emphasized the inclusiveness of the enlargement process. The declaration stated that the 13 candidate countries were included in the accession process on equal terms and that they should share the values and goals set out in the EU's treaties. In addition, the United Nations Charter emphasized the principle of peaceful resolution, and it stated that candidate countries should make maximum efforts to resolve existing border disputes. It was also emphasized that unresolved disputes should be referred to the International Court of Justice within a reasonable period, and the European Council stated that it would examine these situations until the end of 2004 (European Parliament, 1999, para. 4). This indicates that steps should be taken to resolve the ongoing problems between Türkiye and Greece (especially the Aegean continental shelf dispute and, most importantly, the Cyprus Issue). The necessity of negotiations for Cyprus's solution process and the need to find a peaceful solution to the division were underlined.

In conclusion, the Helsinki Summit was a critical turning point in Türkiye's 36-year membership quest, and it went down in history as one of Türkiye's greatest diplomatic successes on the path to EU membership. The prestige brought by the Candidacy status after the Summit attracted more economic investments to Türkiye. At the same time, the way was opened to establish closer economic and political relations with the EU; moreover, after the Summit, the parliament approved a 135 million euro aid

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<sup>40</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyet Merkez Bankası. (1999). *Helsinki Zirvesi ve Türkiye* (p. 4). TCMB. [https://www.tcmb.gov.tr/wps/wcm/connect/db0f1c6e-03f2-48c7-8b8c-6c77706de889/Helsinki\\_Zirvesi\\_ve\\_Turkiye.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE-db0f1c6e-03f2-48c7-8b8c-6c77706de889-m3fBaDh](https://www.tcmb.gov.tr/wps/wcm/connect/db0f1c6e-03f2-48c7-8b8c-6c77706de889/Helsinki_Zirvesi_ve_Turkiye.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE-db0f1c6e-03f2-48c7-8b8c-6c77706de889-m3fBaDh)

package for Türkiye. Of course, Türkiye's strategic location, its search for stability in the region, and the EU's efforts to determine its future borders were decisive in granting Türkiye a candidacy. However, no matter how vital this candidacy was, it was a fact that the requirement to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria, which was a prerequisite for starting the negotiation process, would be pretty challenging for Türkiye.

### 3.2. *Copenhagen Criteria*

The Copenhagen Criteria, determined at the Copenhagen Summit held on June 21-22, 1993, include guidelines that determine whether countries wishing to join the EU are eligible to join the EU. The criteria include many important criteria such as the democratic status of states, their socio-economic status, their implementation of human rights or the effectiveness of institutions protecting human rights, having a functioning market economy and protecting minority rights, and their compliance with the EU acquis<sup>41</sup>. The country applying for candidacy must accept the aims of the union and the obligations of membership and shape its policies in line with the Copenhagen criteria. Therefore, these criteria have also shaped Türkiye's EU accession process. Nations aspiring to join the EU must follow the rules outlined in the Presidency Conclusions. Reports from the Copenhagen European Council about the candidacy talks and other topics: In order to be eligible for membership, the candidate nation must have established stable institutions that uphold democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, a functioning market economy, and the ability to withstand market forces and competitive pressures within the Union (Presidency Conclusion Copenhagen European Council, 1993, para. 4).

Another reason the adoption of the Copenhagen Criteria is so important is that it shows that EU membership is not limited to economic development: thanks to these criteria, it has become more apparent that the EU is not only an economic but also a political community. The Copenhagen Criteria have shown that the EU's enlargement process, which accelerated after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the communist countries in Eastern Europe, was based not only on economic but also on democratic values. The criteria have shown candidate countries that it is not enough to have a market economy but also that they must ensure the functioning of democratic

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<sup>41</sup> European Parliament. (1999). *Helsinki European Council: Presidency conclusions, 10-11 December 1999*. European Parliament. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hell\\_en.htm](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hell_en.htm)

institutions, establish the rule of law, and undertake the obligation to protect human rights. The Copenhagen Criteria aim to preserve the stability and sustainability of the EU in the long term. These criteria, which serve as a standardization function in the rather complicated EU's enlargement strategy, aim to guarantee the EU's enlargement without damaging its democratic value system.

The applicability and institutional framework of the Copenhagen Criteria are not only based on the 1993 European Union Council Copenhagen Summit Final Declaration; The framework of these criteria was established with The Maastricht Treaty (also known as the Treaty on the European Union) went into effect on November 1, 1993, and the binding arrangements were created with the Nice Treaty on February 1, 2003. The Maastricht Treaty, which laid the foundations of the European Union, provided an institutional structure to the membership process by determining the goals of economic stability and financial discipline and established a common foreign and security policy with the aim of "protecting the common values, fundamental interests and independence of the Union"<sup>42</sup>. At the same time, Article 49 of the Maastricht Treaty (formerly Article O) states that only "European countries" can apply for EU membership<sup>43</sup>. The emphasis in this geographical criterion states that states located on the European continent can apply for the membership process by complying with the EU values and criteria. The Copenhagen Criteria have deepened this framework established by the Maastricht Treaty. While the Maastricht Treaty established the institutional structure, the Copenhagen Criteria added political, economic, and human rights standards to this framework, thus concretizing the membership process. The EU membership process has gained a more concrete and political framework with the Copenhagen Criteria and the institutional reforms that have become evident with the Maastricht Treaty. However, no official mechanism has been developed to monitor the implementation of the criteria adopted in 1993 and the compliance of the candidate countries. This deficiency has created some setbacks in the EU's enlargement process.

When a far-right party in Austria, Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ, Austrian Freedom Party), joined the government in 2000, it caused a severe backlash in Europe;

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<sup>42</sup> European Central Bank. (n.d.). *What is the Maastricht Treaty?* European Central Bank. [https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb-and-you/explainers/tell-me-more/html/maastricht\\_treaty.en.html](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb-and-you/explainers/tell-me-more/html/maastricht_treaty.en.html)

<sup>43</sup> European Union. (2020, January 17). *Treaty on European Union - Joining the EU*. EUR-Lex. Retrieved October 27, 2024, from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/treaty-on-european-union-joining-the-eu.html>

the party leader's anti-immigrant rhetoric and positive references to the Nazi past were seen as contradicting the fundamental values of the EU (democracy, human rights, the rule of law) in Austria<sup>44</sup>. Therefore, the EU imposed diplomatic sanctions on Austria. The sanctions were not economic; Austria could participate in EU meetings, but diplomatic relations were frozen. Other EU countries refused to hold official talks with Austrian officials and aimed to put political pressure on Austria with this isolation policy<sup>45</sup>. As a result of these sanctions, which backfired immensely, the Austrian people saw these sanctions as an intervention in the country's internal affairs. The EU ultimately had to withdraw the sanctions, highlighting the need for the Union to assess whether its own values were being upheld. The Copenhagen Criteria should have been valid not only for candidate countries but also for member states. The EU's deficiencies in protecting its fundamental values were revealed after this crisis. With this experience, at the Nice Summit (December 7-11, 2000), 15 EU member states decided that an intervention could be made in advance if there was a severe risk of violating the EU's fundamental principles in a member state<sup>46</sup>. Thanks to the addition of Article 7 in the Nice Treaty, the EU's internal regulations were strengthened, and the protection of democratic standards was taken more seriously. In short, it would not be right to evaluate the Copenhagen Criteria as a membership criterion alone without considering the Maastricht and Nice Treaties. The Maastricht and Nice Treaties ensured the traceability of the reform processes developed based on the Copenhagen Criteria and brought more institutional discipline to the EU's enlargement process. The Maastricht Treaty, established before the Copenhagen Criteria, referred to Copenhagen, and the Nice Treaty developed control mechanisms that made the Copenhagen Criteria binding. Thanks to these institutional arrangements, the Copenhagen Criteria were transformed from being just a part of the membership process to concrete reform targets and control standards for candidate countries. These three main criteria (political, economic, and legislative) have been critical in directing each candidate

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<sup>44</sup> Schwarz, P. (2000, February 22). The European Union's sanctions against Austria. *World Socialist Web Site*. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2000/02/haid-f22.html>

<sup>45</sup> Longworth, R. C. (2000, September 13). European Union lifts sanctions against Austria. *Chicago Tribune*. The Seattle Times Archive. <https://archive.seattletimes.com/archive/?date=20000913&slug=4042119>

<sup>46</sup> Falkner, G. (2001). The EU14's "sanctions" against Austria: Sense and nonsense (p. 4, para. 3). *Demokratiezentrum Wien CSA Review (Journal of the European Union Studies Association [formerly the European Community Studies Association])*, 14(1), 14–15. [https://www.demokratiezentrum.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/falkner\\_sanctions.pdf](https://www.demokratiezentrum.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/falkner_sanctions.pdf)

country's democratization and economic development process. These three main criteria aim to transform both the candidate countries' domestic policies and their relations with the EU during the harmonization process.

Political Criteria have always been the most important criteria for the EU. Political criteria, which are based on fundamental principles such as the institutionalization of democracy, respect for human rights, protection of minority rights, and establishment of the rule of law, oblige the candidate countries to move away from their authoritarian administrations and adopt democratic standards. The protection of minority rights aims to facilitate the candidate countries' internal peace and their adaptation to the pluralistic understanding within the EU. From Türkiye's perspective, the Political Criteria required reforms, especially in areas such as the Kurdish issue, minority rights, and judicial reform.

There are two primary economic criteria: The existence of a stable market economy and the capacity to withstand competition from the outside world, especially the EU. Candidate countries must have a functioning market economy. In this way, the candidate country can keep up with competition within the union and does not create an additional burden on EU countries. In this way, the candidate country can keep up with competition within the union and does not create an additional burden on EU countries. Candidate countries must adopt free market principles, ensure macroeconomic stability, and limit public intervention. Thus, candidate countries that can adapt to the EU economically will approach the status of 'member country' even more. In terms of Türkiye, Türkiye had to make intensive efforts to ensure macroeconomic stability and make structural reforms. Türkiye had a large and dynamic economy but also structural imbalances and unsustainable growth dynamics. Türkiye's economic fragilities and structural problems in the financial system became even more apparent with the economic crisis of 2001. They were one of the main factors that negatively affected Türkiye's adaptation process to the EU. As a fact better revealed in this process, implementing economic reforms and structural adjustment policies realized under economic criteria are important.

The importance of the capacity to adapt to the EU acquis, including the Political Union and the Economic and Monetary Union, is emphasized with the Legal Criteria. The legal criteria require the candidate countries to adopt and implement the EU acquis

effectively. The EU acquis includes detailed regulations in many areas, from environmental protection to consumer rights, and candidate countries are expected to develop a legal infrastructure compatible with this legislation. With the Nice Treaty that entered into force in 2003, monitoring and supervising compliance with these criteria became more systematic. If we evaluate from Türkiye's perspective, Türkiye has made legal reforms in various areas within the scope of these criteria and has especially adapted to the EU's trade regulations within the framework of the customs union; however, issues such as the implementation of legal reforms and the impartiality of the judiciary continue to be constantly criticized criteria in Türkiye's membership process.

In summary, according to the Copenhagen Criteria, candidate countries can have the status of a member state if they guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, the protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy, and the capacity to cope with market forces/competitive pressure within the Union; if the Union has the capacity to absorb new members<sup>47</sup>. The Copenhagen Criteria are essential for the integration of candidate countries and the harmonization of EU countries with new members.

### *3.3. Key Findings of the 2000 Regular Report from the Commission on Türkiye's Progress Towards Accession*

After the Helsinki Summit in 1999, Türkiye's membership process necessitated deepening political, economic, and legal reforms within the framework of the Copenhagen Criteria. Following the Helsinki Summit, Türkiye began taking various steps to comply with these criteria, and the first comprehensive assessment of these efforts was made with the 2000 Regular Report from the Commission on Türkiye's Progress Towards Accession prepared by the European Commission. This report not only revealed the developments that Türkiye made on the path to membership and the difficulties it encountered but also identified the areas in which it should focus. The Regular Progress Report on Türkiye This report, covering the period from 1999 to September 30, 2000, describes the relations between Türkiye and the EU within the association agreement framework and evaluates Türkiye's situation regarding the Copenhagen Criteria.

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<sup>47</sup> Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs. (n.d.). *22 Haziran 1993 Avrupa Birliği Konseyi Kopenhag Zirvesi Sonuç Bildirgesi*. AB Başkanlığı. <https://www.ab.gov.tr/302.html>



Focusing on the progress regarding political criteria, the report highlights that the continued enforcement of the 1982 Constitution and the election of Ahmet Necdet Sezer as president through a democratic process were acknowledged positively. In order to comply more with the Copenhagen criteria, Türkiye promised to establish a Human Rights Department affiliated with the Prime Ministry to improve the judicial system within the scope of freedom of expression, and as promised, this department was established on October 5, 2000. It was stated that efforts would be made to eliminate regional imbalances in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia. It was also stated that efforts would continue without slowing down to closely follow developments in human rights, democracy, and the rule of law and to continue efforts to harmonize with EU standards<sup>48</sup>. The report also mentioned positive developments regarding the Kurdish issue; it was stated that the security situation in the Southeast had improved to a great extent, that according to the estimates of the General Staff Press Office, PKK activities had decreased by 26% in 1999, and that the state of emergency had been lifted in some provinces as a result of these positive developments. It was also stated that a socioeconomic development program had been initiated in region<sup>49</sup>. Türkiye signed the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights during the same period, thus expanding its international obligations<sup>50</sup>. However, despite the progress, the report also highlights important deficiencies. The report emphasizes that torture and ill-treatment are widespread in human rights criteria, which occupy a large place as political criteria, and that there are severe restrictions, especially on freedom of expression. Restrictions on the Kurdish population in Southeastern Anatolia continue; despite the decision of the Civil Code accepted by the Supreme Court of Appeals on March 31, 2000, confirming the freedom of individuals to give their children Kurdish names, it is stated that some population registration officers refuse to implement the process and obstruct the process. The report also draws attention to the closure of pro-Kurdish associations and the banning of magazines and newspapers in the state of emergency region<sup>51</sup>. It is stated that the

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<sup>48</sup> European Commission. (2000). *2000 regular report from the Commission on Turkey's progress towards accession* (p. 10). (Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs, Trans.). [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB\\_Iliskileri/AdaylikSureci/IlerlemeRaporlari/Turkiye\\_Ilerleme\\_Rap\\_2000.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB_Iliskileri/AdaylikSureci/IlerlemeRaporlari/Turkiye_Ilerleme_Rap_2000.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> *Ivi*, p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> *Ivi*, p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 14-15.

activities of civil society organizations are restricted, that there is pressure, and that restrictions on freedom of the press continue. It has been reported that there are many journalists in prison, and it has been added to the report that there are 40 journalists in prison, according to official sources<sup>52</sup>. The report, which stated that the general situation of human rights is quite worrying, emphasized that the death penalty should not be carried out in any case, including the Abdullah Öcalan case<sup>53</sup>.

The 2000 Regular Progress Report emphasizes that, in terms of economic criteria, Türkiye has sustained the implementation of the Customs Union agreement, resulting in an increase in its trade volume with the EU. It is stated that the decrease in state intervention is considered a positive step. It is also stated that a socioeconomic development program has been initiated in region<sup>54</sup>. As stated in the report, structural reforms have been carried out within the framework of cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and steps have been taken to ensure economic stability. The increase in tourism revenues by 5% in the first half of 2000 is a positive development<sup>55</sup>. However, in addition to these positive developments, there is a very serious economic framework; due to the rapidly deteriorating current account deficit in 2000, only a part of the deterioration could be compensated with the 5% earned from tourism; Although the economy has recovered after the recession in 1999, the current account deficit has grown and reached 6% of GDP<sup>56</sup>. Deficiencies in public finance and the banking sector continue. Further structural reforms are needed for a functioning market economy. In addition, industrial and infrastructure investments fall short of EU standards. As stated in the report, unemployment increased significantly as a result of the economic slowdown in 1998-1999, and according to an International Labour Organization (ILO) compliant survey, the general unemployment rate rose to 8.3% in the first quarter of 2000<sup>57</sup>.

The report examines the capacity to adapt to the EU acquis under 29 headings. It states that Türkiye's capacity to implement the acquis effectively is still lacking. It states that Türkiye continues its Customs Union practices but that progress still needs to be

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<sup>52</sup> *Ivi*, p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> *Ivi*, p. 54.

<sup>54</sup> *Ivi*, p. 24.

<sup>55</sup> *Ivi*, p. 21.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>57</sup> *Ivi*, p. 20.

made in areas such as the liberalization of services. It was emphasized that the progress made in the fields of environmental and social policy was insufficient. In general, the report stated that Türkiye's compliance with the Customs Union was good, but this was insufficient, and that progress was requested in all other areas<sup>58</sup>.

The report also focused on the Cyprus Issue and stated that limited progress was made in the negotiations carried out under the leadership of the UN. It criticized Türkiye's continuing violation of the property rights of the Greek Cypriots (Loizidou Case). The EU stated in the report that they expected Türkiye to take more concrete steps in this area<sup>59</sup>. It was stated that Türkiye, which had experienced improvements in its basic situation compared to 1999, still did not comply with the Copenhagen criteria (especially political). The 2000 Regular Progress Report, which drew attention to the fact that Türkiye had made progress in the European Union membership process but that reforms were progressing slowly, underlined that more reforms were expected in the areas of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

#### *3.4. Main Insights from the Accession Partnership Document (March 8, 2001)*

The Accession Partnership Document prepared by the European Commission for each country whose candidacy is accepted serves as a roadmap for candidate countries. The Accession Partnership Document describes the measures that candidate countries must take for membership in the form of short and medium-term priorities in terms of the Copenhagen criteria. This document also includes issues regarding the EU's financial assistance. The Accession Partnership Document stipulates that short-term measures are to be implemented within 1-2 years, while medium-term measures are expected to be fulfilled within 3-4 years. The Accession Partnership Document, dated March 8, 2001, created membership roadmaps for Türkiye's short and medium-term targets for harmonization with the EU acquis.

The Accession Partnership Document, after Türkiye was officially declared a candidate country at the Helsinki Summit in 1999, presented an objective analysis of Türkiye's preparations for membership in the 2000 Progress Report prepared by the Commission, and this analysis facilitated the preparation of the road map in the Accession

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<sup>58</sup> *Ivi*, p. 52.

<sup>59</sup> *Ivi*, p. 16.

Partnership Document<sup>60</sup>. On July 6, 2000, the EU Commission proposed a regulation to coordinate aid to be provided to Türkiye, just as it was prepared for every candidate country; this regulation was prepared by drawing inspiration from similar experiences of the other ten candidate countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Council Regulation 622/98, OJ L85, 20.3.1998, p.1); The Accession Partnership and the Council Regulation will be established by decision of the Council and will be proposed by the Commission after consultation with Türkiye<sup>61</sup>. With these documents, Türkiye's short and medium-term priorities for harmonization with the EU will be defined, and political, economic, and legal reforms will be encouraged. The targets, divided into short and medium-term, are also divided into three main conditions; the starting point of these conditions is based on the Copenhagen criteria.

#### 3.4.1. Short-term Priorities

As stated in the 2001 Accession Partnership Document for Türkiye, the short-term political goals expected from Türkiye included expanding freedoms of thought, expression, press, and association and making necessary arrangements to prevent torture and ill-treatment. Legislative and constitutional guarantees were requested to be strengthened in line with Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights regarding freedom of expression. In addition, within the scope of political reforms, it was emphasized that Kurdish language rights be recognized, the expansion of publishing freedoms, the military's influence in politics be limited, and democratic control be increased<sup>62</sup>.

Regarding economic reforms, Türkiye was expected to combat inflation and ensure budget discipline by implementing structural reform programs in accordance with the agreements made with the IMF and the World Bank. In particular, it was necessary to control public expenditures, accelerate the privatization process in the public sector, and continue agricultural reforms in line with the EU Common Agricultural Policy<sup>63</sup>.

In order to comply with the EU *acquis*, Türkiye had to adopt the necessary regulations to comply with EU legal and administrative standards and to accelerate the

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<sup>60</sup> European Commission. (2001). *Accession Partnership Document for Türkiye (2001/235/EC)* (Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs, Trans.). [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB\\_Iliskileri/AdaylikSureci/Kob/Turkiye\\_Kat\\_Ort\\_Belg\\_2001.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB_Iliskileri/AdaylikSureci/Kob/Turkiye_Kat_Ort_Belg_2001.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> *Ivi*, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> *Ivi*, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*.

modernization of public administration. This included accelerating the transition to EU environmental, health, competition law, and consumer rights standards. In addition, the fight against corruption, ensuring transparency in public administration, and taking strong measures against corruption were emphasized as key priorities<sup>64</sup>.

#### 3.4.2. *Medium-term Priorities*

As stated in the 2001 Turkey Accession Partnership Document, Türkiye's medium-term political goals included signing and ratifying the 6th Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Civil and Political Rights, and Social and Cultural Rights. It was also requested that the state of emergency in the Southeast be lifted and cultural rights be guaranteed for all citizens regardless of origin<sup>65</sup>.

The medium-term economic criteria included completing the privatization process, finalizing reforms in the agricultural and financial sectors, and making the wage and social security system sustainable. In addition, education and health services were expected to be developed, with special attention given to young generations and underdeveloped regions<sup>66</sup>. In terms of compliance with the EU Acquis, ensuring the independence of the judiciary, increasing transparency in public administration, and combating corruption were among the priority goals. In addition, completing the necessary reforms for opening negotiation chapters with the EU was expected. Efforts to strengthen the judicial system, harmonize agricultural policies, and resolve the Cyprus problem also came to the fore in this process<sup>67</sup>.

The 2001 Türkiye Accession Partnership Document stated that Türkiye received 376 million Euros in grant aid, with an average of 90 million Euros per year between 1996 and 1999. The report foresaw 5 million Euros per year for 3 years to deepen the EC-Türkiye Customs Union, with the first regulation adopted in April 2000. The report also stated that 45 million Euros per year would be provided for 3 years to encourage economic and social development in Türkiye, which was in the ratification process<sup>68</sup>. The conditions of this aid depended on Türkiye's fidelity to the agreements it had made with the EU and

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<sup>64</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 4-6.

<sup>65</sup> *Ivi*, p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>67</sup> *Ivi*, p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> *Ivi*, p. 10.

its reform commitments. If Türkiye did not fulfill the stated priorities, the EU could suspend financial aid, which would negatively affect the progress of the process.

The Accession Partnership Document for Türkiye, published by the European Commission on March 8, 2001, provided a roadmap for Türkiye to implement the necessary reforms to the EU. The Accession Partnership Document defined the priority reform areas that Türkiye should implement in the EU membership process and tied financial support for implementing these reforms to conditions.

### *3.5. Key Findings of Türkiye's 2001 National Programme for Adopting the EU Acquis*

Following the Accession Partnership Document, the 2001 Turkish National Program was prepared to set forth how Türkiye would take concrete steps to adapt to the EU. The National Program provides a detailed roadmap to accelerate Türkiye's harmonization process with the EU acquis and implement reforms that comply with political and economic criteria. The Turkish Government submitted its proposals to the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 2001 to accelerate its work on political, administrative, and judicial reforms. The adoption of the "Decision on the Implementation, Coordination, and Monitoring of the Turkish National Program for the Adoption of the European Union Acquis" was published in the Official Gazette on March 24, 2001 (Republic of Türkiye, Directorate for EU Affairs, n.d.).

With this National Program, Türkiye pledged to remain committed to the principles of secularism, the rule of law, human rights, and pluralistic democracy. The National Program emphasized that EU membership was seen as a goal in line with Atatürk's vision of modernization. The Turkish people have adopted adaptation to contemporary values as an indispensable lifestyle and a permanent goal. The National Program highlighted that Turkish people are ready and able to undertake essential tasks and responsibilities in the context of the ideal of European unification thanks to their historical accumulation and experience and the civilizational consciousness shaped by centuries. In this context, it has been stated that Türkiye has the will to assimilate the EU acquis<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> Republic of Türkiye, Directorate for EU Affairs. (2001). *AB müktesebatının üstlenilmesine ilişkin Türkiye 2001 ulusal programı* (p. 1). Republic of Türkiye, Directorate for EU Affairs. [https://www.ab.gov.tr/ulusal-programlar\\_46225.html](https://www.ab.gov.tr/ulusal-programlar_46225.html)

Türkiye, which has demonstrated its desire to transform line with the Copenhagen Criteria with the acceptance of the National Program, has set forth the goal of further developing the Constitution and legal provisions that are liberal, participatory, secure, balance the duties and authorities among state organs, and prioritize the principle of the rule of law in terms of political criteria, based on Türkiye's international commitments and EU standards. It has been stated that Türkiye aims to build a liberal and participatory system by making constitutional amendments. It has been stated that within the framework of a 'state of law' aimed at harmonizing with the EU, freedom of thought and expression should be expanded. It drew attention to the need to combat torture and improve detention conditions to strengthen civil society and increase freedom of association. Another goal was to increase the judiciary's functionality and enhance public officials' training in human rights<sup>70</sup>. The report stated that Türkiye would participate in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy but reserve the right to protect its national interests<sup>71</sup>.

After the 2001 economic crisis and according to the 2000 Regular Report from the Commission on Türkiye's Progress Towards Accession published by the European Commission, the deficits must have been noticed because, in terms of economic criteria, it was stated that reforms in social security, tax system, and banking sector were started before the National Program was accepted. It was stated that priority was given to the privatization of large public enterprises (Türk Telekom, THY, TÜPRAŞ). It was stated that direct income support application was started in agriculture. The document also stated that obligations within the scope of the Pre-Accession Financial Notification Procedure prepared by the EU for candidate countries would be fulfilled in the short term<sup>72</sup>. Regarding EU Acquis Harmonization, the document stated that industrial products would be required to comply with EU technical standards and that the passport law would be changed to prevent illegal immigration. It was emphasized that the aim was to remove restrictions on foreign investments, and it was stated that efforts would be accelerated to ensure compliance with the EU in financial services and to eliminate deficiencies<sup>73</sup>. It was stated that priority would be given to participation in Europol and combating

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<sup>70</sup> *Ivi*, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> *Ivi*, p. 17.

<sup>72</sup> *Ivi*, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> *Ivi*, p. 4.

organized crime. It was stated that efforts would be initiated to comply with Schengen practices. It was stated that the aim was to prevent child labor by amending the labor law.

This document presented an action plan for Türkiye's compliance with the EU *acquis*. Since it determines the direction and scope of the reform process in political, economic, legal, and social areas, it can be stated that it is of vital importance both in terms of Türkiye-EU relations and Türkiye's internal transformation. This document, which brings together Türkiye's recovery process after the 2001 economic crisis and its strategic steps in the EU membership process, is considered an important document of Türkiye's international integration efforts. While these efforts led to progress in democratization and economic reforms, the 2001 Progress Report published by the European Commission in the same year pointed out significant deficiencies in issues such as freedom of expression, judicial independence, and the Kurdish Issue.

The report claimed that Türkiye's path toward the EU membership goal was negatively impacted by the economic crisis, particularly the Cyprus Issue. The insufficiency of the efforts, notably with the Kurdish Issue and human rights concerns, prompted criticism of the democratic process. On the economic front, it has been claimed that Türkiye has improved fiscal discipline and inflation control through collaboration with foreign financial institutions. However, the 2001 economic crisis disrupted these achievements, resulting in a rise in jobless rates. Regarding foreign affairs, it was highlighted that Türkiye's attitude on the Cyprus Issue remained a severe impediment to cooperation with the EU. While the Progress Report generally acknowledged that Türkiye had made progress in some areas, it pointed out that more substantial steps were needed to fully comply with EU standards (European Commission, 2001).

During this period, the challenges posed by Türkiye's internal and external dynamics tested the feasibility of reforms and EU integration efforts. Although the echoes of the 2001 economic crisis are still felt, political unrest and setbacks have triggered calls for more radical changes in the reform process's agenda. In this context, the AKP came to power in Türkiye after the general elections in November 2002.

### *3.6. The AKP's Ascension to Power and the Momentum in EU Affairs*

After the general elections held on November 3, 2002, the AKP came to power, and significant changes began to occur in Turkish foreign policy. The AKP came to power with the promise of accelerating the reform process. In the November 3, 2002, General



Election Manifesto, AKP officials stated that they were innovative and contemporary and stated that they would strive for EU membership as follows:

Implementing the economic and political provisions of the EU criteria is an essential step towards our contemporaryization as a state and society. These criteria will inevitably be implemented even when considered independently of EU membership. However, we can convey our messages to humanity within the age, and by being aware of it, we can continue our existence in the international arena by using the opportunities of the age. The ideological approaches of the circles opposing our integration with Europe on the issues of national sovereignty, national security, national interest, and national and local culture are delaying the implementation of the Copenhagen Criteria (AKP, 2002, p. 12).

The AKP came to power and gave Türkiye's EU accession process new momentum. The new government pledged to take more decisive steps to accelerate negotiations with the European Union and deepen reforms, marking the beginning of a new era in Türkiye-EU relations. In the same declaration, the statement, "Türkiye will fulfill its commitments and the conditions that the European Union expects other candidate countries to meet as soon as possible," received positive feedback from the European Commission<sup>74</sup>. Known as a conservative party, the AKP adopted a reform-oriented political program committed to the EU process after the political and economic instability caused by the 2001 economic crisis. The party aimed to make progress in areas such as expanding freedom of expression, combating torture, protecting minority rights, and democratizing civil-military relations. To meet the Copenhagen Criteria, the government accelerated legal reforms and identified EU accession as a strategic objective for Türkiye. This approach was welcomed both domestically and internationally.

Following its rise to power, the AKP pursued policies of fiscal discipline and economic stability under agreements made with the IMF. It expanded the privatization program and aimed to encourage foreign investment. Türkiye's economic recovery during this period further reinforced its commitment to the EU process. The accession process gained momentum, and at the 2002 Copenhagen Summit, Türkiye was assured that accession negotiations would begin if it completed the necessary reforms.

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<sup>74</sup> AK Parti. (2002). *3 Kasım 2002 genel seçimleri: Seçim beyannamesi* (p. 90). <https://www.akparti.org.tr/media/318780/3-kasim-2002-genel-secimleri-secim-beyannamesi-sayfalar.pdf>

The new government made significant efforts in international relations. Before the Copenhagen Summit on December 12-13, 2002, multiple meetings with European leaders were conducted, and reform initiatives have been implemented in Türkiye to ensure compliance with the requirements of the EU. The 2002 Copenhagen Summit was vital for assessing the EU's enlargement strategy. Even though ten nations were approved to join the Union, the debate focused exclusively on Türkiye's candidacy. Türkiye requested a firm start date for accession discussions by the end of 2003. However, the EU declared that discussions with Türkiye would begin in December 2004, provided the country hastened its reforms. The EU encouraged Türkiye to continue its reform process energetically and promised to commence accession negotiations without delay once Türkiye was deemed to have met the Copenhagen political criteria<sup>75</sup>.

The summit highlighted substantial problems that Türkiye encountered throughout the accession process, including the Cyprus issue, violations of human rights, and military tutelage. The Cyprus Issue has emerged as one of the major obstacles to Türkiye's EU membership. The EU stated that the Republic of Cyprus would become a full member in 2004, regardless of whether a solution was achieved in the Cyprus Issue. Although the Cyprus conflict was supposed to be settled by Türkiye, the ultimate Greek Cypriot side's membership without a settlement made Türkiye's accession process considerably more difficult. The decision to establish the end of 2004 as the discussion deadline meant that Türkiye had to begin negotiating with 25 member nations instead of 15.

As highlighted in May 19, 2003, Accession Partnership Document for Türkiye, the European Commission reiterated its recommendation from the October 9, 2002 Strategy Paper, "Towards an Enlarged Union," stating that "the European Union should increase its support for Türkiye's pre-accession preparations, considering the next stage of Türkiye's candidacy"<sup>76</sup>. The document referenced the commitment made at the Copenhagen Summit to start accession negotiations if the necessary criteria were met by

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<sup>75</sup> T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı. (n.d.). *Kopenhag Zirvesi (12-13 Aralık 2002)*. T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı. [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/kopenhag-zirvesi-12-13-aralik-2002.tr.mfa#:~:text=Kopenhag%20Zirvesi%20\(12%2D13%20Aralık,Dışişleri%20Bakanlığı&text=“18.,Helsinki'de%20aldığı%20kararı%20hatırlatr](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/kopenhag-zirvesi-12-13-aralik-2002.tr.mfa#:~:text=Kopenhag%20Zirvesi%20(12%2D13%20Aralık,Dışişleri%20Bakanlığı&text=“18.,Helsinki'de%20aldığı%20kararı%20hatırlatr)

<sup>76</sup> European Commission. (2003). *Accession Partnership Document for Türkiye* (p. 1). (Trans., Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs). [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB\\_Iliskileri/AdaylikSureci/Kob/Turkiye\\_Kat\\_Ort\\_Belg\\_2003.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB_Iliskileri/AdaylikSureci/Kob/Turkiye_Kat_Ort_Belg_2003.pdf)

2004. It also emphasized that financial assistance and support for institutional development and investment would be provided. The document highlighted the Copenhagen Summit's promise to begin accession discussions if the necessary conditions were completed by 2004. It additionally stated that financial support and assistance for institutional development would be provided. The report emphasized the necessity of developing institutional structures and infrastructure, stating that capacity-building and alignment with the EU *acquis* will be facilitated through twinning arrangements with Member States. Additionally, organizations involved in social discussion, including chambers of commerce, trade unions, employers' federations, and agricultural groups, were to get financing. Furthermore, financing was provided to civil society groups working on initiatives promoting democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and gender equality<sup>77</sup>.

The report expected Türkiye to amend its National Programme to better accord with the EU *acquis*. It highlighted the importance of progress in democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and the report encouraged the resolution of the Cyprus Issues and other border-related disputes. These resolutions were deemed necessary conditions once the Republic of Cyprus' EU membership was confirmed, rather than only suggestions. Combating torture and ill-treatment was also identified as a priority<sup>78</sup>. Additional demands included maintaining macroeconomic stability and managing inflation, pursuing agricultural and financial reforms, and expediting the privatization of state enterprises<sup>79</sup>. The report said that a total of 1.05 billion euros in financial help was planned for 2004-2006. It also emphasized establishing a public administration aligned with EU standards and completing necessary legal reforms. Areas such as customs union, energy, agriculture, and transportation required further alignment. Increased participation in EU Community Programs was encouraged. The document outlined the main objectives and priorities in Türkiye's EU harmonization process while providing a framework for financial and technical assistance to support the reforms. This approach aimed to address the main challenges Türkiye faced on its path to membership while clarifying how the EU's pre-accession strategy would be implemented.

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<sup>77</sup> *Ivi*, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>79</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 10-14.

As previously stated, the ruling AKP adopted a more focused and comprehensive EU strategy than previous coalition governments. Türkiye's National Programme, launched on June 23, 2003, indicated the AKP's dedication to EU membership. The program was part of a larger restructuring process that began when Türkiye's candidacy was officially recognized at the Helsinki Summit. It attempted to organize Türkiye's legal, political, economic, and administrative reforms in accordance with EU-accepted standards. The 2003 National Programme was developed in collaboration with vital departments and the Secretariat General for EU Affairs (*EUSG*), and was expected to be completed by June 2004. The National Programme's introduction said that "full membership in the European Union is Türkiye's primary goal for ensuring economic and democratic development." <sup>80</sup>.

The government's commitment was further reinforced with the declaration: "Our government is determined to meet the Copenhagen Criteria fully. There is no doubt that Türkiye's rightful place within the European Union family will benefit both sides and positively impact peace, stability, and security beyond the European continent." The primary objective was accelerating Türkiye's political reforms per the Copenhagen Criteria. The goal of the National Programme was to secure a decision to start accession negotiations at the December 2004 EU Summit by advancing economic and social reforms and enhancing Türkiye's competitiveness. Key targets to be achieved by June 2004 included aligning legislation with the European Convention on Human Rights, implementing legal changes to promote democratic participation, adopting a "zero-tolerance" policy on torture through comprehensive training and monitoring mechanisms, and expanding cultural rights by allowing broadcasts in different languages and dialects to protect minority rights<sup>81</sup>. Other goals included reducing public debt to ensure macroeconomic stability and sustainable growth, effectively implementing the Customs Union, and accelerating trade harmonization efforts. The government also aimed to reduce the state's role in the economy through privatization and free-market reforms, which were among the EU's most praised objectives<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs. (2003). *2003 Yılı Ulusal Programı: Giriş*. [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/UlusalProgram/UlusalProgram\\_2003/Tr/pdf/I-giris.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/UlusalProgram/UlusalProgram_2003/Tr/pdf/I-giris.pdf)

<sup>81</sup> Republic of Turkey Directorate for EU Affairs. (2003). *Ulusal Program 2003: II. Siyasi kriterler*. [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/UlusalProgram/UlusalProgram\\_2003/Tr/pdf/II-siyasi\\_kriterler.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/UlusalProgram/UlusalProgram_2003/Tr/pdf/II-siyasi_kriterler.pdf)

<sup>82</sup> Republic of Turkey Directorate for EU Affairs. (2003). *Ulusal Program 2003: III. Ekonomik kriterler*. [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/UlusalProgram/UlusalProgram\\_2003/Tr/pdf/III-ekonomik\\_kriterler.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/UlusalProgram/UlusalProgram_2003/Tr/pdf/III-ekonomik_kriterler.pdf)

### *3.7. 2004 Regular Report from the Commission on Türkiye's Progress Towards Accession and 2004 Brussels European Council Presidency Conclusions*

Although the 2003 National Programme brought significant momentum to the alignment process with the EU acquis and reforms, not all of its objectives were fully achieved by the Brussels Summit on December 16-17, 2004. However, numerous essential reforms were implemented, contributing to the positive evaluation of Türkiye before the Summit.

The most significant reforms came from political targets. A policy of zero tolerance for torture was declared, and detention periods were reduced. Significant steps were taken towards freedom of expression; some restrictions on the press and media were lifted. Improvements were made in minority rights. For example, the opportunities for education and broadcasting in different languages and dialects were expanded, which was praised by the Commission in the 2004 Progress Report<sup>83</sup>. Another thriving reform area was macroeconomic stability, with IMF-supported economic programs implemented successfully. Privatization gained momentum, and the public sector's economic share was reduced. The Customs Union was effectively implemented, aligning a large part of the commercial legislation with EU standards<sup>84</sup>. The work of the EUSG intensified, and public institution reforms accelerated. Under local government reforms, some powers were transferred to municipalities, albeit with certain authorities remaining under central control. Although Türkiye achieved many significant goals of the 2003 National Programme before the Brussels Summit, structural problems and political obstacles hindered the complete implementation of the program.

As noted in the 2004 Progress Report, some steps were taken to accelerate and enhance the judiciary's transparency; however, judicial independence deficiencies persisted. The military's influence on politics was criticized, highlighting that Türkiye's history of military interventions posed a threat to democracy<sup>85</sup>. Despite the declaration of a zero-tolerance policy towards torture and ill-treatment, implementation problems

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<sup>83</sup> European Commission. (2004). *2004 regular report from the Commission on Turkey's progress towards accession* (p. 14). (Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs, Trans.). [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB\\_Iliskileri/AdaylikSureci/IlerlemeRaporlari/Turkiye\\_Ilerleme\\_Rap\\_2004.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB_Iliskileri/AdaylikSureci/IlerlemeRaporlari/Turkiye_Ilerleme_Rap_2004.pdf)

<sup>84</sup> *Ivi*, p. 50.

<sup>85</sup> *Ivi*, p. 45.

remained. While progress was made in freedom of thought, expression, and the press, pressures on journalists and legal proceedings against them continued to draw criticism<sup>86</sup>. Although improvements were made in Kurdish language education and cultural rights, the report emphasized that the reforms would not be fully realized without addressing the region's economic and social problems.

Some steps were taken in the fight against corruption, yet transparency and accountability remained significant issues. Economic reforms helped reduce inflation; however, high unemployment and current account deficits persisted<sup>87</sup>. Türkiye initiated the alignment process under the 31 chapters of the EU acquis, but the alignment of many laws was still incomplete. Progress was noted in visa policies, border security, and migration management, though further efforts were needed to combat illegal immigration<sup>88</sup>. Agriculture modernization efforts continued, but substantial gaps remained in meeting EU standards. While progress was observed in environmental protection and energy policies, the report underlined limited implementation progress and deficiencies in environmental standards compliance. Regional development agencies were established, yet stronger policy frameworks were required to address regional disparities<sup>89</sup>.

The report highlighted Türkiye's significant progress in democratic reforms and human rights. However, structural challenges and shortcomings in implementation persisted. Further progress was required in areas such as judicial independence, freedom of expression, and the Kurdish issue. While compliance with the economic criteria presented an overall positive picture, issues such as unemployment, current account deficits, and the informal economy remained obstacles. Although progress was achieved in several areas of the EU acquis alignment, challenges persisted in environmental, agriculture, and regional policies.

The Turkish Government repeatedly expressed its determination to join the European Union and updated the National Programme per the EU's recommendations. At the December 17, 2004, Brussels Summit, it was stated that Türkiye had met the political criteria, and it was decided that accession negotiations would begin on October 3, 2005.

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<sup>86</sup> *Ivi*, p. 46.

<sup>87</sup> *Ivi*, p. 49.

<sup>88</sup> *Ivi*, p. 63.

<sup>89</sup> *Ivi*, p. 112.

At the Summit, the European Council welcomed Türkiye's progress in the comprehensive reform process and expressed confidence in Türkiye's continued reforms. The decision to delay the start of accession negotiations to October 3, 2005, from December indicated that the progress made was not deemed sufficient<sup>90</sup>. The Summit set October 3, 2005, as the official start date for full membership negotiations. This decision marked a significant milestone in Türkiye's EU accession process.

However, EU leaders emphasized that initiating negotiations did not guarantee automatic full membership. It was also mentioned that "special arrangements" other than full membership could result from the negotiations<sup>91</sup>. Before negotiations, the EU expected Türkiye to continue its democratization and human rights reforms. It was also stressed that the accession process was reversible, and negotiations could be halted if the criteria were not met<sup>92</sup>. Critical areas for progress included human rights, judicial independence, and reducing military influence. While Türkiye's political reforms were acknowledged, further alignment with the Copenhagen Criteria was deemed necessary. The issue of recognizing the Republic of Cyprus resurfaced as a precondition for the accession process. Türkiye was expected to extend the Customs Union to include Cyprus before the start of negotiations<sup>93</sup>.

Except for the Cyprus issue, the decision was seen as a political success for the AKP government, reinforcing the message that Türkiye was progressing toward European integration. The Summit's outcomes created a sense of optimism in Türkiye, especially regarding the negotiations set to begin in 2005. However, the conditional nature of the EU's accession process and the Cyprus issue signaled challenges for future relations.

In conclusion, Türkiye's EU membership process was endorsed by the 2004 Brussels Summit. However, it became obvious that the path to full membership would be long and challenging, filled with political obstacles. The Cyprus conflict, the EU's enlargement policy, and Türkiye's internal reforms emerged as major elements influencing the future of discussions.

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<sup>90</sup> Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2004). *Briksel Zirvesi: 16-17 Aralık 2004*. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/briksel-zirvesi--16-17-aralik-2004.tr.mfa>

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*.

### *3.8. Turning Points on the Road to Europe: Cyprus, the Kurdish Initiative, and Accession Negotiations*

Following the 2004 Brussels Summit, significant progress happened in Türkiye's journey to the European Union. After the Summit, Türkiye was in a well-positioned position to initiate negotiations. In the same year, a significant endeavor to address the Cyprus issue, the UN Comprehensive Settlement Plan (Annan Plan), was proposed to a referendum. The plan proposed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan between 2002 and 2004 was a comprehensive package to end the Cyprus conflict. The plan called for the establishment of a bicomunal federation on the island. It addressed the political structure of the federal government, human rights regulations, security measures, and power-sharing agreements. The plan additionally suggested giving the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot component nations equal status.

Under this plan, the member nations would establish a federation with shared authority over specified areas, such as foreign policy and defense, while retaining autonomy over internal issues<sup>94</sup>. Türkiye and Greece's guarantor rights would stay intact, and both nations would maintain a limited military presence on the island. Freedom of movement would be created between the two sides of Cyprus, with regulation allowing Greek Cypriots to reside and work in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (*TRNC*), and vice versa for Turkish Cypriots in the south. A unified Cyprus would join the EU and adopt EU legislation, allowing Turkish Cypriots to benefit from EU membership.

The plan was to separate referendums in both communities on April 24, 2004. While the Turkish Cypriots accepted it with 65% support, the Greek Cypriots rejected it with 76%<sup>95</sup>. The Greek Cypriots' rejection of the plan disrupted efforts toward a peaceful solution and indirectly affected Türkiye's EU accession process. Despite this setback, Türkiye's support for the plan was perceived positively by the EU. Nevertheless, the admission of the Greek Cypriot administration into the EU without a solution in place reinforced the division on the island, complicating the resolution of the Cyprus issue. This

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<sup>94</sup> Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.). *BM kapsamlı çözüm planı (Annan Planı)*. [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/bm-kapsamli-cozum-planı-\\_annan-planı\\_.tr.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/bm-kapsamli-cozum-planı-_annan-planı_.tr.mfa)

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*.



rejection revealed the lack of trust between the two communities and solidified the Cyprus issue as a persistent obstacle to Türkiye's EU membership ambitions.

Despite the disappointment regarding Cyprus, Türkiye continued to undertake reforms in various areas to meet the EU's demands for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. In this context, the Kurdish issue was addressed as one of the most critical obstacles to both domestic peace and the EU accession process. The "Solution Process" (*Çözüm süreci*) initiated in 2005, was not only a domestic policy step but also aligned with EU-compatible reforms. It aimed to recognize the rights of Kurdish citizens and end regional conflicts, addressing the EU's expectations for democratization and human rights improvements.

2005 marked the beginning of significant changes in Türkiye's domestic policy. The Solution Process signaled a new era in efforts to resolve the Kurdish Issue, aligning with the EU's demands for reforms on minority rights and freedom of expression. The Kurdish Issue, shaped by the state's strict security policies, had escalated into a military conflict with the armed struggle initiated by the PKK in 1984, resulting in loss of life and social and economic challenges. The Solution Process represented a comprehensive effort by the government to find a peaceful resolution. In August 2005, the AKP articulated its manifesto on the "Kurdish Issue" in Diyarbakır. During a historic speech, Prime Minister Erdoğan declared that "the Kurdish issue is also my issue," marking a turning point in the state's approach to this problem<sup>96</sup>. This statement reflected a shift toward acknowledging the existence of Kurds and addressing the issue openly at the highest state level. In his speech, Erdoğan also referenced the Ottoman Empire's fair governance, suggesting an implicit apology on behalf of the state while signaling the end of denial and assimilation policies<sup>97</sup>.

The Solution Process specifically addressed the EU's Copenhagen Criteria for protecting minority rights and freedom of expression. The progress in the EU accession process motivated Türkiye to adopt a more democratic approach to the Kurdish issue. Subsequent EU progress reports acknowledged the process as a positive step toward democratization and criticized the insufficient implementation of reforms. While the

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<sup>96</sup> Kurt, A. (2014, 13 Kasım). *Kürt sorununda çözüm süreci: AK Parti hükümeti ve PKK'nın adımları*. Heinrich Böll Stiftung Türkiye Temsilciliği. <https://tr.boell.org/tr/2014/11/13/kuert-sorununda-coezuem-suereci-ak-parti-huekuemeti-ve-pkknin-adimlari>

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*.

Solution Process was viewed as a significant step toward peace and democracy, it sparked polarization within Türkiye. On the one hand, hopes for peace rose; on the other, nationalist segments expressed security concerns. Despite positive steps, continued PKK attacks disrupted the process. The EU criticized the Solution Process for its lack of sustainability and comprehensive implementation. As explained in the "Political Challenges" and "Domestic Policy Implications" sections of the "Compliance Challenges and Implications of EU Accession" chapter, the process faced setbacks due to operations launched in 2009. The resurgence of terrorist activities in the 2010s and the government's return to security-based policies led to the termination of the Solution Process.

While the Solution Process became a turning point in Türkiye's domestic policy and EU accession process, the failure to sustain peace and democratization efforts left the Kurdish issue unresolved. Nevertheless, the process remains a part of Türkiye's history of democratization and serves as a reference point for future peace efforts. Türkiye's democratization efforts extended beyond internal reforms, encompassing more significant challenges such as the Cyprus Issue and human rights. The official negotiations between Türkiye and the EU commenced in Luxembourg on October 3, 2005. This marked one of the most significant milestones in Türkiye's EU membership journey, with negotiations structured across 35 chapters<sup>98</sup>.

The EU accession negotiations require candidates to incorporate the EU *acquis* into their domestic laws and implement them effectively. However, these negotiations differ from traditional diplomatic negotiations due to their rigid framework, limiting the candidate's flexibility. For Türkiye, achieving compliance with EU standards necessitated comprehensive legislative, economic, and political reforms. Türkiye must continue its reform by advancing the rule of law, human rights, fundamental freedoms, and democracy. The negotiations began with the first phase of the process, known as "screening"<sup>99</sup>.

The EU expressed that it expected tangible progress from Türkiye, particularly in the following areas: reinforcing legal frameworks under a zero-tolerance policy toward torture and ill-treatment; implementing regulations aligned with the ILO standards in

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<sup>98</sup> Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs. (n.d.). *AB rehberi* [EU guide] (pp. 6-7). . Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/rehber/06\\_rehber.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/rehber/06_rehber.pdf)

<sup>99</sup> Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs. (n.d.). *Accession negotiations*. Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. [https://ab.gov.tr/katilim-muzakereleri\\_37.html](https://ab.gov.tr/katilim-muzakereleri_37.html)

areas such as freedom of expression and worship, women's rights, union rights, and minority rights. Türkiye must adopt all EU regulations at the time of accession. This obligation implies that Türkiye's legal and political alignment efforts must continue throughout the negotiation process and post-accession. The Türkiye-EU accession process requires technical alignment and tangible progress in democratic reforms and human rights. Strengthening political reforms, embedding human rights standards, and aligning with EU criteria are essential for successfully progressing the negotiations<sup>100</sup>. Although Türkiye completed the screening process for all chapters on October 13, 2006, the screening reports for ten chapters were not approved by the EU: Free Movement of Workers, Fisheries, Transport Policy, Energy, Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments, Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, Justice, Freedom and Security, External Relations, Foreign, Security and Defense Policy, and Financial and Budgetary Provisions.

The EU has demanded reforms from Türkiye not only in economic and commercial regulations but also in areas such as democratization, freedom of expression, and minority rights. While the initiatives related to the Kurdish issue reflected Türkiye's democratization efforts, they were deemed insufficient by the EU and frequently criticized in progress reports. Türkiye encountered a significant political obstacle on the path to EU membership: the issue of recognizing the Republic of Cyprus. Although Türkiye supported the Annan Plan, the rejection of the plan by the Greek Cypriot side and its subsequent accession to the EU in 2004 complicated relations. Türkiye's stance toward Cyprus remained a political issue that directly affected the progress of negotiations.

The negotiations officially started on October 3, 2005, and were not expected to be concluded quickly. The open-ended nature of the negotiations, that is, the fact that the outcome was not guaranteed full membership, created uncertainty in Türkiye-EU relations. Despite the initiation of negotiations in 2005, political obstacles stemming from France and the Republic of Cyprus prevented the opening of several vital chapters. 2006 marked a turning point that brought stagnation and disappointment in Türkiye-EU relations. During this period, France's President Nicolas Sarkozy opposed Türkiye's full membership in the EU. Sarkozy proposed a privileged partnership for Türkiye, limiting

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibidem*.

the relationship to economic and political cooperation rather than full membership. Türkiye firmly rejected the privileged partnership proposal, with Turkish officials criticizing it as a step back from the EU's enlargement policy and an example of double standards toward Türkiye<sup>101</sup>. In official statements, Türkiye emphasized that no alternative to full membership would be accepted, reaffirming that EU membership was a strategic objective that the country would not abandon<sup>102</sup>.

France vetoed the opening of five critical chapters related to economic and financial policies: Agriculture and Rural Development (Chapter 11), Economic and Monetary Policy (Chapter 17), Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments (Chapter 22), Financial and Budgetary Provisions (Chapter 33), and Institutions (Chapter 34)<sup>103</sup>. These chapters were essential for Türkiye's accession negotiations. While France justified its veto by arguing that Türkiye had not implemented the necessary structural reforms, the underlying reason was interpreted as France's view that Türkiye was not compatible with the EU's identity.

The Republic of Cyprus blocked the opening of specific chapters due to Türkiye's non-compliance with the Ankara Protocol. Under this protocol, Türkiye was required to open its ports and airports to vessels and aircraft under the Cypriot flag. However, Türkiye refused to take this step without resolving the Cyprus issue. The Republic of Cyprus exercised its veto power, particularly over chapters related to the Cyprus issue, such as Transport Policy. This situation seriously hindered the negotiation process<sup>104</sup>.

Following Türkiye's refusal to open its ports to Cypriot vessels, the EU Council suspended eight negotiation chapters and announced that no chapters could be closed until Türkiye complied. This decision represented a major setback in Türkiye's EU membership process<sup>105</sup>. From 2006 onward, Türkiye-EU negotiations reached a near-standstill. Although technical chapters were opened, their political significance remained limited. The obstacles in negotiations and opposition within the EU toward Türkiye reduced public support for the EU in Türkiye. As a result, Türkiye began to strengthen its

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<sup>101</sup> Çayhan, E., & Oğurlu, E. (2014). *Türkiye-AB ilişkilerine siyasal partilerin bakışı* (p. 60). Beta Yayınları.

<sup>102</sup> *Ivi*, p. 61.

<sup>103</sup> Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs. (n.d.). *AB rehberi* [EU guide] (p. 16). Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/rehber/06\\_rehber.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/rehber/06_rehber.pdf)

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*.

relations with other regional and global actors, such as Russia and the Middle East. The year 2006 highlighted the critical role of the Cyprus issue and political blockages in slowing Türkiye's accession process. Enthusiasm and motivation for EU membership gradually diminished, and skepticism toward the EU grew among both the public and political circles in Türkiye.

Between 2006 and 2016, 16 chapters were opened, but progress in other chapters stalled. The accession process was halted due to the Cyprus issue and several political crises. In the post-2016 period, political tensions between Türkiye and the EU further complicated the process. In 2018, the European Commission announced that negotiations had stalled and that no new chapters would be opened under the existing conditions<sup>106</sup>.

### *3.9. Main Insights from the Accession Partnership Document (February 18, 2008)*

The 2007 Accession Partnership Document prepared for Türkiye defined the reform areas determined for the purpose of harmonization with the EU acquis and presented a roadmap to support Türkiye's progress in the EU membership process. The 2007 Accession Partnership Document was updated to meet the emerging needs, especially after Türkiye started full membership negotiations in 2005. This document prioritized critical reform areas to accelerate Türkiye's progress toward membership. The revised roadmap outlined for Türkiye sought to facilitate the development of a legal and administrative framework aligned with EU standards, fostering the swift and comprehensive implementation of reforms. In addition, the EU's financial support has emerged as an important tool in providing the financial resources that Türkiye needs in this reform process. The document set forth short-term (12-24 months) and medium-term (3-5 years) priorities for harmonization with the EU acquis.

#### *3.9.1. Short-term Priorities*

As outlined in the 2008 Türkiye Accession Partnership Document, the short-term political goals expected from Türkiye primarily focused on judicial reform and human rights. Among the key expectations were ensuring judicial independence, improving the efficiency of the judicial system (particularly by reducing the duration of

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<sup>106</sup> Schug, S. (2024, July 18). *EU expansion: How close are the nine candidate states to membership?* The Parliament Magazine. [https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/eu-expansion-how-close-are-the-nine-candidate-states-to-membership\\_24534.htm](https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/eu-expansion-how-close-are-the-nine-candidate-states-to-membership_24534.htm)

trials), and providing training for prosecutors and judges in line with EU norms<sup>107</sup>(European Commission, 2008, p. 4). Regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms, the implementation of a zero-tolerance policy toward torture and ill-treatment was emphasized, along with the removal of obstacles to media and freedom of expression<sup>108</sup>. Regarding minority rights, the document highlighted the need to introduce regulations enhancing Kurdish citizens' educational and cultural rights and allowing Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (*TRT*) to broadcast in Kurdish. Additionally, it stressed the importance of protecting property rights and expanding religious freedoms for non-Muslim minorities<sup>109</sup>.

On economic criteria, the document emphasized the need to ensure macroeconomic stability, suggesting strict fiscal policies to control inflation and reduce the budget deficit<sup>110</sup>. The report indicated that Türkiye needed to reform its labor market to reduce unemployment and promote female labor force participation through incentives. Furthermore, compliance with EU standards and relevant ILO conventions regarding workers' rights was deemed essential<sup>111</sup>.

Regarding Cyprus, the document called for the implementation of the Ankara Protocol, which aligns the Ankara Agreement with the accession of new EU member states, including Cyprus, and requires the removal of restrictions on vessels flying the Cypriot flag and on trade involving Cyprus (European Commission, 2008, p. 8). The short-term goals also addressed specific problematic chapters individually.

### 3.9.2. *Medium-term Priorities*

Economic criteria were prominently featured among the medium-term priorities outlined in the Accession Partnership Document. Completing privatization projects and guaranteeing the sustainability of public finances were highlighted as top concerns. The document emphasized the significance of enhancing services, notably in education and healthcare, with an emphasis on young people and women. Strengthening

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<sup>107</sup> European Commission. (2008). *Accession partnership document for Türkiye* (p. 4). Trans., Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs). [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB\\_Iliskileri/AdaylikSureci/Kob/Turkiye\\_Kat\\_Ort\\_Belg\\_2007.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB_Iliskileri/AdaylikSureci/Kob/Turkiye_Kat_Ort_Belg_2007.pdf)

<sup>108</sup> *Ivi*, p. 5.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>110</sup> *Ivi*, p. 6.

<sup>111</sup> *Ivi*, p. 7.

energy and transportation infrastructure was also highlighted as a way to boost the economy's competitiveness<sup>112</sup>.

The document also addressed challenges throughout all problematic chapters. Under Chapter 2, for Free Movement of Workers, Türkiye had to develop its public employment services to join the European Employment Services (EURES) network. It also highlighted the necessity to continue developing institutional structures for coordinating social security schemes<sup>113</sup>. The abolition of service-providing constraints was underlined in Chapter 3, which dealt with the Right of Establishment and Freedom to Provide Services<sup>114</sup>. Chapter 15 highlighted the need to liberalize the energy sector, promote a competitive environment, and link nuclear security regulations with EU standards<sup>115</sup>. Chapter 19 aimed to improve the ability to monitor labor markets and societal developments<sup>116</sup>. Chapter 24, covering Justice, Freedom, and Security, highlighted the importance of establishing an integrated border management system, lifting geographical limitations under the Geneva Convention, and aligning asylum legislation with EU standards<sup>117</sup>.

The document additionally stated that in order to be eligible for pre-accession financial assistance tools, Türkiye must achieve the Copenhagen criteria as well as the goals defined in the Accession Partnership text. It provided a thorough framework for the structural changes and regulations Türkiye needed to execute in preparation for EU membership. Each chapter sought to align Türkiye with EU norms in the relevant fields, a key step toward economic progress and societal reform.

### *3.10. The EU Enlargement Agenda Amid the Global Financial Crisis*

The 2008 global financial crisis had profound economic and political consequences for the EU. The crisis revealed a lack of economic coordination within the EU, exposing significant imbalances among member states. In response, the policies developed by the EU to manage the crisis accelerated the reform process to address the Union's structural problems. The global crisis, which emerged in 2008, confronted many European countries with economic contraction, slowing growth rates, and rising

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<sup>112</sup> *Ivi*, p. 15.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>114</sup> *Ivi*, p. 16.

<sup>115</sup> *Ivi*, p. 17.

<sup>116</sup> *Ivi*, p. 18.

<sup>117</sup> *Ivi*, p. 19.

unemployment. The Eurozone economy shrank by 4.1% in 2009, marking the most severe contraction in its history<sup>118</sup>. The EU had to prioritize re-establishing economic stability over its enlargement agenda, diminishing interest in negotiations with candidate countries like Türkiye. Growth rates in the Eurozone declined, unemployment rose rapidly, and several member states struggled with economic recession.

The crisis led to public debt crises, particularly in Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain, and Italy. Due to excessive borrowing, these countries had to seek financial assistance from the European Central Bank (*ECB*) and the IMF<sup>119</sup>. The bailout packages from the EU and the IMF required strict austerity measures in indebted countries, which fueled social unrest and increased criticism toward the EU<sup>120</sup>. After the global crisis, the EU shifted its focus to internal economic stability, sidelining its enlargement policies. This shift slowed down Türkiye's accession process and reduced support for reforms. During this period, anti-enlargement and populist rhetoric gained prominence in many EU countries, directly impacting Türkiye's membership process.

The post-crisis period became economically and politically challenging for EU-Türkiye relations. Although Türkiye was expected to continue its reform efforts, the EU's focus on internal issues diminished the interest in EU-led reforms within Türkiye. The social problems caused by the crisis eroded public trust in the EU in many member states. Populist and Eurosceptic parties gained momentum, and the crisis significantly affected EU countries' banking sectors and public finances. Many countries adopted reforms aimed at reducing public spending and revitalizing their economies, which led to a stricter emphasis on the economic requirements of the accession process<sup>121</sup>.

The impact of the 2008 crisis made it difficult for Türkiye to advance its EU membership steps promptly and adequately. The crisis highlighted, once again, the direct influence of global and regional developments on Türkiye's accession process. The 2008 financial crisis fundamentally reshaped the EU's economic and political structure, paving

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<sup>118</sup> Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs. (n.d.). *Avrupa Birliği'nin tarihçesi* (para. 18). [https://www.ab.gov.tr/avrupa-birliginin-tarihcesi\\_105.html#:~:text=2008%20Küresel%20Finans%20Krizi%20ve,mali%20sorunlarla%20karşı%20karşıya%20kaldılar](https://www.ab.gov.tr/avrupa-birliginin-tarihcesi_105.html#:~:text=2008%20Küresel%20Finans%20Krizi%20ve,mali%20sorunlarla%20karşı%20karşıya%20kaldılar)

<sup>119</sup> Szczepanski, M. (2019, October). *Economic and budgetary outlook for the European Union 2020* (p. 3). Members' Research Service, European Parliament. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/642253/EPRS\\_BRI\(2019\)642253\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/642253/EPRS_BRI(2019)642253_EN.pdf)

<sup>120</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>121</sup> *Ivi*, p. 6.



the way for reforms to enhance the Union's capacity to manage future crises. However, austerity policies implemented during this period triggered social discontent and altered the political dynamics within the EU. At the same time, a slowdown in the EU's enlargement policy marked a new phase for candidate countries like Türkiye.

### *3.11. Key Findings of Türkiye's 2008 National Programme for Adopting the EU Acquis*

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis slowed the European Union's enlargement process, prioritizing economic stability and affecting Türkiye's accession negotiations amid this uncertainty. Despite these circumstances, Türkiye did not abandon its reform process and committed to continuing its efforts to align with the EU acquis. Accordingly, the 2008 National Program was designed to accelerate the alignment process toward EU membership and strengthen progress in the relevant chapters. The following section examines the key findings of Türkiye's 2008 National Program and its priorities.

Türkiye reaffirmed its commitment to the alignment process, emphasizing its aim to reach contemporary civilization as a secular, democratic, and social state governed by the rule of law, with respect for human rights<sup>122</sup>. Full EU membership was not merely defined as a political objective but also as a project of social transformation. The program stressed that every reform undertaken in this process would enhance the quality of individual lives and strengthen the country's international reputation.

The economic challenges experienced under the Customs Union, particularly the inequalities created by Free Trade Agreements (*FTAs*), were addressed. The need for fairer conditions in relations with the EU was emphasized. The National Program presented Türkiye's EU membership not only as an economic gain but also as a contribution to regional and international peace. It supported efforts to resolve the Cyprus issue and highlighted the importance of civil society dialogue<sup>123</sup>. The program emphasized that Türkiye would continue its reforms in adherence to the Republic's core values throughout the EU accession process.

The report stated that Türkiye had undertaken comprehensive constitutional and legal reforms to align with the EU acquis. These reforms included strengthening human

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<sup>122</sup> Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs. (2008). *2008 yılı ulusal programı: Giriş*. [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/UlusalProgram/UlusalProgram\\_2008/Tr/pdf/i\\_giris.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/UlusalProgram/UlusalProgram_2008/Tr/pdf/i_giris.pdf)

<sup>123</sup> Republic of Turkey Directorate for EU Affairs. (2008). *Ulusal program 2008: II. Siyasi kriterler*. [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/UlusalProgram/UlusalProgram\\_2008/Tr/pdf/ii\\_siyasikriterler.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/UlusalProgram/UlusalProgram_2008/Tr/pdf/ii_siyasikriterler.pdf)

rights, preventing torture and ill-treatment, and expanding freedom of thought and expression. Additionally, under the zero-tolerance policy, legal regulations were implemented to combat torture and ill-treatment, and the death penalty was abolished under all circumstances. The program outlined efforts to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women. It also highlighted progress in minority rights, including providing broadcasting and education opportunities in various languages and dialects<sup>124</sup>.

Under the Judicial Reform Strategy, the program emphasized enhancing judicial independence, impartiality, and efficiency, with new courts established and appellate courts becoming operational. The program also aimed to align penitentiary institutions with international standards. In women's rights, the program promoted microcredit schemes to increase women's participation in the labor force, established shelters, and organized public awareness campaigns<sup>125</sup>.

The National Program emphasized that Türkiye had achieved significant progress in economic stability and growth through comprehensive macroeconomic and structural reforms in alignment with the EU accession process. The Ninth Development Plan (2007–2013) outlined a vision focused on sustainable growth, improved income distribution, and narrowing the economic gap with the EU. Aligning with the Copenhagen and Maastricht criteria was identified as a critical objective of economic policies<sup>126</sup>.

The document highlighted fiscal discipline to reduce the budget deficit and public debt. Public spending efficiency was improved, and the Public Financial Management and Control Law (No. 5018) strengthened budget transparency and performance-based budgeting. Tax rates were reduced, and lower VAT and corporate tax rates were implemented<sup>127</sup>. Inflation targets were set in coordination with the government to reduce inflation rates to levels consistent with the Maastricht criteria. The privatization program was rapidly implemented, transferring much of the state's ownership in sectors such as telecommunications, energy, cement, and textiles to the private sector. Market liberalization was achieved in the energy and agriculture sectors, focusing on prioritizing domestic and renewable energy resources in production<sup>128</sup>. The document emphasized

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>126</sup> Republic of Turkey Directorate for EU Affairs. (2008). *Ulusal program 2008: III. Ekonomik kriterler*. [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/UlusalProgram/UlusalProgram\\_2008/Tr/pdf/iii\\_ekonomikkriterler.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/UlusalProgram/UlusalProgram_2008/Tr/pdf/iii_ekonomikkriterler.pdf)

<sup>127</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibidem*.

that Türkiye continued to pursue structural reforms to cope with competitive pressures within the EU. The Investment Climate Improvement Reform Program was highlighted as an initiative to reduce bureaucratic obstacles and facilitate investments<sup>129</sup>.

### *3.12. Key Findings of the 2010 Regular Report from the Commission on Türkiye's Progress Towards Accession*

According to the 2009 Progress Report, Türkiye opened thirteen chapters in its accession negotiations. These chapters include Environment, Free Movement of Capital, Taxation, Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Policy, Statistics, Company Law, Consumer and Health Protection, Information Society and Media, Trans-European Networks, Industrial Policy, Financial Control, and Science and Research. Only the Science and Research chapter has been temporarily closed among the opened chapters. However, the Council Decision of December 2006 continues to pose a significant obstacle in the negotiation process and remains in force. As highlighted in the 2010 report, this Council Decision blocked the opening of eight chapters due to Türkiye's restrictions on the Greek Cypriot Administration. It was also emphasized that Türkiye must fully implement the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement. No chapter can be closed, even temporarily, until the European Commission confirms that Türkiye has fulfilled this obligation<sup>130</sup>.

The 2010 Progress Report addresses several key issues that shaped Türkiye's domestic political agenda, including the constitutional reform package, the democratic initiative regarding the Kurdish issue, and investigations into coup plans<sup>131</sup>. However, as the report notes, tensions among political institutions and the lack of dialogue between the government and opposition parties further deepened the polarized political environment in Türkiye.

The report also emphasizes that the Constitutional Court's decision to dissolve the Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi, DTP*) negatively impacted the government's Kurdish initiative. Following the party's closure, its members continued their political activities by forming the Peace and Democracy Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi*

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>130</sup> European Commission. (2010). *2010 regular report from the Commission on Turkey's progress towards accession* (p. 5). (Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs, Trans.) [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB\\_Iliskileri/AdaylikSureci/IlerlemeRaporlari/turkiye\\_ilerleme\\_rap\\_2010.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB_Iliskileri/AdaylikSureci/IlerlemeRaporlari/turkiye_ilerleme_rap_2010.pdf)

<sup>131</sup> *Ivi*, p. 7.

*Partisi*, BDP). Furthermore, the report highlights the need for Türkiye to align its legislation on political party closures with European standards<sup>132</sup>. Although the Parliament's legislative activities were reported to have become more active, its capacity to oversee the executive branch remained limited. While legal measures to combat violence against women were strengthened, shortcomings in implementation were observed. Despite the government's democratic initiative, progress in expanding political and cultural rights remained limited.

The 2010 Progress Report also highlights Türkiye's support for the Cyprus negotiations under the UN Secretary-General's Good Offices mission. Although Türkiye openly backed the negotiations between the two community leaders, the report states that the outcome is expected to align with the principles of the UN Security Council and the EU. Türkiye's commitment to a fair, comprehensive, and sustainable solution under the UN framework is considered crucial for the success of the process. However, despite repeated calls by the Council and the Commission, the report notes that Türkiye has not fulfilled the obligations outlined in its September 21, 2005 declaration and the Council statements of December 2006 and December 2009. Notably, Türkiye's failure to fully and indiscriminately implement the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement remains a major obstacle<sup>133</sup>.

The 2010 Progress Report evaluates Türkiye's economic performance within the framework of the Copenhagen criteria, emphasizing the importance of a functioning market economy and competitiveness for EU membership. However, the lack of coordination among public institutions is cited as a challenge. After the economic contraction in 2009, growth regained momentum in 2010, with improvements observed across all sectors. However, the current account and trade deficits grew rapidly alongside rising domestic demand. In the first half of 2010, the current account deficit reached 6.2% of GDP. The growth of the banking sector and international reserves were highlighted as factors that enhanced Türkiye's resilience to the crisis. The report stresses that improving coordination and planning in economic policies would increase economic confidence<sup>134</sup>.

According to the 2010 Progress Report, Türkiye made progress in various areas of alignment with the EU *acquis*. Although technical alignment in free movement

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>133</sup> *Ivi*, p. 36.

<sup>134</sup> *Ivi*, p. 39.

continued, implementation remained problematic, and progress was limited. In competition policy, transparency in state aid was achieved, but the preservation of monopolistic structures in some sectors was criticized. In the energy sector, significant steps were taken regarding energy security and renewable energy, and Türkiye's support for the Nabucco project was positively received. While efforts to align environmental legislation continued, waste management and air quality progress were insufficient. In the area of justice, freedom, and security, although developments were recorded in border management and migration policies, shortcomings in the protection of asylum seekers were criticized<sup>135</sup>.

The 2010 Progress Report acknowledges Türkiye's progress in democratization and economic development but highlights challenges in implementing reforms. Limited progress was reported in key political areas such as judicial independence, freedom of expression, human rights, and the Kurdish issue. Additionally, the unresolved Cyprus issue continued to have a negative impact on Türkiye-EU relations. The report emphasizes that Türkiye must maintain its alignment efforts with the EU acquis and that the successful continuation of political and economic reforms is essential for the process to succeed.

The significant milestones achieved in Türkiye's EU accession process between 1999 and 2010 accelerated the reform dynamic and strengthened the European perspective. However, this process was shaped not only by diplomatic negotiations and summits but also by the challenges encountered in implementing reforms and aligning with the acquis. These challenges have created significant difficulties in both Türkiye's domestic and foreign policy. Political, economic, and socio-cultural alignment issues have been key factors shaping the trajectory of Türkiye-EU relations. The section "Compliance Challenges and Implications of EU Accession " will focus on how Türkiye addressed these challenges and the impact of the EU accession process on Türkiye's domestic and foreign policy.

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<sup>135</sup> *Ivi*, p. 64

## IV. Compliance Challenges and Implications of EU Accession

Türkiye's accession process to the EU has required a comprehensive alignment effort, encompassing legal regulations and political, economic, social, and cultural structures. The reforms implemented to align with the EU *acquis* have necessitated significant changes across various sectors. However, the process has encountered numerous obstacles and resistance. While the accession process has driven transformations in both Türkiye's domestic and foreign policies, it has also become one of the key factors shaping the direction of Türkiye-EU relations. This process cannot be evaluated solely through the lens of compliance challenges and outcomes; societal divisions and differences in views on EU membership also hold a crucial place.

EU membership has sparked ideological debates and brought about divergent opinions within Turkish society. On one hand, secular and progressive groups advocate that EU membership will foster progress in economic development, democracy, and human rights. On the other hand, conservative and religious groups express concerns that integration with Europe could negatively impact cultural identity. Those who embrace Atatürk's vision of modernization view EU membership as an opportunity for Türkiye's future, while more conservative circles, particularly during the AKP's rule, have maintained a more cautious stance toward closer ties with Europe.

Nationalism, religious sensitivities, and Turanism are among the ideological factors underpinning the reluctance toward EU membership in Turkish society. Nationalists argue that Türkiye must preserve its independence and are skeptical about international collaborations, advocating that the country should act solely in line with its national interests. A survey conducted in 2017 revealed that a significant portion of the population supported the idea that Türkiye should make independent decisions<sup>136</sup>. Conservative groups, who place religious values at the forefront, also maintain a distance from EU membership. While Türkiye has a secular system of governance, a large portion of society values religious sensitivities. The belief that integration with the EU might

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<sup>136</sup> American Progress. (2018, February). *Turkish nationalism and perceptions of identity and culture: Findings from a 2017 national survey in Turkey*. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/02/TurkishNationalismPolling-report.pdf>

erode these values has led many conservative voters to oppose closer relations with Europe. Furthermore, the ideology of Turanism, which promotes the unity of all Turkic peoples, continues to influence anti-EU rhetoric. This ideology is seen as conflicting with the EU's integration policies.

The challenges Türkiye faces in its membership process are not limited to domestic dynamics. The EU holds fundamental reservations about Türkiye's full membership. Türkiye's large population and expansive geography are perceived as straining the EU's "absorption capacity" (TURKSTAT reports that Türkiye's population in 2023 is 85.37 million). Additionally, the fact that most of Türkiye's territory lies in Asia has sparked debates about its geographical and cultural ties to Europe. Although Türkiye is often described as a bridge between Europe and Asia, 95% of its landmass is on the Asian continent. The rejection of Morocco's application for EU membership in 1987 on similar geographic grounds demonstrates the seriousness of the geographical challenges Türkiye faces.

The EU sees Türkiye's geopolitical position as both an advantage and a risk. While Türkiye is of strategic importance to Europe's security, it also borders conflict zones such as Syria, Iran, and Iraq. This proximity to volatile regions has heightened security concerns among EU members, making progress in Türkiye's accession process more difficult. Implementing political reforms and democratization efforts during the accession process have led to shifts in Türkiye's domestic balances, deepening societal polarization. At the same time, political reforms aimed at aligning with the EU have faced internal and external resistance as they seek to transform the country's governance model. For this reason, it is essential to examine how the political challenges arising from Türkiye-EU relations have impacted the country's domestic politics. The following section will analyze these political challenges and their reflections on Türkiye's internal dynamics in greater detail.

#### *4.1. Political Challenges and Domestic Policy Implications*

Türkiye's EU membership process has required progress in legal reforms and key areas such as democratization, judicial independence, and human rights. However, these reforms have led to significant resistance and polarization in domestic politics. Political attitudes are one of the main obstacles to Türkiye's full EU membership. The secular and democratic Türkiye, established by Atatürk in 1928, has occasionally faced

political challenges. Due to the lack of deeply rooted democratic traditions, the military has intervened in governments to preserve secularism. These interventions have resulted in human rights violations, drawing frequent criticism from the Council of Europe. In the EU accession process, political reforms have taken center stage, with major challenges emerging in areas such as judicial reforms, the protection of human rights, freedom of expression, and the development of minority rights. The Kurdish Issue and insufficient democratization efforts have posed severe barriers to Türkiye's EU membership aspirations.

Human rights violations and setbacks in press freedom, often highlighted in EU progress reports, have been central to the criticisms directed at Türkiye. Additionally, reducing military influence and improving oversight in civil-military relations have been among the EU's key conditions. These reforms have triggered significant transformations in Türkiye's domestic politics. The 2001 constitutional amendments and subsequent legal reforms achieved notable progress in the democratization process. However, the slowdown in reforms and ongoing rights violations have negatively impacted Türkiye's EU accession process. Issues such as judicial independence and freedom of expression remain contentious, increasing the risk of EU membership negotiations being suspended.

#### *4.1.1. Cyprus and Kurdish Issues as Key Political Obstacles*

Deep-rooted issues like the Cyprus and Kurdish Issues have hindered the development of human rights and minority rights, slowing Türkiye's progress in EU negotiations. Despite these challenges, reform efforts in the 2000s led to adopting EU harmonization packages, advancing democratization. However, deficiencies in implementing these reforms and the eventual slowdown brought political issues back to the forefront. The complex interaction between Türkiye's domestic politics and the EU harmonization process has shaped the primary challenges along the path to membership.

The Cyprus issue, briefly mentioned in earlier sections, has been one of the most significant political obstacles to Türkiye's EU membership. In 1960, the Republic of Cyprus was established through a partnership between Turkish and Greek communities, with equal political rights granted to both. Archbishop Makarios served as president, while Dr. Fazıl Küçük represented the Turkish community as vice president<sup>137</sup>. However,

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<sup>137</sup> House of Representatives of Cyprus. (n.d.). *Historical review*. Parliament of Cyprus. Retrieved October 30, 2024, from <https://www.parliament.cy/tr/general-information/historical-review>



this partnership was short-lived. Rising tensions between the two communities soon escalated into violent conflicts. Notably, the constitutional amendments of 1963 and the "Bloody Christmas" events in 1964 shook the island deeply. During these events, 364 Turks and 174 Greeks lost their lives, and thousands of Turks were forced to abandon their homes<sup>138</sup>. These developments disrupted peace on the island and internationalized the Cyprus issue.

The most critical event deepening the Cyprus problem occurred in 1974. On July 15, 1974, the Greek military junta, with support from the nationalist EOKA-B group, staged a coup against Makarios to unite the island with Greece. This prompted Türkiye to intervene, invoking its guarantor rights. On July 20, 1974, Türkiye launched a military operation in Cyprus<sup>139</sup> to protect the Turkish community and establish a de facto division of the island.

Türkiye's intervention separated the two communities, with Turks in the north and Greeks in the south, solidifying ethnic boundaries. This intervention sparked international debates and sanctions against Türkiye<sup>140</sup>. While Turkish Cypriots referred to the operation as a peace mission, Greek Cypriots saw it as an invasion, complicating the reconciliation process. No solution was reached following the 1974 division, and in 1983, Turkish Cypriots declared the establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (**TRNC**). However, the TRNC was only recognized by Türkiye, with the rest of the world continuing to recognize the island as the Republic of Cyprus. As mentioned earlier, various attempts were made by the United Nations to resolve the Cyprus issue. The most comprehensive proposal was the Annan Plan 2004, which aimed to establish a federative structure with political equality between the two communities. Although Turkish Cypriots accepted the plan, it was rejected by Greek Cypriots, and the Republic of Cyprus joined the EU as a full member in 2004.

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<sup>138</sup> United Nations. (1964, September 10). *Report by the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Cyprus*. United Nations Security Council. [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S\\_2021\\_890\\_E.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2021_890_E.pdf)

<sup>139</sup> Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.). *Kıbrıs meselesinin tarihçesi: BM müzakerelerinin başlangıcı*. [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/kibris-meselesinin-tarihcesi\\_-bm-muzakerelerinin-baslangici.tr.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/kibris-meselesinin-tarihcesi_-bm-muzakerelerinin-baslangici.tr.mfa)

<sup>140</sup> Müftüler-Bac, M. (1999, August). The Cyprus debacle: What the future holds (p. 562). *Futures*, 31(6), 559–575. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287\(99\)00014-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287(99)00014-2)

After this point, Türkiye's EU accession process became directly tied to the Cyprus Issue -the full EU membership of the Greek Cypriot administration in 2004 further complicated efforts toward a solution. In EU negotiations, vetoes by Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration blocked Türkiye's progress, even when other negotiation chapters were successfully completed<sup>141</sup>. Critical issues in negotiations included the reunification of Cyprus and the withdrawal of Turkish troops from the island. The non-recognition of the Republic of Cyprus by Türkiye has become a severe obstacle in the EU accession process.

Similarly, the Kurdish Issue has been another major political barrier to Türkiye's EU membership. Until 1992, Türkiye did not officially recognize the Kurdish minority, drawing criticism for violating the EU's minority rights criteria. The EU has viewed the Kurdish Issue not only as a human rights violation but also as a source of regional instability. Without resolving the Kurdish Issue, Türkiye's EU membership seems unlikely.

The Kurdish Issue has been one of the most significant political and social challenges in modern Turkish history, with ethnic, political, economic, and cultural dimensions. The problem deepened in the aftermath of the Republic's foundation, particularly within the context of identity politics and state centralization efforts. The unitary structure introduced by the 1924 Constitution and the emphasis on Turkish identity led to the denial of Kurdish identity and the restriction of cultural rights<sup>142</sup>. Events like the Sheikh Said Rebellion (1925) and the Dersim Rebellion (1937-1938) further strained relations between the state and the Kurds, increasing state repression<sup>143</sup>.

Following the 1980 military coup, political repression against the Kurdish people escalated, and the lack of response to Kurdish demands triggered catastrophic conflicts. The PKK was established as a separatist group in the 1980s, escalating the conflict by attacking both military and civilian targets. The Kurdish issue received global

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<sup>141</sup> İnaç, H. (2016). *Türkiye-AB ilişkileri: Entegrasyonu zora sokan saikler*. Journal of Süleyman Demirel University Institute of Social Sciences, 2016(3), 229–246. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/276280>

<sup>142</sup> Kirişci, K. (2003). *The Kurdish question and Turkish foreign policy*. In M. Abramowitz (Ed.), *Turkey's Transformation and American Policy* (pp. 275-281). ResearchGate. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237734135\\_The\\_Kurdish\\_Question\\_and\\_Turkish\\_Foreign\\_Policy](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237734135_The_Kurdish_Question_and_Turkish_Foreign_Policy)

<sup>143</sup> Kirişci, K., & Winrow, G. M. (1997). *The Kurdish question and Turkey: An example of a trans-state ethnic conflict*. Routledge Press.

concern throughout the 1990s as a result of human rights atrocities. The violent conflict escalated after the PKK initiated military operations in 1984, initially trying to establish an independent Kurdish state before altering its objectives to autonomy and cultural rights. The Kurdish conflict has killed hundreds, driven millions to relocate, and hampered the socioeconomic growth of Türkiye's eastern and southeastern areas.

The PKK's violent campaign was temporarily halted after Abdullah Öcalan was captured in 1999<sup>144</sup>. Around the same time, Türkiye initiated reforms related to human rights, freedom of speech, and cultural rights as part of the EU accession process. The AKP's ascent to power in 2002 accelerated democratization efforts and brought in several policies to solve the Kurdish problem<sup>145</sup>. Initiatives such as the Solution Process in 2009 and the Peace Process (2013-2015) attempted to resolve the Kurdish issue through dialogue. The steps included setting up Kurdish-language television channels, recognizing the right to Kurdish education, and strengthening local administrations. However, the PKK's resumption of military warfare in 2004 jeopardized these achievements. Attempts such as the Oslo Talks in 2008 and other peace initiatives failed, and violence escalated again in the 2010s.

The EU continually encourages Türkiye to find peaceful solutions to the Kurdish issue and acknowledge Kurdish rights. However, the process has been hampered by government mistrust, social division, and complicated regional dynamics. The Kurdish issue remains a fundamental obstacle to Türkiye's political, social, and economic progress. Addressing this issue through dialogue and reconciliation is critical to creating enduring peace. Both the state and civil society must actively support these initiatives. Recognizing Kurdish rights, advancing democratization, and fostering regional peace are critical to Türkiye's long-term success.

In summary, internal divisiveness (especially domestic polarization) and political reform delays have often hampered Türkiye's EU accession path. Despite advances in civil-military relations, judicial independence, and minority rights, difficulties in the sustainability of reforms remain. The Cyprus and Kurdish Issues remain major obstacles to national democratization and Türkiye's EU membership.

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<sup>144</sup> Kirişci, K. (2003). *The Kurdish question and Turkish foreign policy*. In M. Abramowitz (Ed.), *Turkey's Transformation and American Policy* (pp. 275-281). ResearchGate. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237734135\\_The\\_Kurdish\\_Question\\_and\\_Turkish\\_Foreign\\_Policy](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237734135_The_Kurdish_Question_and_Turkish_Foreign_Policy)

<sup>145</sup> Ivi, p. 274.

Although changes implemented in the 2000s helped Türkiye align with the EU, implementation flaws and negotiating stalling have pushed the membership aim back indefinitely. In order to secure long-term peace and stability, Türkiye must continue to implement political reforms and coordinate its internal policies with the EU membership process.

Following the 1999 Helsinki Summit, Türkiye started a thorough reform process to achieve EU membership. There has been progress in critical areas such as democracy, judicial independence, and human rights protection. However, these changes were met with opposition and polarization in domestic politics. Türkiye's path to complete EU membership has been determined not just by legal reforms but also by their successful execution. To accelerate the process, Türkiye offered multiple harmonization packages:

- First Harmonization Package (February 19, 2002): Narrowing the scope of the death penalty; enhancing press freedom.
- Second Harmonization Package (April 9, 2002): Freedom to establish associations; freedom of expression.
- Third Harmonization Package (August 9, 2002): Complete abolition of the death penalty; Kurdish-language broadcasting and education; combating torture.
- Fourth Harmonization Package (January 11, 2003): Judicial reforms; protection of minority rights.
- Fifth Harmonization Package (February 4, 2003): Freedom of assembly and protest; transparency in judicial processes.
- Sixth Harmonization Package (July 19, 2003): Human rights and anti-torture measures; diversity in education.
- Seventh Harmonization Package (August 7, 2003): Minority rights; reducing detention periods.
- Eighth Harmonization Package (July 14, 2004): Freedom of expression and press; human rights; compliance with EU norms.
- Ninth Reform Package (April 12, 2006): Women's rights; judicial reforms (Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs, n.d.).

These packages amended 53 laws and 218 articles, leading to advancement in democracy, individual freedom, and freedom of speech. Since the reform process needed significant legislative efforts, harmonization packages were offered to accelerate it<sup>146</sup>.

Reducing the military's role has been important in Türkiye's democratic transition. In accordance with EU demands, the National Security Council was transformed into an advisory body, with civilians assigned to its secretariat. The State Security Courts were dissolved, but judicial independence was strengthened<sup>147</sup>. These changes were a watershed moment in Türkiye's democratization efforts. However, the decrease in the military's traditional role in politics has led to problems in domestic politics.

The Cyprus issue remains one of the most serious political obstacles to Türkiye's EU membership. The island's divisions following Türkiye's 1974 incursion have aroused international debate -the Greek Cypriot Administration's complete EU membership in 2004 complicated Türkiye's accession path. The vetoes imposed by Greece and the Republic of Cyprus blocked Turkish progress in negotiations. The resolution of the Cyprus issue, as well as the evacuation of Turkish forces from the island, have been ongoing areas of contention in Turkish-EU relations.

Türkiye launched TRT Kurdish, an official television channel that supports Kurdish language education and media<sup>148</sup>. The Solution Process in 2009 and the Peace Process (2013-2015) were attempts to resolve the Kurdish issue through dialogue. However, the resurgence of PKK activity hindered the reform process and undermined efforts to address the Kurdish issue. The EU has encouraged Türkiye to acknowledge Kurdish rights and seek peaceful solutions to the crisis.

Significant changes were achieved, particularly in the 2000s, in areas like democracy, human rights, and judicial independence, although political and social tensions persisted. Cyprus and Kurdish issues have continued to hamper Türkiye's democracy and EU accession efforts. Although harmonization packages introduced legal changes, deficiencies in implementing these reforms have slowed Türkiye's progress toward EU membership.

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<sup>146</sup> Republic of Türkiye Directorate for EU Affairs. (n.d.). *Rehber: Avrupa Birliği uyum süreci ve yapısal reformlar* (p. 3). (Guide on the EU integration process and structural reforms). [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/rehber/04\\_rehber.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/rehber/04_rehber.pdf)

<sup>147</sup> *Ivi*, p. 18.

<sup>148</sup> *Ivi*, p. 4.

#### 4.2. *Economic Challenges and Economic Implications*

In order to integrate with the EU, Türkiye implemented economic reforms that needed extensive adjustments but encountered several structural obstacles. In particular, the regulations introduced to align the labor market encountered resistance from employers and trade unions. The expenses imposed by the Customs Union Agreement (1996) were also criticized, emphasizing the need to improve the competitiveness of the industrial and agricultural sectors, which presented a substantial challenge.

Key economic challenges included controlling inflation, reducing the budget deficit, lowering unemployment rates, and ensuring macroeconomic stability. Türkiye aimed to build a competitive market economy as part of its goal for full membership, yet small and medium-sized enterprises (*SMEs*) struggled under competitive pressure. Persistent regional development disparities and high unemployment rates further complicate the process.

The decline in growth rates exacerbated Türkiye's economic alignment efforts. The GDP growth rate, which was 11% in 2011, dropped to 1.9% in 2020, reflecting the fragility of the Turkish economy (World Bank, 2023). Türkiye's per capita income, which is less than half the EU average, also represents an additional burden for the EU economy. Moreover, income inequality remains a significant issue in Türkiye's path toward economic convergence with the EU.

As noted in the regular reports from the Commission on Türkiye's progress towards accession, the reforms implemented during Türkiye's EU alignment process have stimulated economic growth and strengthened Türkiye's position in the global economy. Structural reforms have further integrated Türkiye into the EU market, increasing trade volume and encouraging foreign investments. However, implementing these reforms has been costly in the short term. Sectors such as small businesses and agriculture have faced considerable adaptation costs.

While the Customs Union Agreement boosted Türkiye's trade volume, it also increased the competitive pressure on the industrial and agricultural sectors. Despite benefits such as access to EU funds and expanding free trade opportunities, economic stabilization programs and reforms have negatively impacted specific sectors. Although improvements in areas like income distribution were expected, the persistence of regional development disparities remains a significant obstacle to economic alignment.

In conclusion, Türkiye's economic reforms throughout the EU alignment process aided long-term development and integration while also resulting in an expensive and difficult transition. Current economic indicators reveal Türkiye is not yet entirely prepared for EU membership. However, there is still optimism that alignment efforts may improve anti-corruption measures and economic distribution. Although trading with the EU has given the industrial sector a competitive edge, sensitive industries like small enterprises and agriculture have suffered. Furthermore, financial reforms have increased Türkiye's resilience in global markets. Nonetheless, the societal consequences of these shifts have caused instability and prompted criticism of government policy.

#### *4.3. Social and Cultural Challenges and Foreign Policy Implications*

In order to comply with EU criteria, Türkiye had to establish a social structure that complied with those standards. Education, women's rights, minority rights, and civil society strengthening were all key areas for aligning with EU social policy. Progress in sensitive areas, including the Kurdish issue and the rights of non-Muslim minorities, became critical components of Türkiye's social integration throughout the accession process.

Türkiye introduced reforms related to minority rights to align with the EU *acquis*. However, these reforms raised concerns in some segments of society about potential threats to national identity and cultural unity. Debates surrounding the rights of Kurds and non-Muslim minorities generated social resistance. Similarly, reforms aimed at improving women's rights -inspired by the EU- occasionally clashed with traditional social norms. Efforts to strengthen women's roles in social and economic life were met with resistance, particularly among conservative groups.

Ideological divisions between secular and conservative groups in Türkiye also influenced attitudes toward EU integration. While secular factions were more open to adopting EU standards, conservative groups found the EU's social values incompatible with their traditional structures. Nationalist movements and Pan-Turkism regarded Türkiye's accession to the EU as threatening independence and national sovereignty. EU-mandated reforms were met with opposition, particularly due to concerns about preserving Türkiye's identity and sovereignty. Pan-Turkism, a movement promoting the unity of all peoples of Ural-Altaic origin, emerged during the Ottoman period. Its vision of a Turan Union conflicted with the EU's integration policies. Meanwhile, Atatürk's

supporters, who advocate for a secular and democratic society, remained committed to EU membership.

Although social reforms brought significant progress, resistance, and polarization within society hindered their implementation. The EU's criticisms, particularly in areas such as human rights and social equality, occasionally led to tensions in Türkiye-EU relations. While some segments of society welcomed these reforms, others strongly resisted them, shaping both Türkiye's domestic and foreign policy priorities.

Türkiye's reforms throughout its EU accession process resulted in substantial changes in its foreign policy. The aim of membership pushed Türkiye to reconsider its relations with neighboring countries and implement a foreign policy in line with EU standards. Balancing Türkiye's regional leadership ambitions with the EU's expectations proved difficult at times. As stated in the Historical Overview chapter's Transformation of Türkiye's Political Structure, Turkish-EU ties have frequently gone through tough periods, which have been formed in part by Turkish public opinion. The Cyprus problem is one of the most visible manifestations of these difficulties. Regardless of the difficulties, Türkiye backed the Annan Plan to address the Cyprus dispute. However, the unilateral acceptance of the Republic of Cyprus into the EU in 2004 caused significant disappointment in Türkiye and became a lasting source of tension in Türkiye-EU relations.

As part of the EU membership process, Türkiye restored relations with Greece. The increased dialogue between the two countries following the 1999 Helsinki Summit helped to reduce tensions, but it did not occur without obstacles. Throughout the EU alignment process, Türkiye aimed to become part of Europe's security infrastructure. However, this integration was hampered by the EU's hopes for more alignment and the difficulties of achieving an agreement on security issues.

Türkiye's foreign policy throughout the EU accession process had a significant influence on regional dynamics. Türkiye's alignment with the EU was hindered by the Cyprus problem and its autonomous policies toward the Middle East, even if progress was promoted by mending ties with Greece and implementing policies that aligned with EU ideals. Efforts to integrate into Europe's security system boosted Türkiye's relations with the EU, although combining regional concerns with EU aims was not always feasible. Eventually, Türkiye's internal and foreign policies were profoundly influenced



by the political, economic, and social obstacles it experienced while aligning with the EU acquis. In order to overcome these obstacles, Türkiye must accelerate the reform process, and the EU must treat Türkiye fairly.

Türkiye's institutional structures have undergone significant changes as a result of the EU process. Still, these changes will only last as long as Türkiye remains committed to both reforms and the EU's enlargement strategy. Cooperation between both sides will be critical to the future of Turkish-EU relations. The political, economic, social, and cultural issues highlighted in this chapter are key aspects influencing Türkiye's EU accession process. The way Türkiye deals with these difficulties will have an impact on both its internal and foreign policy.

## V. Conclusion

This thesis has examined Türkiye's EU accession process between 1999 and 2010 in-depth and revealed the complex nature of the process. Türkiye's integration efforts with the EU were not limited to political and economic reforms; the influence of regional and global dynamics also shaped them. Thanks to the reforms throughout the process, significant progress was made in democratization, improved human rights standards, and strengthened the market economy in Türkiye. However, the obstacles during this period prevented the accession process from progressing linearly and slowed the process occasionally. This situation turned Türkiye-EU relations into a fragile, cyclical, uncertain structure. The Helsinki Summit was a historical turning point in terms of Türkiye-EU relations, and with Türkiye gaining the status of a candidate country, both the reform processes gained momentum and political expectations increased. During this process, efforts to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria necessitated comprehensive political, economic, and legislative reforms. However, the unresolved Cyprus issue, the Kurdish issue, and the difficulties experienced by Türkiye in the face of EU expectations on human rights and minority rights have created significant obstacles to the process. At the same time, rising nationalist movements and enlargement fatigue within the EU have further complicated Türkiye's membership perspective.

The thesis findings show that significant structural changes were experienced in Türkiye's EU process between 1999 and 2010. Still, the failure to sustain the reform momentum had a negative impact on the process. Reforms gained momentum in Türkiye, especially after the AKP came to power in 2002; however, both domestic political developments and the EU's own internal problems caused a slowdown in Türkiye's harmonization process after 2005. The slowdown in reforms increased trust issues in EU relations and complicated the negotiation progress. However, Türkiye's geopolitical location and strategic importance have made it an indispensable partner for the EU regarding migration, the fight against terrorism, and energy security. This situation reveals that Türkiye's membership process is not only a technical issue but also shaped by strategic interests and regional balance searches.

The findings discussed in the thesis show that Türkiye's EU membership process not only brings about compliance with EU standards but also transforms Türkiye's political culture and foreign policy. However, this transformation process has been

interrupted from time to time by domestic political polarizations, economic crises, and social resistance. External and domestic issues such as Cyprus and the Kurdish problems have continued to exist as the main obstacles to Türkiye's EU membership; instead of deepening Türkiye-EU relations, these problems have occasionally caused them to become blocked.

Furthermore, the thesis findings reveal that Türkiye's relations with the EU are not just important but essential regionally and globally. Türkiye acts as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East, and is the EU's strategic partner in energy security, migration management and regional stability. Türkiye's geopolitical importance, far from being a complication, is a key factor that enhances the technical aspects of the membership process. The internal debates of the EU, as well as the significant increase in tendencies such as populism and Islamophobia, have been factors that have complicated Türkiye's membership process.

One of the fundamental questions that is attempted to be answered within the scope of this thesis is *"In which areas does Türkiye carry out the reforms to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria concentrated, and in which aspects have the successes and shortcomings of these reforms manifested themselves?"* Between 1999 and 2010, Türkiye undertook important reforms in vital areas such as democratization, human rights, the rule of law, and the growth of the market economy. Initially, significant progress was achieved in issues such as freedom of expression, minority rights, the fight against torture, and the development of women's rights, and the legal framework has come closer to EU standards. However, significant deficiencies have emerged during the implementation phase. Political obstacles, especially the failure to resolve the Kurdish issue and the Cyprus problem, as well as shortcomings in judicial independence, have limited the permanent impact of the reforms. In addition, factors such as political polarization in Türkiye and the EU's enlargement fatigue have led to the failure to sustain the reform momentum. As a result, although Türkiye's reforms within the framework of the Copenhagen Criteria have achieved significant progress over a certain period, the shortcomings and lack of sustainability of these reforms have prevented relations with the EU from developing at the expected level.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown that Türkiye's EU accession process between 1999 and 2010 was a period that encouraged reforms for both parties but also brought

various difficulties. The gains achieved in this process enabled Türkiye to take important steps towards democratization and modernization; however, the challenges experienced regarding the sustainability of the process have created uncertainty about the future of the relations. The future of the relations between Türkiye and the EU will depend not only on the parties' political will but also on the urgent need for the recognition of common interests and values, the re-evaluation of the relations by both parties within a strategic framework, the establishment of mutual trust, and the continuation of a constructive dialogue.

In this context, the period between 1999 and 2010 provides essential clues for understanding the future of Türkiye-EU relations. It contains lessons that the parties should consider when determining their future strategies. How these relations will shape in the future will depend on both Türkiye's commitment to the reform process and the EU's approach to enlargement policies. Understanding the future course of relations requires considering historical dynamics and global developments.

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