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**TÜRKİYE'S GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES: A
CASE OF EUROPEANIZATION OR (DE)-
EUROPEANIZATION?**

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... Istanbul Convention saves lives...

Abstract

Gender equality policies have played a fundamental role in the European Union (EU) since the Treaty of Rome. The EU has consistently prioritized gender equality and has extended its influence to encourage the Europeanization of gender equality policies in member and candidate countries. As a global leader in advancing gender equality, the EU strives to promote gender parity both within its borders and worldwide. This thesis seeks to investigate the evolution of gender equality policies in Türkiye within the context of Europeanization and (de)-Europeanization processes and delves into the intricate dynamics of how Türkiye's gender equality policies have been shaped and reshaped by its engagement with the EU. It examines the extent to which Türkiye's domestic gender equality agenda has been influenced by EU policies and directives and the impact of potential (de)-Europeanization forces that may have led to shifts in the country's approach to gender equality. By analyzing policy changes, this thesis aims to comprehensively understand the interplay between Türkiye's pursuit of gender equality and its relationship with the EU.

Keywords: Europeanization, (de)-Europeanization, Gender Equality, Türkiye, European Union

1 Europeanization and Policy Change

1.1 Introduction

The relationship between the European Union – Türkiye goes back in history. Türkiye has been a reliable partner of the EU. For the Turkish state as well, the EU has significant importance. Since the start of the accession processes, the EU managed to impact most areas of the domestic political, social, and economic life in the country. These processes enable us to talk about Europeanization in Türkiye, not only in general but also from several perspectives. Gender equality is one of the areas that the EU is proud to be a leader in terms of improving gender equality not only inside the EU but around the globe. Following the leading future of the EU and after a detailed study of both Europeanization literature and gender equality, the thesis would like to explore the gender equality policy change in Türkiye under Europeanization and (de)-Europeanization processes as there seems to be little amount of study that focused on the policy change over the periods.

In the first chapter, Europeanization and gender equality literature are described in-depth to provide a clear view of the point. Europeanization literature includes diverse perspectives and areas of study. The gender equality literature related to the EU and Europeanization is considered as part of it. However, these two topics are explained under different titles. Following these, research design and methodology are defined to provide the research steps and ensure the research is reliable.

In the second chapter, the EU gender equality policy is displayed, starting from how it evolved over the period of time by analyzing policies, EU directives, EU funds, and projects. Additionally, the policy structure of the EU Gender Equality Policy is mentioned with an analysis of four dimensions: objectives, principles, procedures, and financial instruments to assist the examination of gender equality policy change in Türkiye. Following that the third chapter provides a brief explanation of the political landscape in Türkiye by focusing on the time from AKP's coming to power until today and Europeanization in Türkiye.

The fourth chapter is where the analysis of the Europeanization of Gender Equality Policies in Türkiye has been carried out. Policy structure is a way to present the policy change. It articulates how objectives, principles, procedures, and financial instruments have changed during the Europeanization period. Also, the answers from the semi-structured interviews were used here to make the analysis stronger. The fifth chapter is the analysis of (de)-Europeanization period of gender equality policies. Here also same methodology was employed. In this chapter, the argued gender equality policy change continues, however, it is in a reverse way. In the conclusion part, the limitations of the study and future research suggestions were presented.

1.2 Europeanization: Methodological and Conceptual Issues

The European Union and its member states are the main actors in analyzing the Europeanization process. There is an important amount of literature on how Europeanization takes place in member states and candidate countries. The main argument over Europeanization is conditioned on the idea of EU membership influencing the member states' political life. Meanwhile, member states influence the political outcomes at the EU level and are part of knowledge exchange and sharing of best practices and forms of making things due to their closer cooperation (Exadaktylos & Graziano, 2022). The process is not only taking place in one area but specifically influencing every level of policymaking. As an outcome, policy change is visible in member states and candidate countries. As this thesis focuses on the case of Türkiye, I will analyze Europeanization in Türkiye, however, before doing that I will try to explore Europeanization literature and try to present in what ways or in which areas this process happened and is happening. It is important to also highlight that the thesis adopts the definition of Europeanization by Radaelli (2003):

“processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things', and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures, and public policies.” (p.g.17)

Without going too deep, this part will give a brief overview.

Approximately a top-down and bottom-up approach can be mentioned in terms of Europeanization and before the 1990s, most of the studies focused on implementation of the European policies, the study cycle followed first the ‘pressure’ from Europe on member states, then intervening variables and lastly the reactions and change at domestic level and the ‘pressure’ and ‘intervening variables’ were treated as primitive (Radaelli, 2004). When we turn to the beginning of Europeanization studies specifically on public policymaking, the change at the domestic level has been the core element (Exadaktylos & Graziano, 2022). In time, the studies evolved: early perspectives on the impacts of Europeanization, the theorization of domestic change, public policy making, implementation of EU policies at the domestic level, member states’ form of performing on altering EU directives, convergence or not from a top-down approach, common policy making at the EU level such as economic and social cohesion policies, transport, environment, immigration and refugees, citizenship, social policy, foreign policy, the role of Europe as a global actor reconsidered (Green Cowles, Caporaso and Risse, 2001; Börzel and Risse, 2003; Börzel, 2001; Kaeding, 2006; Mastenbroek, 2003; Sverdrup, 2007; Benz & Eberlein, 1999; Héritier et al., 2001; Knill, 1998; Lavenex, 2001; Vink, 2001; Graziano, 2003; Aggestam, 2004; Tonra, 2001; Exadaktylos, 2012 mentioned in Exadaktylos & Graziano, 2022). The research area of Europeanization is not a stable agenda or is limited to certain topics.

Rationalist institutionalism and constructivist institutionalism are used to explain the impact of the EU in Europeanization studies. According to rationalist institutionalism, efficiency calculations are the reason for deciding if the government must comply with EU rules and conditions or not, the benefits of the compensations from the EU for compliance, or the costs of sanctions for non-compliance are calculated by governments. On the other hand, for constructivist institutionalism, processes of social learning that assure target governments in terms of the legitimacy of the EU rules and demands lead to the adoption of EU rules. Both proportionally describe, at the domestic and EU level, some competing and some complementary interpretive factors that impact cost/benefit estimations or recognized legitimacy (Sedelmeier, 2012). Most of the studies benefited

from both to explain processes and from time to time, it is visible that there are cases that could be explained in their intersection.

In one of his studies, Graziano (2003) stated that Europeanization roughly can be explained in a cluster of two intersecting processes that first resulted from the birth of a new European supranational political and institutional setting by national, political, social and economic forces and the second is EU political, social and economic dynamics being more and more significant in the domestic political system. In short, this is a course of 'construction' and 'diffusion' of European policies and institutions in European states. To understand Europeanization, Radaelli (2004) provides a good explanation of when it occurs and what are the achievements of this knowledge. Europeanization happens when the EU turns into a cognitive and normative frame and displays adjustment to the logic of meaning and action, and a course of change happens as an answer to EU pressure or usage of Europe. Further, he says that the time dimension is key to understanding how causation pursues and how actors, resources, and issues adjust, they present if, when, and how Europeanization influences the domestic level, and the logic of meaning needs a time-sensitive composition to be studied. He also claims that Europeanization includes pressure and usage, bottom-up research designs are the one thing that can provide knowledge on if the change has happened due to pressure or usages, and a clarification between EU policy and Europeanization where the latter does not presume the previous and clarification of part of socialization developments as it is not required nor adequate for Europeanization. It is not enough to analyze the processes of Europeanization from a top-down perspective to understand domestic change. Moreover, Knill and Lehmkuhl (1999) discuss three mechanisms of Europeanization in the cases of possible domestic institutional change influenced by European requirements. Firstly, domestic change might happen due to European policy-making that EU policy 'positively' determines tangible institutional requirements, which must be followed by member states, and they have limited institutional discretion in the time for decisions about concrete adjustments to follow those requirements. Secondly, by adjusting the domestic order of the play, domestic adjustments might be influenced by European legislation, and the European influence is constrained to changing the domestic opportunity structures like allocation of power and resources between domestic actors, however, even though they challenge

existing institutional equilibria, they do not present an ideal new equilibrium. The third and weakest form is changing the beliefs and expectations of domestic actors instead of prescribing tangible institutional requirements or revising the institutional context for strategic interaction and these changes in domestic beliefs might have an influence on domestic actors' beliefs and preferences and cause corresponding institutional adaptations, thus, cognitive logic is the basis of the influence of European policies towards domestic impact.

Olsen (2002) distinguishes the different phenomena attributed to the term into five feasible groups in terms of Europeanization. The first one is changes in external boundaries which include pertaining to the geographical scope of a governance system and the extension of Europe as a single political space. The second one is developing institutions at the European level which means that some level of coordination and coherence is maintained by center-building with a collective action capacity that also creates room for binding decisions and to sanction non-compliance. Thirdly, there is the central penetration of national system of governance which highlights the separation of responsibilities and powers between diverse levels of governance such as central coordination and local autonomy which should find a harmonization between unity and diversity. It also includes the adaptation of national and sub-national systems of governance to a European political center and European-wide norms. Exporting forms of political organization is the fourth one which signifies the typical and distinct types of political organization and governance for Europe and beyond the European territory, it concentrates on relations with non-European actors and institutions and how Europe is located in the international agenda where it is seen as a positive action. As a fifth point, a political unification project comes: it is connected to how Europe is occurring as a more unified and stronger political entity and how it is spread outside of Europe as well, but it does not mean that this point has a positive correlation with others.

Börzel and Risse (2002) stated there are two circumstances in terms of foreseeing domestic diversities as a reaction to Europeanization that do not depend on studying policies, politics, or polities; there has to be some amount of "misfit" or conflict between European-level developments, policies, and institutions, domestic-level processes,

policies and institutions and secondly, facilitating factors such as actors, and institutions reacting to the adaptational pressures. They present two mediating factors as part of the institutionalist perspective that benefit from the favorable circumstances which are multiple veto points in the institutional structure to bypass restraints against change and formal institutions that hand over resources to profit from new opportunities to catch the change. Additionally, they display two other mediating factors included in the sociological institutionalist perspective, the first one is “change agents” or norm entrepreneurs, they work to influence domestic perspective to reclaim their interests and identities and the second one is political culture and other informal institutions which are useful in terms of consensus-building and cost-sharing. However, there is not a clear cut between these two approaches in reality, they might intersect at points in time.

Important to highlight that Europeanization is not only restricted to member states of the EU, but also quasi-members and candidate countries are under influence. The transfer of the *acquis communautaire* is the heart of Europeanization (Schimmelfennig, 2015). Schimmelfennig (2015) provided a table of mechanisms of EU impact beyond the member states:

Table 1.1. *Mechanisms of EU impact beyond the member states*

	<i>Intergovernmental</i>		<i>Transnational</i>	
	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Indirect</i>
<i>Logic of consequences</i>	(1) Conditionality Intergovernmental incentives Compulsory impact Compliance	(2) Externalization Competition Negative externality Lesson drawing	(3) Transnational incentives Connective impact	(4) Transnational externalization Competition
<i>Logic of appropriateness</i>	(5) Socialization Intergovernmental social learning Constructive impact Communication	(6) Imitation Mimicry Enabling impact Unilateral emulation	(7) Transnational socialization Transnational social learning	(8) Societal imitation Enabling impact

Source. Schimmelfennig, F (2015). “Europeanization beyond Europe.” *Living Reviews in European Governance* (1). <https://doi.org/10.14629/lreg-2015-1>

The starting point for the logic of consequences is agency-based, highlighting how policy change, with its redistributive impact on resources, can empower various actors. On the other side, the logic of appropriateness starts by considering structural conditions and pointing out the mechanisms that enable policy preferences and actor identities to evolve, such as through processes like socialization and learning (Exadaktylos & Graziano, 2022). With his study, Schiommelfenning (2015) not only provided the mechanisms but by studying European Neighbourhood Policy, he provided an actual example of Europeanization beyond Europe. Sedelmeier (2012) claimed that more well-defined results were achieved in terms of the Europeanization of policies in candidate countries: for the candidate countries who became part of the EU in 2004 and 2007, the EU had an influence on the public policies that were element of the *acquis communautaire* where explanatory factors of rationalist institutionalism explained it well such as not threatened governments by the high costs were following the EU *acquis* due to membership offer and credibility. The same author also stated that the influence of EU policies in public policies has not been fast in candidate countries in the western Balkans and Türkiye compared to previous candidates: in many states related to the EU's political conditions generate bigger domestic issues by involving national identity and statehood cost comparing to East Central European candidates, and the membership framework is more obscure, especially in the example of Türkiye, its credibility is less, and the influence of EU's policy is more restricted even in East European neighborhood as they were not recognized as potential candidate countries even though they are European.

While mentioning Europeanization, it is critical to mention (de)-Europeanization too, especially in the case of Türkiye, it is useful to understand the processes that are not aligning with European norms and rules. (De)-Europeanization attributes to processes that arise from either less harmonization, or collective action, and are potentially enhanced through the opposition at the domestic level (Radaelli & Salter, 2019). Müller et al. (2021) investigated the (de)-Europeanization in terms of foreign policy and they identified three intersecting criteria: scope or discursive tone of the challenge, the scale of the challenge, associated policy challenges put the state across the wide spectrum of member state policy positions. Furthermore, they presented three interlocking elements of (de)-Europeanization, and those are the reconstruction of professional norms, a

sustained challenge to foundational norms, and structural disintegration. Even though in their study, these have resulted from foreign policy framework, it might be considered in terms of (de)-Europeanization in other areas, it might provide a road map.

In their study, Radaelli and Salter (2019) predict a two-level operating model where at the upper level the works of the EU favoring either more harmonization of policy and more supranational activity (Europeanization) or less ((de)-Europeanization) and this can come from the EU institutions, or come from members states to be imposed upon the EU institutions and at the lower level, the interplay of domestic entities, institutions, structural factors, and narratives impacts alterations in EU policies, enabling a member state to either oppose Europeanization by not fully implementing EU-directed policy changes or resist (de)-Europeanization by maintaining a policy that the EU aims to discontinue. Radaelli and Salter (2019) show (de)-Europeanization in different segments: EU level where the EU ‘doing less’; policy dismantling in terms of exhibition of limited preferences; the role of challenger governments (from the below); as a non-compliance whether the policy changes at the EU level are mirrored in national level.

Overall, the literature on Europeanization includes a broad range of studies on diverse topics. This part only has tried to give the main points of Europeanization and (de)-Europeanization as part of the literature to provide a clear path for the further parts of the thesis.

1.3 Europeanization in Gender Equality Policies

Gender equality policies have been at the basis of the European Union since the Treaty of Rome. It is obvious that the EU gives its attention to gender equality policies and under the Europeanization of countries, it can be clarified that gender equality policies have also gone under the process of Europeanization. The Europeanization of gender equality policies may not be on an identical level in member states or in candidate countries, it is visible that there is a clear achievement of the EU on this issue. In the literature, there is a myriad of works on the Europeanization of gender equality policies. While some of them are focused on country-specific analysis or precise topics, others are studied without going deeper into the situation of countries. In this section of the thesis,

the literature on the Europeanization of gender policies, gender policies of the EU, and the two topics specifically focusing on Türkiye will be analyzed.

A comparative study of the transformation of EU gender equality policy (as a public policy) by Jacquot (2015) has three periods of analysis: the exception model (1980s-1990s), the anti-discrimination model (1990s-2000s), and the rights model (2000s-2010s). Exception model considered in terms of progressive construction of gender equality policies that generated core values. The two forthcoming advancements of the anti-discrimination model are the emergence of velvet triangles (femocrats, women politicians, experts, and members of civil society) and the introduction of gender mainstreaming as a tool. The third period, the rights model, is where the process turns into being more about justice and the promotion of rights (Jacquot, 2015). Thus, the transformation among the three periods goes through, in order, a process of institutionalization, then normalization, and finally marginalization (Jacquot, 2015). Today's gender equality policy of the EU might be considered as the outcome of these three periods.

In their studies, Lombardo and Forest (2015) claimed that to understand detailed policy change in Europe, discursive analysis of gender equality policies is compatible with discursive institutionalist analysis of Europeanization, and their proposed approach is not only limited to a discursive understanding of Europeanization but also sociological and their gender approach is entrenched to the experience of the QUING (Quality of Gender+ Equality Policies in Europe) research project that concentrated on frame analysis methodology (see for details of QUING project: Verloo, 2007). By perceiving this approach, they showed in their study that even when Europe is under difficult conditions such as threats by a political and economic crisis that destabilize the foundations of European integration, discursive-sociological perspectives hold a deeper informative ability than approaches that paid attention to policy implementation and compliance that come from the same neo-functionalist grounds. Thus, they opened a new window to understanding policy change and the Europeanization of gender policies.

Additionally, Lombardo and Forest (2012) in their edited book gathered prominent academics in the field of gender and the EU where they examined how Europeanization shaped domestic policy standards of gender and equality types: first, they closely looked at the framing of specific issues such as political contention and EU usages of civil society and institutional actors and soft measures including domestic violence and same-sex partnership rights. Furthermore, in their chapters of the book, they focused on issues of the role of soft measures, reconciliation of work and family order, gender-based violence, the politics of partnership rights, the institutionalization of equality and anti-discrimination policies, and Europeanization of gender equality at a sub-national level (Lombardo & Forest, 2012). With this book, the Europeanization of gender equality can be seen at a broader and more in-depth level. It helps us to understand in which ways the process of Europeanization might occur, especially how it can change the domestic level occurrences.

On the other side, Kantola (2010) analyzed the influence of Europeanization and neoliberalism on women's policy agencies where she based on previous research that included 12 Western countries (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the UK and the US). After working on the influence of Europeanization on state feminism, single equalities bodies, the influence of neoliberalism on state feminism, and gender mainstreaming, she stated that while the EU maintains new places for influencing supranational decision-making and makes sure that it is binding for member states and advance gender equality, it established new challenges such as 'single equality bodies'. Additionally, she highlights the fact that new equalities bodies are not only women's policy agencies and produce a necessity to think again about the relationship between the lines of accountability and social movements. Lastly, she specifies the need to reconsider the definitions of 'state feminism' and 'women's policy agencies' and reinterpret the presumptions about their part and practices in promoting gender equality.

Accession of Eastern European countries to the EU has resulted in diverse gender equality policies among the member states, even though the previous states were not ideally equal in terms of gender equality, Central and Eastern European countries'

adaptation turned out to be a complex subject. By drawing on sociological institutionalism, rational choice, and feminist literature, Bego (2015) remarks on disparate results on gender equality policies among newly Central and Eastern European member states starting from 1998 to 2010. Implementation and adaptation procedures of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Latvia and Poland of equal employment and reconciliation policies include laggards and superiors. (Bego, 2015). Impact of the EU over domestic politics of member/candidate countries as a supranational institution, increasing visibility and power to change legislation of women's NGOs as a group considered marginal and its relation to democratization, and position of gender in politics are provided by Bego, 2015.

Clavero and Galligan (2009) analyzed how the gender order in Europe has been constituted and reconstituted by adopting the thesis 'two needles eyes' by Ostner and Lewis, construction of EU legal order, three enlargement rounds and participation of Eastern European countries and influence of enlargement on framing national gender relations schemes. They found that there are still some problems existing in terms of expansion and implementation of gender equality laws, policies, and practices at European and domestic levels, and even though Eastern enlargement countries have diverse social circumstances, there are not too many divergences in implementing gender equality policies. Their result highlights that there is a huge responsibility on the supranational level – European Parliament and European Council- to advance gender equality in every context. The differences among member states could be eliminated and Europeanization of gender policies could reach an equal level in every member state with the help of supranational institutions. Liebert (2003), previously to studies of Clavero and Galligan (2009), shaped her study around the 'Needle's Eye' thesis defined by Ostner and Lewis as the source of obstacles for better integration coming from the clash between the 'strong male breadwinner' gender policy regime of Germany and the EU equality policies. Thus, she focused on the case of the employment policies of the Federal Republic of Germany in terms of gender equality. She concluded her studies with the finding of the significant impact of Europeanization on gender policy: even though Germany resisted the change, it eased the conditions such as employment in the army and lifted the ban of not enabling women to work at night. She points out the priority of hard

legal tools like directives and European Court of Justice decisions, which pushed for compliance and institutional adaptation, in shaping the Europeanization of German employment policy, however, she also stresses the fact that without norm clashes, the legal mechanisms might have not been successful in transforming normative and strategic level.

The country-specific studies in the literature provided case study examples for a broad understanding of the Europeanization of gender equality policies. Eräranta and Kantola (2016) analyzed the case of Finland as an example of the Europeanization of Nordic Gender Equality in terms of the reconciliation of work and family by connecting soft Europeanization to the Foucault theory on power Analytics of Government literature. Their argument is shaped around European Social Fund (ESF) projects and how they operate as Foucault 'technologies of involvement'. The analysis shows that even if a member state's national policy is strong, ESF as a soft law instrument can lead to critical adjustments in member states. As part of their research, they analyzed nine ESF project reports that detailed workplace research and development activities by seven diverse ESF projects in Finland between 1995-2008. Overall, they found that the relationship between the Nordic approach and ESF development projects is quite contradictory; the second one tries to shape the Nordic approach into a more liberal welfare state such as adopting managerial rationalities and project techniques, and the first one is closer to 'proactive' Nordic approach rather than defensive. Lastly, they touched upon the issue of gender implications of the work-family reconciliation policies in terms of ESF projects attracting more female-dominated organizations and women.

Another example in this area would be the study of Krizsan and Popa (2010) where they focused on Europeanization in making policies against domestic violence during the EU eastern enlargement and they focus on the impact of Europeanization in five countries (Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia). They argue that Europeanization was successful to influence domestic policy transformation via various mechanisms, however, they focus on only three of them: the construction of EU accession conditionality to incorporate domestic violence, collective learning with the help of the Daphne project funding mechanism, and the crucial use of the EU accession incentives

by feminist advocates. The logic of setting the EU demands and the logic of domestic changes were identified as part of the processes of norm construction and norm entrepreneurship and the involvement of the Commission with the domestic violence issue as part of the EU enlargement processes was open to negotiation in different nations. However, the three mechanisms lead to norm construction by the EU.

Previously to this study, the influence of the EU conditionality on policies, legislation, and institutions on gender equality in Bulgaria and Romania (between the years 1990-2007) is studied by Chiva (2009) with the aim of bringing literature on EU enlargement, works of social policy in the EU, and feminist theorizing about equality of women and men. The level of Europeanization differs depending on policies related to gender equality, such as issues related to reproductive rights, which are highly argumentative among different member states depending on the domestic-driven change as demonstrated by Chiva (2009). Subsequently, this study displayed the limits of Europeanization and the compelling interaction between Europeanization and domestic factors of change, and examples of Bulgaria indicated that somehow marginal policy areas that do not have a major place in the EU membership race and country's place in enlargement race (Chiva, 2009).

On the other hand, as a general looking for Europeanization of gender equality policies, Kuhar (2012) investigates how Europeanization is used in same-sex partnership issues in Europe that shaped the Europeanization frame and horizontal social learning as a result of Europeanization by analyzing discourses by Critical Frame Analysis (Like Lombardo and Forest (2015), he used materials from QUING research project). He discovered that Europeanization performs as, first of all, a way of pressure for EU member states to arrange same-sex partnership policies in line with EU beliefs and tendencies. Even though the absence of binding measures does not necessarily display that the Europeanization frame does not influence policy contexts, inequality problems are the key reason for major social upheaval. Also, Sloomaeckers and O'Dwyer (2018) drive attention to how education is an effective way of transmitting values in terms of the Europeanization of behaviors regarding homosexuality. They investigated questions such as how social attitudes have been influenced by the EU integration, whether

Europeanization assisted by enlargement affected mainly policy change or additionally adjusted societal norms and beliefs, if this normative change is only guided by elite socialization processes such as involvement of transnational policy networks and EU-level epistemic communities as European literature mainly advocates or if attitudinal change happens at the mass level and is arbitrated by national education. Based on their quantitative study, they claimed that attitudes against homosexuality are not depending on the conditionality that the country has encountered even though the EU manages to make countries agree with EU legislation and those changes do not pass through society. Only being a member state is not enough to lead a social change. However, Sloomaeckers and O'Dwyer (2018) detected proof of "social learning" following accession via education and social learning preliminary accession and in countries not involved in the enlargement plan. They provided a distinct overlook to Europeanization issues. Instead of focusing merely on institutional analysis of the EU enlargement process, they investigated how education could be an important factor in spreading EU norms and beliefs.

MacRae (2006) examined the case of Germany and how Germany as a country was influenced very slowly by the EU policies even though the country had emphasized a "strong male breadwinner" culture, thus, it should be important to consider under not only national or EU level but the multilevel process. She focused on German gender policy by analyzing specifically the 1974 equal pay directive (EPD) (75/117/EEC) and the 1976 equal treatment directive (ETD) (76/207/EEC) by using multiscale analysis to show how the present German gender regime emerged and the interdependency between the domestic and transnational EU policy regimes which led to a hybrid regime. Furthermore, by studying court cases such as Sabine von Colson and Elisabeth Kamann, she showed how the EU policies became influential on the nation-state's actions and all those factors led to a new definition of gender regime which included aspects of both domestic and European. The article helps us to understand the fact that even if a country has strict traditional values, Europeanization might cause differences in the long term. Gender regimes of the countries have been always complicated in terms of not letting a third factor to involve, however, the EU has managed to ensure compelling changes. Earlier to this research, Liebert (2002) studied how gender mainstreaming is

Europeanized by examining the member states' performance of the implementation of gender directives of the EU to understand methods and dynamics, the role of Germany, and the future institutionalization inside the EU. Most importantly, she indicated that there are especially three governance mechanisms that pushed for Europeanization and domestic change, and these can be as named legal measures, material incentives, and knowledge-based inducements. However, she claimed that legal measures and material incentives have small importance and strategies and institutional setting that boost the learning potential of public and private decision-makers. Separately from the previous article, it can be seen that rather than focusing on how the gender regime in Germany has been shaped by Europeanization procedure, this article investigated the Europeanization of gender mainstreaming with the example of Germany based on the same argument of Germany being resistant to change and having a persistent idea of 'strong male breadwinner' as the previous article.

Sindbjerg Martinsen (2007) investigated two aspects of the Europeanization process: whether member states regulate the implementation of EU policies and the influence of EU policies in the member states via examination of so-called 'least likely case' Europeanization of Danish gender equality through a historical study as the belief is that national policies caused the development of gender equality. She claimed that the Europeanization of gender equality has displayed major impacts on national policy, politics, and law transferred by European integration. As a result of this study, she stated that even though Danish executives had a significant power of control, this power diminished in the long run, therefore, it might be claimed that as 'least likely case' was under the influence of Europeanization, this change might be found highly likely in other member countries as well.

Differently than others Rawłuszko (2021) points to a diverse opinion about the result of Europeanization in non-Western countries as she takes the example of Poland and how gender equality projects which were supported by international actors might encourage anti-gender movements by employing framing analysis. She highlights that supporters of anti-gender movements claim that they lose control over the state as citizens and describe it as undemocratic and against this they propose local gender equality

policies. Furthermore, she demonstrates the influence of the EU on domestic policy due to the Europeanization process by the example of gender mainstreaming, elitist and technocratic trends of Europeanization cause the democratic deficit due to not including wider audience and gender wars are not only resulting from a discussion over gender and LGBTQI+ but solicitudes about citizens' control on state policies. Overall, it is important to note that ideological debates on gender are not enough to illustrate the complicated situation of anti-gender movements, it should be assisted with a democratic analysis of gender equality policies. With this article, she provides an eye-opening perspective about how top-down implications of gender policies without emphasizing local context might result in unwanted situations. Poland is a very good example of this, how the citizen used gender and having power in their hands to increase the strength of anti-gender movements.

As mostly the literature displays the role of the EU in impacting the domestic policies of member countries or third countries in terms of Europeanization of gender equality, Jenichen (2011) directs the focus to a diverse case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. She points out that instead of having a top-down approach, there is a persuasion of a bottom-up approach to change the country's gender equality perspective: the role of domestic policy entrepreneurs from NGOs is key in this change. Compared to other Western Balkan countries, in Bosnia Herzegovina, the EU did not interrupt gender equality policies, such as with Stabilization and Association Process, at the beginning. However, the domestic actors benefited from creating a 'shadow of membership conditionality' to have an effect on the government which had aimed to be a member of the EU. Jenichen (2011) also provided some suggestions for the EU: giving more attention to women's rights and gender equality during negotiations with Western Balkan countries, increasing the demand from the EU by domestic policy entrepreneurs, and carrying on exploiting the Europeanization process to advocate the application of gender equality policies as it will help with the arguments in terms of national compliance. By showing a bottom-up approach toward Europeanization, the article displays that the process of Europeanization is not only limited to a top-down approach by the EU and nation-states, but it involves domestic actors and their demands.

Zartaloudis (2015) worked on the Europeanization of gender equality promotion as a part of employment policies in Greece and Portugal, the findings provided that the two countries demonstrated similar features regarding gender equality, however, it can be argued that Greece was a bit more reluctant than Portugal. He analyzed the influence of the European Employment Strategy (EES) on Greek and Portuguese employment policies: mainly gender mainstreaming (GM), reconciliation of work and family, and reducing gender pay gaps (GPGs). Two main fields can be detected as serious changes: extension of training and provision of start-up allowances for women and increase of care facilities for advocating for reconciliation of work and family life (Zartaloudis, 2015). It can be argued that even though the Europeanization of gender equality policies cannot be found, Europeanization can have an impact via diverse policies to improve gender equality, in this case, it was employment policies. Another example of a comparative study is the work of Caporaso and Jupille (2001) which aimed to determine the influence of Europeanization as an EU social policy on domestic frameworks in France and the United Kingdom with the analysis of Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome (post-Amsterdam Article 141), the Equal Pay Directive (EPD), and the 1976 Equal Treatment Directive (ETD). They controlled for the goodness of fit, mediating institutions, and domestic structural change (domestic legislation, individual rights, and domestic institutional balance), and the results show that unsimilar to France, the United Kingdom faced high pressures from both the EU and domestic actors and due to those pressures, the country had to adopt changes according to the EU directives. Thus, the United Kingdom had a preeminent Europeanization process than France in terms of change in legislation, individual rights, and domestic institutional balance.

Up until now, the literature has displayed studies on the Europeanization of gender equality policies with regard to the application of methodologies, how it shaped domestic standards, effects on women's agencies, ways of transmitting values, specific country studies, and how Europeanization influenced their gender equality regimes, same-sex partnership issues, impact on specific policies such as employment and so on and so forth. In the continuing part of this section, Europeanization of gender equality policies in Türkiye literature will be focused on to see what type of studies have been done in the current literature.

The dualistic nature of Europeanization and the welfare state in Türkiye is explained as “veiled Europeanization” by Dedeoglu (2013) with the framework of gender and social policy in the 2000s. She displayed the gender and social policy change during the start of the ruling of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government and how the party perceived neo-liberalist and Islamist sentiments. She claimed that the approach of the AKP government was only a “decorative approach”, there were no affirmative policies to modify women’s secondary position in public, and only women’s legal and citizenship rights are adequately put. Overall, she highlighted the role of women as mother and wives in public have not faced a change regarding the Europeanization of gender equality.

On the other, Fougner and Kurtoğlu (2015) investigated the gender policy from a point of instrumental Europeanization; even though there were attempts to improve gender equality in Turkish legislation before the start of the accession process to the EU, the idea of compliance with the Copenhagen criteria pushed Türkiye to increase its actions. They emphasized that the country had misfits with the EU in terms of policies that were diminishing gender equality such as family law, employment, and retirement, and pressures from the EU led to several improvements that could not successfully be implied in the daily life of the public. As mandatory ‘compliance’ was never an issue for related EU requirements and due to the patriarchal and sexist attitudes of the AKP it should be mentioned that predominantly instrumental logic was adopted in terms of changes regarding gender equality, however, it is not attributed to the necessity of achieving EU membership or impact of EU integration process to the domestic politics (Fougner & Kurtoğlu, 2015).

Kazanoğlu (2019), similarly to the research topic of Eräranta and Kantola (2016), worked on work and family life reconciliation policies from a crucial gender lens focusing on the case of Türkiye whether it is under Europeanization or Ottomanization. She points out the AKP government’s change towards a more Islamic line. Furthermore, it is clear that even though the Turkish government took measurements in line with the EU’s perspective of defamiliarized reconciliation laws, the government also passed

familiarized reconciliation laws which made the question of Europeanization imprecise (Kazanoğlu, 2019). Primarily, her findings show that despite the pressures from the EU and the long candidacy status of Türkiye, the government did not give up on the traditional family model and conservative division of labor consciousness. It can be argued the EU candidacy process has been influential in changing neither government perspective nor public opinion.

Instead of studying the impact of Europeanization on policy change toward LGBTQI+ rights [like Kuhar (2012)], Neo's (2020) study focuses on the change led by Europeanization in discourse analysis of media and LGBTQI+ issues between the years 2005-2010. He claimed that there is a major level of increase in the representation level of LGBTQI+ issues due to expected European integration, however, even though there is a serious boost in the visibility of LGBTQI+ issues in media, it is highlighted that these issues are still negatively portrayed. Several findings of his study can be listed as critical advancements in LGBTQI+ issues in media reporting, a serious boost in the visibility of LGBTQI+ issues in media (as mentioned before), a better tone of general reporting on LGBTQI+ issues, still a low representation of LGBTQI+ media indeed in 2010, episodic frames like derogatory frames and stereotypical news topic are in use and regarding quotes that operated display approach of blame and underrepresentation. However, the EU's positive impact cannot be disregarded in this issue.

According to Özdemir (2014), the role of the relationship between external factors and domestic factors is key for the development of legislative reforms for eliminating violence against women, the accession process for the EU, and the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) are part of external factors who led the change with involvement of domestic factors. By analyzing the interaction of the state, women's movement, and external factors (requirements of EU membership and CEDAW process) with a bottom-up approach, she claims that the institutionalization of the gender equality policy and the introduction of the law in 1998 are connected to CEDAW obligations and women's movement's struggle and Civil Code in 2001 and Penal Code in 2004 had matched with the EU accession process. Furthermore, she stated that the EU accession process is added on top of the

already existing international CEDAW initiative and domestic women's movement for the elimination of violence against women (VAW). The EU's impact on legislative reforms cannot be ignored, however, the relationship with domestic factors also should not be neglected. For instance, the actions of the Kadın Sığınakları Kurultayı (Women's Shelter Assembly) and KAMER (Women's NGO in Türkiye) and awareness of media are worth mentioning to combat VAW (Özdemir, 2014).

The general approach in the literature is more focused on how the EU shapes gender equality policies in member states or candidate countries, however, Uçan Çubukçu (2012) provides a different angle: second-wave feminism in Türkiye and how the movement's democracy demands gave its inputs to the Europeanization process by exploring feminist movement's campaigns, achievements with a parallel to Europeanization and legislative changes regarding gender mainstreaming. She claimed that the women's movement is an important factor in terms of the democratization of Türkiye such as the movement had plurality on the level of micro-cultures, and they followed international documents and activities closely. Thus, the application of gender mainstreaming in real time was an achievement of strong civil actors which mainly are women's organizations, and it might be proof of how the Europeanization of gender equality and women's rights are under a bottom-up process in Türkiye context (Uçan Çubukçu, 2012).

Aybars et al. (2018) looked at the Europeanization process of Türkiye by examining EU-Türkiye relations and its impact on gender equality in employment from a discursive institutionalist perspective. They analyzed gender equality developments during the Türkiye's accession process to the EU by separating into three-time frames: the peak of Europeanization (1999-2007), weakening commitment to the EU (2007-2011), and Europeanization without substance (2011-2015). Their study highlighted that even though the country showed high progress in gender equality, after the governing party's change towards a more conservative line, the Europeanization process slightly shifted towards de-Europeanization. However, this situation did not only result from the country's shift but also the EU's attitude and actions against gender equality became additional factors (Aybars et al., 2019). The importance of the discourses of the politicians

can be clearly seen in this study, it assists to display how speeches can be influential on policy change.

In their co-edited book *Feminist Framing of Europeanisation*, Kurum-Suleymanoglu and Cin (2021) provide a feminist framework of Europeanization and concentrate on numerous policy areas with the case study of Türkiye, and with this feminist framework that is profoundly entrenched in feminist philosophy, they aimed to estimate the transformative power of the EU over member states and candidates. Further, they employ three models of the influence of the EU: interest-driven, norm-driven, and lesson driven. They present both theoretical and empirical frameworks: the evolution of gender equality policy, the EU's promotion of gender perspective in its external relations, a feminist framework for Europeanization processes, the construction of a gender equality regime, the impact of globalization and the EU membership on women's rights, the role of EU in gender policy-making, adaptation and implementation of the EU rules, legislative reforms for eliminating violence against women (VAW), the implication of gender-responsive budgeting, gender equality in the private sector, education acquis of the EU and external aspect of EU migration and refugee policies. This book provides a detailed work on how Europeanization and gender are interconnected and how Türkiye, as a long-lasting candidate country, has gone under the influence of Europeanization.

To go in-depth into the topic of (de)-Europeanization of gender equality policies of Türkiye, the work of Bodur Ün and Arıkan (2022) analyzes the case of the Istanbul Convention, legislative changes, and variations in domestic players' discourses. They sustained their arguments around (de)- Europeanization around this case study, the AKP government, after guaranteeing its power as a ruling party, shifted its approach to a more conservative and Islamist way, putting most of the obtainments in terms of gender equality in danger. However, the AKP's power is not only sustained by conservative domestic politics, but the government party also emphasizes the EU as an inferior 'intruder' in its discourses as one of their claims is that Istanbul Convention is based on Western values, and it should be better to create an Ankara Convention (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022). Additionally, to this element, the authors provide another factor that is used by the governing party which is the argument of some of the member states

(Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia) opposition to ratification of the Istanbul Convention. The backsliding of EU norms and trends in its member countries evidently becomes an excuse for candidate countries to justify their wrongful acts.

Consequently, the Europeanization of gender equality policy literature is currently growing, there is plenty of place for future research and issues waiting to be discovered. Thus far, we have seen the transformation of the EU gender equality policy, discursive institutionalist analysis of the Europeanization of gender equality policy, how domestic policies have changed, influence on women's policy agencies, emerging diversities with the accession of Eastern European countries, country-specific studies and so on. When it comes to studies specific to Türkiye, we see there is also a need for further research. Therefore, the thesis aims to explore untouched issues and generate original work.

1.4 Research Design and Methodology

This part of the thesis provides an understanding of how the research has been undertaken, with what kind of methods, what the emphasized methodology is, the phases that have been done, and restrictions while completing to sustain the research's reliability.

The research is a qualitative empirical one. The empirical data is compiled through semi-structured interviews. In addition to interviews, primary sources such as EU Türkiye Reports between the years of 2001-2022 have been analyzed to provide a comparison in terms of Europeanization/ (de)-Europeanization.

The overall objective of this thesis is to grasp the development and change in gender equality policies in Türkiye under 21 years of AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi/ Justice and Development Party) ruling in terms of the Europeanization perspective and if the change in gender equality policies has an impact on AKP's political survival. Important to understand if and how the European Union and membership goals influenced Türkiye's gender equality policies and what is the current situation. Following this overall goal, the research question is determined as:

How Europeanization of gender equality policies in Türkiye contribute to generating the political survival of the ruling party?

To be able to find an answer to this, the specific objectives are established:

- Evaluate the Degree of Europeanization: Demonstrate to what extent Europeanization occurred in Türkiye's gender equality policies by studying legislative changes, policy implementations, and adjustments to match with EU standards and norms,
- Compare Türkiye's Gender Equality Approach with EU standards: Determining similarities and distinctions between gender equality policies and practices with EU standards,
- Investigate the Role of Gender Equality Policies in Political Survival: Investigating the influence of gender equality policies on the ruling party's political survival,
- Explore the Role of Civil Society in the Development of Gender Equality Policies Aligning with EU Norms: Explore their role in forming gender equality policies in terms of impacting policy changes of the ruling party and spreading EU norms,
- Evaluate the Impact of the EU's Soft Law Approach in the Improvement of Gender Equality Policies: Evaluating the EU's soft law approach on the commitment of the AKP toward gender equality policies,
- Investigate the Outcomes of (de)-Europeanization in Gender Equality Policies: Investigate if the policy change led to (de)-Europeanization process where policies occurred to conflict with EU standards and principles,
- Scrutinize What Kind of Justifications Made by AKP in Terms of (de)-Europeanization: Scrutinizing the religious and cultural arguments, particularly emphasizing the role of women as defined by Islam as primarily motherhood.

The analysis was constructed using the subsequent procedures to answer the research question. Firstly, an in-depth study of literature review and primary sources has been done to grasp the topic's core. In terms of literature review, Europeanization, and gender equality policies have been studied. With regard to primary sources, I have analyzed

reports and joint communications of the European Commission and reports and plans from Turkish Government Agencies.

Inspired by Graziano's (2011) article, this study applies the policy structure approach and studies policy change by considering the four aspects of policy structure which are objectives, principles, procedures, and financial instruments. Thus, first, the European Gender Equality policy structure is analyzed according to these four dimensions. Later, it is followed by the analysis of Türkiye's gender equality policies before Europeanization, during Europeanization, and from the start (de)-Europeanization. Graziano's (2011) classification states that *policy transformation* denotes situations in which all four dimensions of the policy structure experience noteworthy alterations, *policy adjustment* refers to cases where two or three policy structure dimensions change and *policy continuity* characterizes instances when only one or none of the policy structure dimensions undergo modification.

Followingly, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted, and these interviews included 13 prepared questions and only one question had 4 sub-questions. Emails were sent to interviewees in July 2023. Interviews were conducted in August and September 2023. Almost 35 NGOs have received an email, however, most of them never responded and some of them were rejected due to the summer holiday session. Nine of the interviews were held with women and LGBTQI+ civil society organizations, one of them being face-to-face, and the others via online communication tools (via Zoom). The organizations are named: European Women's Lobby, Mor Çatı Vakfı (Purple Roof Women's Organization), Uçan Süpürge Vakfı (Flying Broom), SistersLab, SPoD (Sosyal Politika, Cinsiyet Kimliği ve Cinsel Yönelim Çalışmaları Derneği/ Social Policy, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association), Dış Politikada Kadınlar (Women in Foreign Policy), Eşit Nesiller Derneği (Equal Generations Association), 17 Mayıs Derneği (17 May Association), and EŞİK (Eşitlik İçin Kadın Platformu/ Women's Platform for Equality). Only 1 interview was conducted with CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi/ Republican People's Party) Women's Branch and the interview questions were sent and answered via e-mail. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 80 minutes. The difference in the duration of interviews resulted from the interviewees' willingness to

answer, their expertise, and their knowledge of the questions. An interview was disrupted in the middle of the questions due to limited timing and the interviewee did not have time to continue another day. Important to add that all the interviews were recorded with the consent of all the interviewees to be transcribed later. To respect their privacy, their names will not be mentioned in the thesis. As all the interviewees were Turkish, interviews were held in Turkish, After the transcription process, the answers were translated from Turkish to English by the author.

2 The EU Gender Equality Policy

2.1 Evolution of gender equality policy in the EU

The development of gender equality policy goes back to the establishment of the European Union, it happens to be one of the elements at the core of the EU. There are six values: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and human rights and equality defines that all citizens before the law have equal rights, all the European policies and European integration have the basis of equality between men and women in every area and since the Treaty of Rome in 1957 the principle of equal pay for equal work is included (EU, 2023). Thus, European gender equality policy happens to have emerged within a political system based on economic liberalism which had the original aim of advancing the free circulation of capital, goods, services, and workers (Jacquot, 2015). Since those days, the EU has tried to improve its gender equality policies in each level with several tools. The EU has become a leading power in the world in terms of showing the best practices to others. In this part, a short historical evolution of gender equality policy, the policy structure of EU gender equality policy, and how the policy has taken place will be analyzed.

Table 2.1. *EU Gender Equality Policy Structure*

	EU
Objectives	Well-defined (quantified goals)
Principles	Gender Equality
Procedures	Non-hierarchical
Financial Instruments	European

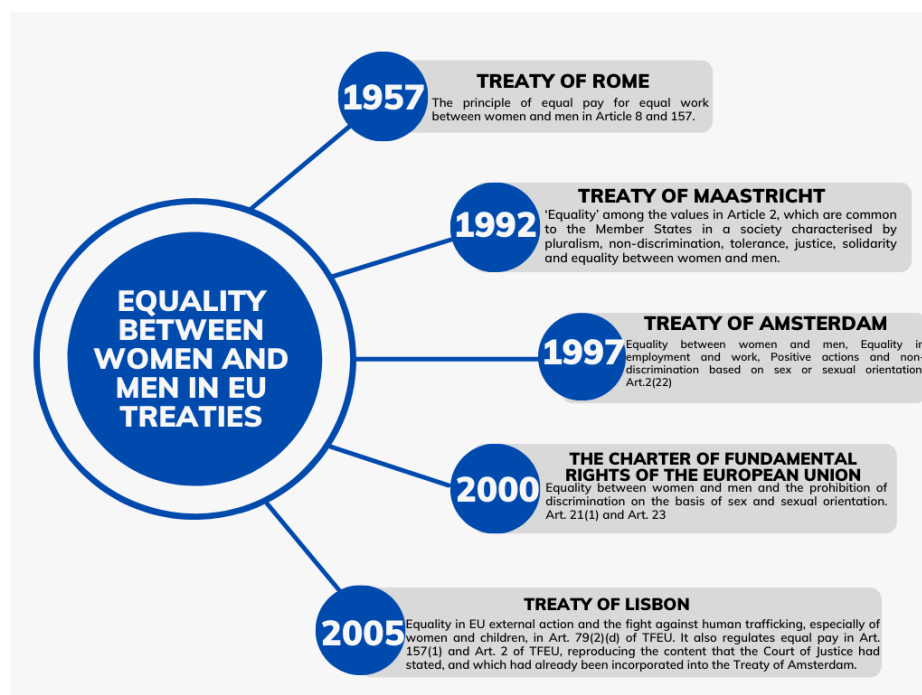
Even though the gender equality policy of the EU seems to have resulted from mainly economic development reasons, the goal of gender equality is one of the core aims of the Union. Thus, when the historical development and the current circumstances of gender equality policy are considered, four dimensions of policy structure can be defined: objectives are well-defined, principles are focused on gender equality, it has a non-hierarchical procedure, and its financial instruments are European. Over the years, it did not have a major change, it secured its features mostly.

As mentioned before, the Treaty of Rome is the key to the principle of equal treatment, and it was broadened with the decision of the Court Justice of the EU (CJEU) in accessing employment and social security and as acknowledged and preserved by EU, equal treatment was the major item of the directives and included equal pay, access to employment, training and professional advancement, working conditions, questions of social security, including professional regimes, for salaried and independent workers but the field of action for equal broadened with Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty on anti-discrimination where a new directive on equal treatment was approved through voting that broadened the access and provision of goods and services, additionally to economic domain's limits, the influence of European directives was hindered by the resistance of some member states in adhering to European legislative norms and the major limitation was the risk of content loss during the process of switching into these norms (Jacquot, 2015). Positive actions do not have a legally binding form of a directive dissimilar to the principle of equal opportunities, increasing trend, even more with gender mainstreaming, of the adoption on the part of the EU of “soft” measures to highlight the issue of gender equality and by introducing gender framework into all policies and programs of governments and EU institutional actors to analyze the impact of policies on women and men before decisions are made and to ensure the inclusion of gender considerations in the implementation, evaluation, and review of policies and political processes. It was announced in Articles 2 and 3.2 of the Treaty of Amsterdam and the latter emphasizing that the Community's activities shall aim to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between men and women in all aspects, they can be found in Article II-23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU says that “equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work, and pay.” (Lombardo & Meier, 2007). Maternity, childcare, and sexual harassment can be accounted as part of the EC initiatives that regulate working conditions by considering unintended barriers to women's employment (Jacquot, 2015).

From this perspective, the idea of equality between men and women comes from the employment strategies of the EU, however, it does not stay limited to employment but spreads into all areas. Even though European gender equality policy was defined in terms of aggregation of economic and judicial instruments starting from the Treaty of Rome

until the beginning of the 1990s, and the limits defined in 1957 had an impact on gender equality, with some room for flexibility in addressing competition distortions related to equal pay, and although the treatment of ‘rights-based inequalities’ was actively pursued, ‘situation-based inequalities’ (following the principle of equal opportunity) were only beginning to be addressed, yet non-binding action programs allowed the European gender equality policy agenda to encompass previously unaddressed areas (Jacquot, 2015). Maternity, childcare, and sexual harassment can be accounted as part of the EC initiatives that regulate working conditions by considering unintended barriers to women’s employment (Jacquot, 2015). Overall, gender equality policies can be understood as an aggregation of various types of instruments: Other legislative, regulatory, jurisprudential, and economic instruments combined according to the original Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome, however, these developments lacked a specific objective and did not constitute a cohesive and organized framework, thus, the aim of the directives was completing and broadening the area of action drafted by the Treaty and the aim of the Court rulings and the action programmes was correcting inequalities that were not necessarily taken into account in the directives, in this way, instruments corrects the previous ones (Jacquot, 2015).

Figure 2. 1. *Equality Between Women and Men in EU Treaties*



Source. EIGE. (2022). The EU's evolving legal and policy approaches to Gender Equality. <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/eus-evolving-legal-and-policy-approaches-gender-equality#>

Starting from the Treaty of Rome, the Treaty of Maastricht, the Treaty of Amsterdam, The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, and the Treaty of Lisbon include adjustments related to gender equality. First equal pay comes, then, non-discrimination, equality in employment, positive actions, non-discrimination based on sex or sexual orientation, prohibition of discrimination based on sex and sexual orientation, equality in external action, and the fight against human trafficking (EIGE, 2022). Although the ambition to promote gender policy and gender mainstreaming came into sight for the first time in 1991, sincere endorsement as a political strategy for the EU happened after the Beijing Conference in 1995 (Jacquot, 2015). The EU's approach has changed over time from being centered on the principle of equality between women and men and the prevention of and the fight against discrimination on the grounds of sex, to grasping the more extensive idea of gender equality (EIGE, 2022). A concrete example of positive actions and the adoption of specific measures to support women have gained renewed attention with the proposed directive presented in 2012 by the European Commission on the presence of women on the boards of listed companies and public enterprises with an objective of having 40% women (Jacquot, 2015).

Gender mainstreaming has come forward at the European level since the end of the 1990s to the level of a legitimate and institutionalized public action instrument (Jacquot, 2015). It includes implying a gender equality perspective in every phase of the policy-making cycle and as part of policies and processes like procurement and budgeting (EIGE, 2023). EU gender policy concepts' evolution displays a change from equal opportunities to positive actions and gender mainstreaming in terms of not only new strategies but also new areas of policymaking and this has allowed the EU to broaden the scope of legal and political instruments to deal with gender equality problems, however, the enlargement of the policy areas and focus on gender mainstreaming and positive actions have been inversely balanced to the binding nature of the adopted measures (Lombardo & Meier, 2007). However, today, gender mainstreaming is still part of the

EU's actions as a prominent instrument. Additionally, there are two fundamental approaches used by the EU for mainstreaming gender equality into public policies. The first one is adopting integrationist approaches that encompass gender equality as a part of comprehensive policy objectives, and the second one is agenda-setting approaches that prioritize gender equality goals (Boşnak, 2021).

According to Jacquot (2015), between 1992 and 2006, there was a high number of texts and fields influenced by gender equality: balancing work and family life, decision-making, economic and social cohesion, development cooperation, budget, publicity and media, scientific research, and human trafficking. All those were mentioned and proposed such as a form of recommendation, Council Resolution, Communication from the Commission to Council, and Council Directive. In addition to these developments, Jacquot (2015) also presents the broadening of economic instruments such as the escalated number of European-funded programs: the multiannual Action Programmes (Aps) on gender equality, the PROGRESS programme, the NOW (New Opportunities for Women), EQUAL, STOP programme and DAPHNE programme. By creating economic opportunities and assisting with economic funds, the EU has managed to touch upon diverse areas rather than only limiting itself to the employment field. Moreover, these all can be considered an example of the EU's adaptation of the soft law approach. On the other hand, with Directive 2006/54/EC on employment, covering equal pay, social security, employment, working conditions, and harassment, Directive 2010/41/EU on self-employment, Directives 92/85/EEC and 2010/18/EU on guaranteed rights to maternity and parental leave, Directive 2004/113/EC on equal access to goods and services, Directives 2011/36/EU and 2012/29/EU on protection for victims of trafficking and crime led to expansion of legislation on gender equality in the EU, permit for affirmative action and provided legal enforcement rights for individuals (Prpic et al., 2019).

While the primary goal stayed economic growth, the Framework Strategy for Gender Equality was emphasized and positioned the EU illustrated as the booster of gender equality in five areas: economic life, political participation, use of social rights and civil life as well as the gender roles in 2000, after the EU's Charter on Fundamental

Rights in 2000 bolstered these by integrating a clause on equal treatment in employment and remuneration (Art. 23) and the EU adopted its first detailed policy framework in 2000 and right after the Roadmap for Equality between Men and Women in 2006 occurred, both focused on promoting gender equality during the 2006-2010 period (Anagnostakis, 2021). In terms of policy framework in the 2010s, comprehensive multi-annual policy programs draft proposals for legislation and a variety of non-legislative measures to develop equality between women and men, sharing the same priorities, such as eradicating gender-based violence and supporting victims; and promoting gender equality and women's rights across the world, with the 2010-2015 strategy, Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019 by The European Commission enacts like a base for cooperation between the Commission, the other European institutions, Member States and stakeholders within the frame of the European Pact for equality between women and men (2011-2020) and important to mention other commitments for highlighting multiple discrimination, promoting gender mainstreaming and assuring that a gender equality perspective is adopted in the post-2020 generation of EU funding programmes (Prpic et al., 2019).

There are three Gender Action Plans of the EU: GAPI (2010-2015), GAP II (2016-2020), and GAP III (2021-2025). The last GAP also follows in the footsteps of the previous plans. It presents a policy framework for the EU with five pillars to increase the engagement level: Making EU engagement more effective, promoting strategic EU engagement at several levels with EU member states, focusing on key areas of engagement (eradicating gender-based violence, advocating for sexual and reproductive health rights, enhancing economic and social rights, empowering girls and women, promoting equal participation and leadership, implementing the women, peace, and security agenda, and addressing challenges and possibilities related to the green transition and digital transformation), gender-responsive and gender-balanced leadership at top EU political and management levels and reporting and communicating system (European Commission, 2020). Thus, the EU continues to work on reaching gender equality in Europe but most importantly a leading example for other countries and even spreading its norms to non-EU states.

In addition to GAP, in 2020, the EU introduced “A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025”. With the Strategy, the work of the European Commission on gender equality is shaped and policy objectives and key actions for 2020-2025 are displayed with the aim of reaching a gender-equal Europe where gender-based violence, sex discrimination, and the idea that structural inequality between women and men is no longer present in society. Furthermore, the implementation of this strategy incorporates a dual approach focused on measures to reach gender equality with assisted gender mainstreaming where gender mainstreaming will be broadened by systematically involving a gender perspective in all stages of policy design in all EU policy areas, internal and external and it will use intersectionality as a cross-cutting principle to focus on discrimination arising from the combination of gender with other personal characteristics or identities (European Commission, 2020). The issues related to gender equality continue to persist, however, the strategies become stronger day by day by strengthening gender mainstreaming and incorporating intersectionality.

2.2 Promotion of gender equality norms in third countries: EU as a leading force

The EU defines itself as a leading actor that promotes gender equality both inside of the EU and in other countries as well. A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 states that the European Union is a global leader in gender equality, with 14 of the top 20 countries worldwide on gender equality being EU Member States, for the sake of robust legislation, gender mainstreaming efforts, and targeted laws addressing inequalities (European Commission, 2020). GAP III also points out the EU’s leadership role at the multilateral level, its role in gender equality, women’s and girls’ rights, and empowerment should be boosted by initiating and co-sponsoring resolutions and declarations, promoting gender-responsive language in all documents, forging partnerships to renew international commitments, and ensuring coordination with EU Member States and partner countries, especially in addressing global challenges like COVID-19 and multilateral EU delegations have a particular responsibility in advancing political initiatives, coordinating with EU Member States on the ground, and partner countries (European Commission, 2020). In the same plan, the EU is involved in the UN system and with all UN bodies and specialized agencies on gender equality within the framework of its multilateral engagement, it should stay as a vocal advocate of women’s

rights at the Human Rights Council and the European Commission is part of the Generation Equality Forum, European Commission co-leads the Generation Equality Action Coalition on preventing gender-based violence, it is engaged in Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies and its new road map, it is involved in G7 and G20 forums to promote WPS agenda and gender equality, it works the Brisbane target (adopted by the G20 in 2014) to reduce the gap in the labor force participation rate between men and women by 25% by 2025, it is an active member of the DAC Network on Gender Equality in the OECD contributing to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the examples of the EU being an element to help the development of gender equality policies. Jenichen (2011) claims that even though the existence of a substantial women's movement is mentionable in this case, future accession to the EU plays a major role in terms of establishing a coherent legal and policy framework to broaden gender equality and women's rights as a mandatory factor. However, she also states that the introduction of the Bosnian Gender Equality Law in 2001 can be on account of the government's ambition to join the EU, the adoption of the law in the parliament can be also attributed to other elements such as the desire of Bosnian parliamentarians to show themselves as progressive to the international community and misinterpretation of the potential influence of the law, and public pressure created by the NGOs. The influence of the EU is not something that can be ignored but the impact of the other factors also should not be neglected. The EU might be considered the key factor in shaping gender equality policies with the assistance of other elements such as public awareness created by NGOs. On the other hand, David and Guerrina (2012), in their interviews, found out that the government in Lebanon distinguishes NGOs as having a crucial role in touching upon gaps left by state actions, particularly in the social sphere which gives EU a space to cooperate with NGOs to do projects to empower civil society to develop its internal governance and raise its voice in policymaking. Furthermore, in another interview, they found the opposite to this example, there is a limited policy dialogue between civil society and the government in Jordan, leading the EU's engagement with NGOs to be more supportive in nature, particularly in the context of human rights issues.

As I mentioned above, the gender equality policy of the EU is shaped around the idea of economic growth and stability and the EU has not given up this priority goal and it can be seen in its interaction for influencing gender equality policies in third countries. In European Neighborhood Policy framework, mostly concentrates on increasing access of women to employment as part of the dimension of equality, thus, somehow it proves that the primary goal of the EU for broadening women's rights is economically formed and this might be seen as a reflection of EU's internal processes (David & Guerrina, 2012). Furthermore, in relation to the distinction between high and low politics impacts how gender is mainstreamed in external relations within the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), with gender equality mainly confined to the low politics realm, leading to a limited understanding of equality and raising doubts about the EU's commitment to mainstreaming gender (David & Guerrina, 2012). Based on their analysis, it is logical to reconsider the influence of the EU and the level of influence of its actions.

The case of civil society and receiving funds from the EU is significant to understanding the EU's approaches to spreading its norms. Boşnak (2021) states that the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) is pursued as a motivator for candidate countries to align with EU norms due to its goal of supporting reforms through financial and technical aid, reflecting the EU's enlargement priorities; additionally, the IPA's funding for civil society provides an opportunity to evaluate the EU's commitment to gender equality, while serving as the most significant financial instrument for Turkish civil society since 2007, playing a key role in promoting gender equality by incorporating women's empowerment programs into civil society development and fostering democratic principles. Moreover, she claims that promoting gender equality, including women in development, is a crucial policy objective, and civil society plays a vital role as an agent in this endeavor, creating alliances with local partners to advance gender equality policies and giving legitimacy to the EU's actions in candidate countries, making assistance a significant policy tool to assist gender equality and integrating women's empowerment programs into civil society development, gender equality, and democracy. The Delegation of the European Union to Türkiye (2016) provided information related to a long-term commitment to Türkiye in terms of promoting gender equality: Empowering

women's NGO networks, fighting against violence against women, assisting women entrepreneurship and raising employment and at that time it provided 36 million Euro with additional 63 million projects and schemes that have objectives of empowering women and women's NGOs in the least developed regions, promoting gender equality in working life, promoting women's employment, strengthening pre-school education and increasing enrolment rate, and increasing enrolment rates for girls in secondary education and vocational training. In this case, like many others, the importance of EU funds to civil society is critical to spreading its gender equality norms.

3 Political Landscape in Türkiye

Over 20 years, the governing party, AKP has managed to keep its power at the top level. The party came into power with liberal promises and Western ideas, however, after securing its position, it went in a clear opposite direction where the conservative ideas came forward. A clash between the past and present of the party became visible at every level such as its policies, public discourses, and even in its external relations. This change in one way created an opportunity for the party to get more support from the conservative groups. But this does not mean that the party did not have any problems in this long period of enjoying the power, there have been several moments to challenge its survival. Gezi Park Occupy and Türkiye's July 2016 coup are some of the key examples of the party's struggles that led to survival issues. The campaigning period of the presidential elections of 2023 spread fear into the party and its circle, but Erdoğan and his party AKP did manage to prevent a major loss after keeping the power for so long. In this part of the thesis, AKP's coming to power and how the party managed to keep its ruling power until today will be discussed.

Öniş (2016) separates AKP's governing term into three between the years 2002-2015: the first phase (2002-2007) is when there was a huge impact of the EU accession process that led to a golden age where important development in the economy, democratic order, and foreign policy occurred, the second phase includes the years between 2007-2011 when there was a transition process that allowed AKP to centralize its power by marginalizing significant actors of the former secularist establishment, including the military and the judiciary, leading to a slowdown in economic and political reforms, and a slowdown in relations with the EU and lastly the third phase started after the election in June 2011, the positive cycle scrutinized in the initial phase overturned, with the previously robust annual economic growth level of nearly 7 percent in 2009 coming to a significant slowdown. Following secularist challenges in the 2007 presidential election and the 2008 legal case of banning AKP, AKP grouped with the Islamist network with the hope of overtaking Kemalists not only this but AKP also obtained wide-ranging support from the West, specifically from the EU, and its own domestic electorates, those of its newly formed partner, the AKP systematically diminished the military's political sway and advanced its own agenda and by the year 2007, the AKP had unmistakably secured

the advantage, causing the military to be in a position of political withdrawal (Esen & Gümüşçü, 2017).

Islamic tendency of the AKP has been noticeable since its foundation as a party. Kumbaracıbaşı (2009) explains the rise of AKP as part of the third and fourth phases of changes in the strategies of Islamic movements that are provided by Yavuz (2003): The third phase started in the 1970s when those movements showed signs of political actions to attract power by changing state institutions and empowering the economy and fourth phase began in 1983, organizations, the free market economy, and public sphere to change society occurred to be significant in Islamic movement that was integrated in socio-economic movement. The liberal vision of the AKP was part of a strategy to gain power which turned out to be a successful step, important to say that this vision mainly was focused on economic goals. In its 2002 election manifesto, AKP bolstered liberal economic agenda by highlighting the replacement of bipolar political ideologies with economic and political integration engagements which envision the free movement of goods and services, knowledge, labor, and capital and recognition of private enterprise as key to economic progress, free competition in the market and removal of the obstacles facing private enterprise (Kumbaracıbaşı, 2009). The economic assurance of the AKP somehow shadowed its religious conservative identity. Öniş (2013), on the other hand, provides an important perspective on how more conservative religious groups of the public have been recognized under the AKP government: in terms of economic perspective, the emergence of new business elites from conservative Anatolian cities challenging the dominance of secular major businesses and seeking to "share the center" can be seen as a step towards a more pluralistic economic and political system in Türkiye, indicating a shift from the exclusivity of the "old regime" to some extent, with new elements of inclusion integrated into the "new regime" to address previous democratic deficits. To go more in-depth, the party's manifesto supported privatization, global economic integration, budgetary adjustments, IMF stand-by agreements, tax reforms, and expenditure policies focused on making savings in the public sector, while proposing a law on public financial management to broaden budgetary unity, effectiveness, financial control, flexibility, transparency, and accountability, it defined the role of government as an efficient "guardian." Furthermore, it focused on making the government an efficient

"guardian" of economic growth and transparency, reshaping the prime minister as a coordinating authority, aligning executive agencies with relevant ministries, cutting the number of ministries, increasing the powers of the Ministry of the Economy, enacting laws on citizens' rights to information, preventing unnecessary expenditure, increasing public tender legislation to EU standards, introducing total quality management techniques in public services delivery to prevent corruption, applying for new staff positions with objective criteria for recruitment and promotion, and simplifying (Kumbaracıbaşı, 2009).

Inheriting the constitutional and economic framework entrenched by prior governments, the AKP was confronted with addressing the system's challenges, such as fractured relationships due to the dissolution of prior Islamist parties and their anti-system rhetoric, requiring a recalibration of interactions with significant political entities and institutions; further constrained by Türkiye's legal framework and its secular principles, the AKP could not apply definite religious discourse similar to Christian democrats, necessitating a variation to integrate more central policies aimed at resonating with a certain degree of secular voters (Kumbaracıbaşı, 2009). However, things have changed after securing its power. The AKP's electoral dominance has provided a room for extensive social engineering by driving Turkish society towards a more conservative direction with an increasing role of religion in public spaces; however, this has led to a paradox where the previous Kemalist era restricted conservative and religious segments of society, while the post-Kemalist era, with a more relaxed understanding of secularism, has diminished the space for the Western-oriented, secular segments, resulting in neither era being genuine examples of political pluralism with mutual respect for diversity and coexistence within the same polity by contrasting elements of Turkish society (Öniş, 2013).

Fear of politics is, as mentioned by Öniş (2016), one of the elements that sustained AKP's and Erdoğan's survival and he explains it further by giving examples from regional geopolitical progress: AKP government had to take a role actively in the coalition against ISIS after receiving pressure from the United States and other Western allies, and AKP benefited from this situation to hit the PKK as included in the campaign against terror

groups and the PKK assumed that major powers would support their bid for an independent Kurdish state in exchange for assistance against ISIS inadvertently benefited the AKP; by late July 2015, the ceasefire collapsed, leading to renewed violent conflict with the PKK and a surge in violence reminiscent of the 1990s clashes between Kurdish insurgents and Turkish security forces in the heavily Kurdish eastern and southeastern regions. As a result of fear of politics, they made a call for a powerful majority government as the certain ground for security and stability and voters replied in November 2015 that it seems to be on the list of public interests, pluralism, and freedom of expression had descended (Öniş, 2016). Of course, the fear of politics is not the only strategy that is emphasized, the organizational and structural impact is also worth mentioning. AKP enjoys a pronounced electoral dominance, boasting nearly 10 million members, with nearly 1.6 million individuals engaged as grassroots activists operating at the local level; the party's strategic utilization of weekly neighborhood gatherings provides it with a distinctive advantage over its political competitors and this advantage is underscored by the interconnectedness of the AKP's district and neighborhood branches through a proprietary communication system established in 2001, which effectively perpetuates the presence of prominent party leaders in the daily lives of citizens. Furthermore, this influence is reinforced by the party's adherence to a conservative-nationalist ideology grounded in Islamic sentiments and Turkish nationalism, where President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is widely regarded as the inherent leader of both the AKP and the nation. (Esen & Gümüşçü, 2017).

Challenges vary from AKP's separation from the Gülen movement to the Gezi Park protests, AKP turned into a case of unstable authoritarianism, in September 2013, many people took over the streets to protest purported because of the government plans to eliminate one of the "green spaces" in center of Istanbul, at the first sight AKP appeared as flustered, but they were able to utilize Türkiye's formidable internal security forces to suppress the protests and a corruption investigation in 2013 accused many children of government officials that included Erdoğan's son as well and this resulted in the resignation of 4 cabinet member. Even though it might have resulted to the detriment of AKP, the party won the 2014 local and presidential elections, stayed as the largest single party in June 2015 elections, snap election in November 2015 and the coup in 2016 was

one of the challenges that AKP turned it into its benefit, thus all those issues became the catalyst for the consolidation of a comprehensive authoritarian regime, although some features of competitive elements stay (Esen & Gümüşçü, 2017). As part of the challenges, there was the July 2016 coup that made AKP to be seized with fear for a moment, however, it was successfully prevented. This military coup was not the strongest that has been faced in Türkiye, midlevel officers initiated it and they had very much miscalculations, to be able to succeed it needed popular, political, and media support for convincing to persuade hesitant individuals both within and outside the armed forces to participate, however, in defeating the coup attempt, the popular mobilization such as Erdoğan's supporters went out to the streets, coupled with support for the government from media and political opposition was instrumental (Esen & Gümüşçü, 2017).

In April 2017, Türkiye held a referendum for Turkish constitutional change which resulted in 51.4% of people saying yes. However, the referendum was not held in a situation where there was freedom of speech, movement, and assembly (Esen & Gümüşçü, 2017). This marked a significant change in Turkish history, as the recent constitutional amendment granted the President unprecedented authority. The campaign for the referendum was shaped around a couple of issues: A strong president under a presidential system to eliminate possible faults of the parliamentary system by accusing the parliamentary system of having a democratic deficit as it provides room in the political system for 'tutelary' power such as military, media bosses and judiciary, delegitimization of the 'No' vote, capitalization of its performance legitimacy, and appealed to religious emotions (Esen & Gümüşçü, 2017). It might be arguable that AKP continued to use fear, religion, and issues related to power with the goal of staying in power. After the constitutional change, Erdoğan achieved another accomplishment by winning the presidential elections in 2018. Esen and Yardimci-Geyikçi (2019) explain Erdoğan's success with two factors in this election: First, the underestimation of Erdoğan's popularity within the mass electorate as he is emphasized as a charismatic and persuasive leader who defended the country against internal and external enemies, this was sustained after the prevention of the coup in 2016 and made Erdoğan as the natural leader for the nationalist-conservative electorate. Secondly, he was able to frame the entire public during the campaign even though he appeared less capable of shaping before; he sidelined

other candidates that might have taken over some of the AKP votes and only focused on himself and İnce (candidate of the opposition), he occupied most of the air time compared to others, focused on nationalist-conservative arguments and considering election promises secondary to so-called ‘major goal’ of historical achievements of the conservative movement under AKP of Erdoğan.

The local election in 2019 is considerably the first step back in AKP’s history as it has lost major municipalities including Istanbul and Ankara. Esen and Gümüşçü (2019) claim that there are three peculiar elements behind the decrease in AKP’s votes: The economic crisis that began in 2018, the opposition’s preference for an electoral strategy for centrist candidates who might surpass Erdoğan’s polarization strategy, the coalition with nationalist MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) and ultra-nationalist speeches estranged Kurdish voters. Furthermore, they showed both coalitions' strategies, Nation’s Alliance (Millet İttifakı) which is composed of CHP, İyi Party, Felicity Party, and Democrat Party, and People’s Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı) which included AKP and MHP: Where Nation’s Alliance targeted local problems and friendly campaign, People’s Alliance’s strategy was created around polarization and fear. However, this time Erdoğan’s main act of politics of fear did not work fully as they lost in crucial cities. This victory of the opposition led to the hopes of the opposition and their supporters increase in terms of there might be a change of Erdoğan’s rule in the 2023 elections.

The campaigning period for the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections was very much hopeful from the opposition perspective. The circumstances in Türkiye were showing that Türkiye was ready for change and the popular demand had never been more powerful: the highest level of corruption under Erdoğan, mismanagement of the economy, and the persistent pursuit of “unorthodox” monetary policy which resulted in triple-digit inflation and negative foreign reserves in the central bank, devastating earthquakes in February where the government was slow to act (Tol, 2023). The polls indicated a powerful likelihood that the opposition candidate would emerge victorious. Most of the research campaigns failed to make clear predictions; some of them claimed that the opposition would win with a huge difference and only a few of them predicted that the second run would be held for the presidential elections (Independent Türkçe,

2023). The elections resulted in a win for Erdoğan once again, he received 51,91% of the votes whereas the opposition candidate, Kılıçdaroğlu got 48,09% (YSK, 2023). The results are explicit examples of how Turkish society is polarized between two poles. According to the election result study of KONDA (2023), Kılıçdaroğlu's votes were at the highest level in most socio-economically developed regions whereas Erdoğan's votes increased and reached the top point in less developed regions. Erdoğan, once again, benefited from the fear of politics to overcome his rival who had emphasized a love language. As Tol (2023) explains, Türkiye's existential anxieties were a tool for Erdoğan such as the Kurdish issue and fear of an independent Kurdish state, the war in Syria, anti-refugee attitude, February earthquakes, and economic problems, however, Erdoğan claimed that he is the only person who can solve all these issues and favorably people believed in his sayings. However, after the elections, nothing has changed and even the situation in Türkiye continues to worsen. Erdoğan turned his face to the West once again as the current economic condition of the country is not bright. For instance, he is currently very enthusiastic about being an EU member state, visa liberation, and receiving F-16 fighter jets from the United States (Craig, 2023).

AKP since the beginning of its coming to power somehow secured its position and increased its number of supporters day by day. The liberal start of the party has changed into a more conservative and religious direction, one might say the party showed its true color for not losing its power. The over-20-year journey of the party has not been smooth as discussed above: Gezi Occupy, the 2015 elections, the coup in 2016, the 2019 local elections, the 2023 elections, the economic crisis, and so on. Here, I tried to show major developments to give an oversight of the AKP rule and its survival.

3.1 Europeanization in Türkiye

Türkiye's historical connection with Europe precedes the formation of the Turkish Republic. In general, Türkiye had tried to align with European standards, and after the Republic's formation, it became stronger. The idea of being an EU member state occurred to be the primary driver of Europeanization in the country, like a carrot offered by the EU. This was not only something that made the state enthusiastic but also the public was very much in the same direction. The goal of being an EU country sparked changes such as

political improvements and democratization. Thus, the beginning of the 2000s was considerably the best time for the country's efforts to improve its condition. It was not only a top-down process led by the government but also there was a bottom-up process thanks to civil society in the country. However, the circumstances did not stay the same; after some time, the reform process slowed down, and the country turned its face away from the EU, but not completely. Türkiye's Europeanization is separated into four phases by Alpan (2021): The first phase was between the years 1959 and 1999 named Europeanization as rapprochement, the second phase is called Europeanization as democratic conditionality (2000-2005), the third phase is Europeanization as retrenchment (2006-2011) and the last phase is Europeanization as denial (2012-2020). This part will try to provide an overlook of Europeanization in Türkiye including the current situation.

There are several studies in the literature focused on the Europeanization process in Türkiye. Müftüler-Baç (2005) analyzes this process by focusing on Türkiye's EU candidacy in 1999 and the political and legal reforms that were made in that period to satisfy the requirements for membership. Similarly, Tocci (2005) presents political reforms and the change since late 2001 and investigates whether this change has resulted externally or internally. Domestic changes such as fighting against corruption and minority rights (Yılmaz & Soyaltın, 2014), ethnocultural diversity (Kaya, 2010), civil society (Diez et al., 2009), domestic drivers such as civil society organizations, business interest groups, media, and political parties (Yılmaz, 2014), political discourses (Alpan, 2014), foreign policy activism (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2009), civilianization, rule of law and fundamental freedoms (Saatçioğlu, 2014), gender equality (Dedeoğlu, 2013; Fougner & Kurto, 2015; Kazanoğlu, 2019; Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm & Cin, 2021) and several other important works have a place in the Europeanization in Türkiye literature.

EU membership has been seen as the organic outcome of the modernization and westernization movement by Atatürk firing the line in the 1920s by the Turkish military and political elites (Tocci, 2005). The Turkish state elites turned their face to Europe and the enactment of European norms and standards: It had a safe spot for its acts to control the Soviet Union after World War II European order, it fixated on the Western system of

countries as it entered in the Organization for European Economic Cooperation in 1948, the Council of Europe in 1949 and NATO in 1952, Türkiye's application for recently established EEC and became an Associate member of the EC in 1963 and due to 1963 Ankara Agreement each side carried out creation of a customs union gradually (Müftüler-Baç, 2005). Even though there were issues going around in the neighboring countries, Türkiye was in a stable period with actual anticipation of full EU membership at the Helsinki Summit in 1999 which happened nearly 40 years after Türkiye's application to EEC which was definitely the opposite of Luxembourg Summit 1997 where the aim was breaking the hopes of the country in terms of EU membership and this also changed public opinion into a more positive direction by diminishing the destructive atmosphere of popular nationalism, minority nationalism(s), Kemalism, religiosity, Occidentalism and Euroscepticism (Kaya, 2010). With this development, the atmosphere became more positive and determined in terms of Europe.

After the Helsinki Summit, Türkiye started immediately to do reforms. Türkiye made a major effort to adopt numerous democratization packages between the years of 1999-2004 to match the political conditions of Copenhagen Criteria with the hope of opening accession negotiations, the significant factor in this period of political Europeanization was the civil society groups and the visibility of pro-democracy and pro-European groups enhanced thanks to the anticipation of membership (Müftüler-Baç, 2005). The political landscape in the country underwent an irrevocable transformation after the inauguration of the EU framework. This accelerated the emergence of new opportunities for various religious, ethnic, social, and political groups, including Kurds, Alevis, Islamists, Circassians, and Armenians, who evolved into genuine advocates of the EU, and this reaffirms the EU's role as a project for peace and integration. Further, incentives and motivation for several groups are provided by the EU to encourage their enthusiasm to live together in unity and this is not due to the reflective history but potential future that includes a democratic perspective of ethnic, religious, and cultural diversities and the EU seems to be the key actor stimulates the democratization process (Kaya, 2010). Thus, Turkish political debates identified 'Europe' in the period before 2005 as the development of diverse identitarian demands and challenging of the state's traditional singular and unified identities, and the processes of democratization and peace-

building in Türkiye were enlarged by the EU integration process's transformative influence on minority rights, the proliferation of sub-identities and providing an 'upper identity' as an umbrella term, however, this 'Europe' as a natural, uncontested, non-ideological dimension was also criticized as being 'elite' as it is not being affiliated any with political party (Alpan, 2014).

Müftüler-Baç (2005) shows the political reforms between 2001-2004 as 34 amendments to the 1982 Constitution and gender equality in marriage in 2001; constitutional amendments, abolishment of the death penalty, revisal of anti-terror law and allowing of broadcasting in other languages, operationalization of previous reforms and revisal of Penal Code for torture, the retrial of cases decided in State Security Courts in 2002; adoption of Protocol 6 of ECHR, conversion of all death sentences to life imprisonment and repealing of Article 8 of Anti-Terror Law, revisal of the National Security Council in 2003; ten amendments of the Constitution including freedom of the press, and prioritization of supranational treaties over domestic law, abolishment of State Security courts, change of Article 46 of the Penal code and revisal of the Higher Education Board and the Censure Boards, revisal of laws on violence against women and children and change of the penalties for various offenses and redefine offenses in 2004. Even though those led to the liberalization of the political environment, it has broadened AKP's power and survival anticipations by adhering to long-lasting secular rivals in the military and high judiciary that observed and examined religion-based parties, thus, it should not be shocking why AKP made reforms in its first period in power (Saatçioğlu, 2014).

Öniş (2013), for instance, defines the period of 2002-2005 as the golden age in terms of initiating democratization and human rights reforms via the European Union and its blend of conditions and incentives for full membership. Thus, Europeanization was at the highest level starting from November 2002 to the official opening of EU accession negotiations in 2005 and three areas came forward as positive effects of this: economic growth, democratization, and the conduct of foreign policy (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2009).

Unfortunately, the positive framework of the EU could not protect its place and slowly negativities started to show. The interest in EU membership started to get lower,

the EU's soft power over Türkiye diminished within the years, and nationalist discourses took the place of liberal reformers as they lost a powerful ally, and an example would be the less attention compared to the post-Helsinki period in media to the Commission's annual reports which states democratic deficits and identification of reforms. Thus, from that point onwards, domestic forces are needed for further democratization, and in an environment polarized socially and politically, the change will be harsh, especially considering rising terrorism and without an external power (Öniş, 2013). According to Kaya (2010), when EU country and national government leaders agreed to begin negotiations, the period 17 December 2004 - 3 October 2005, tensions started to increase among nationalist, patriotic, statist, pro-status-quo groups, and pro-EU groups, thus the virtuous cycle (1999-2005) was taken over by the vicious cycle starting from late 2005. Moreover, he said that specifically among middle-class and upper-middle-class groups, the country embodied a recent nationalist wave, and militarist, nationalist, and Eurosceptic endeavors combined with increasing violence and terror were noted in the electoral cycle of presidential and general elections. The favorable environment faded slowly due to these developments.

AKP in its first years perceived and promoted the practice of “globalism” aligned with Europe that included a powerful pledge to democratization and reform, however, with a decreasing impact of the EU's soft power and changing domestic and external factors, the impression of “globalism” changed into a more Asian type “globalism” where there is a fewer enthusiasm or minimal perception of democracy but open to global integration and diversification of markets. Furthermore, as a result of this paradigm change, there is a promotion of conservative and religious norms instead of democratization and reformism; “conservative globalism” (Öniş, 2013). The reason why the AKP, as the recent Islamic-rooted party, emphasized civilianization and other liberalizing reforms during its initial period in power was to ensure its political survival in the face of a military-judicial secular establishment that was doubtful of its commitment to secular and domestic norms (Saatçioğlu, 2014). However, the political and social splits are driven by economic factors, both external and internal origins: In reality, AKP's representation of emerging middle-class groups from rural and conservative backgrounds in competition with enacted urban middle and upper-middle

classes, also as the legitimate political center is currently accessible to various social groups like Muslims, Kurds, conservative business circles and several other groups apart from laicists, republicans, Kemalists and liberal business circles and international sources like the domestic crisis of the European Union, enlargement tiredness of the Union, the continuing fluctuation in the Middle East, shifting American benefits in the region, the increase of political Islam as an attitude to the continuous Islamophobia in the globe, and the global expressive dominance of civilizationist/culturalist/religious rhetoric (Kaya, 2010).

Saatçioğlu (2014) claims that it is true that the weakening EU credibility is an element that caused the diminishment of AKP's general reform pact after 2005 but some of the policies were not influenced, civilization continued and the reversal of democratic progress in the rule of law and fundamental freedoms did not happen until later 2007, therefore, the reform results of political criteria are not always determined by the EU-related elements but might be influenced by domestic political dynamics as well. In her explanation, she includes domestic factors such as the traditional commitment of the Turkish military to Westernization and eventual EU membership as a result, as well as the domestic political cost in relation to the level of public support. Additionally, she defines internal factors: The dominance of AKP as a regional power in the Middle East, Türkiye's assertive foreign policy in the regions being an asset for EU relations and rising strategic relations in the region, and low credibility of the EU membership. As can be seen, the increase or decrease of Europeanization is not resulting from one factor, there are several developments behind it. Therefore, for instance, foreign relations keep an important place in Türkiye-EU relations. For this reason, it has to be consistent to be a component and should be presented as enacted according to universal values instead of ethnic/religious fondness and the transformation of foreign policy must be included in continuing democratization that consecutively merges with the EU accession procedure (Aydın-Düzgit & Tocci, 2009).

In the following period, Türkiye continued to become distanced from European values and standards. As the credibility of EU membership is not visible anymore, domestic players pick and choose the EU rules that would advance their agendas and

enhance their benefits as can be seen in the fight against corruption and promotion of minority rights (Yılmaz & Soyaltın, 2014). From that onwards, the ruling party only prioritized its own interests to protect its political survival. With this we can talk about (de)-Europeanization process in Türkiye. Aydın-Düzgit and Kaliber (2016) define (de)-Europeanization in terms of the decline or diminishment of the EU/Europe as a normative/political framework and as an anchor in the domestic contexts and national public discussions. They claim that it reveals itself in two aspects: The decrease of the interest and influence of European institutions, norms, and values which prevail in a backdown of EU/Europe's normative/political framework for Turkish politics and society, the enhancement of skepticism and alienation Turkish society towards the EU/Europe dangers the validity of the EU/Europe as a point of reference for necessary reforms, thus, it does not only mean the deficiency of Europeanization but also estrangement from Europe in so many areas in Türkiye such as not feeling the requirement of connecting reforms with EU to justify. This process of (de)-Europeanization started specifically in the post-2007 process and continues to demonstrate itself in present-day Turkish politics (Aydın-Düzgit & Kaliber, 2016).

Looking from a policy change perspective to (de)-Europeanization, for instance, Kaya (2021) studies the change in migration policies and claims the significant evolution of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Law No. 6458, 2013) thanks to Europeanization, however, increasing pressure from Syrian mass migration caused the interference of this process. He also showed that due to the AKP's use of religious rhetoric and its de-secularization policies related to Syrians in Türkiye, there has been a shift away from Europeanization in migration and asylum proceedings and this shift aligns with the broader trend of Islamization and de-secularization in Turkish foreign and domestic policymaking. On the other hand, Saatçioğlu (2016) investigates (de)-Europeanization of the judicial system, by opposing the independence of the judicial system and rule of the law which was advocated under EU conditionality, in Türkiye and the reasons behind it: increasing dominance over the judiciary, pro-authoritarian discourses of AKP and rising Eurosceptic or anti-EU/Europe speech. Thus, it is visible that (de)-Europeanization did not stay limited only to one area in Turkish politics but spread to all levels.

4 Europeanization of Gender Equality Policies in Türkiye

4.1 Instrumentalization of Gender Equality Policy

AKP government mostly used gender equality policy, as an addition to others, to reach its own benefits such as being an EU member country or protecting its place as a ruling party. The AKP strategically exploited gender equality to intensify its authority during both its democratic period and the subsequent period refers to democratic backsliding (Arat, 2021). This takes several forms and approaches, as pursuing power depends on different factors. In the first ten years of the AKP, the party strongly promoted the EU candidacy, it tried to do reforms in this framework and gender equality was one of the criteria that had to be improved, thus, AKP had to make changes to improve the conditions of the country in this area. Later, the perspective changed in terms of both domestic and external factors. AKP took a more conservative turn to get the support of both conservative and religious groups to stay in power. Arat (2021) separates into three periods and major tactics. First, she says that upon gaining power through democratic elections in 2002, the AKP utilized a liberal discourse and broadened women's rights laws to legitimize its rule and enhance its reputation. After 2010, when the process of backsliding started, the AKP judiciary reinterpreted the egalitarian legal framework protecting women's rights in marriage to promote religious marriage. This move propagated the party's conservative gender ideology and threatened women's existing rights. The establishment of conservative institutions for women resulted in the increasingly authoritarian regime consolidating its ideological hegemony in power and as its authoritarian tendencies continued to rise, the AKP created conservative institutions for women to marginalize existing egalitarian ones (Arat, 2021). On the other hand, Fougner and Tore (2015) stated that post-1999 gender policy changes in Türkiye have not presented a broad normative commitment to gender equality, and they seem to have been driven more by instrumental logic rather than absolute dedication to gender equality, despite their relation to EU membership and domestic political objectives.

During the first years of AKP, the party portrayed itself as a liberal aligning party. Developing women's rights through legal changes was a politically beneficial strategy to indicate the government's commitment to the secular republican framework and acquire

the trust of the electorate (Arat, 2021). Therefore, there are many legal improvements and positive discourses during the first period of the AKP in power. For instance, constitutional amendments since 2001 that signify equality between men and women, the New Civil Code where further steps to reach equality were taken, and changes made in terms of the categorization of sexual crimes. Even though the objective of the governing party regarding Law No. 6284 and the Istanbul Convention has changed, they can be considerable among two positive developments that happened under the AKP government. One reason for broadening women's rights was beneficial for the government party as it was not as costly as suppressing the military intervention in civilian issues or perceiving the Kurdish language rights that were expected by the EU (Arat, 2021). Also, Dedeoğlu (2012) stated that the reforms appear to be merely another element checked off the government's EU accession agenda without a genuine commitment to substantial change. Expansion of gender equality was an uncomplicated option for the AKP where it would not threaten the existence of the AKP, as this might have occurred in engaging in other mentioned issues. Additionally, Özkazanç (2020) defines the gender politics of the AKP, within the Janus face of its rule, aligning with the EU requirements for the accession process policies that promote gender equality and applied legal and constitutional reforms were on the one side even though the implementation was not sincerely, however, the feminist movement should not be neglected as well and as violence against women escalated alarmingly by 2007, Law No.6284 were initiated but practical benefits have been limited.

Signing the Istanbul Convention as a first country, thanks to the feminist movement, was a reflection of the “moderate” character of AKP in that period but in conjunction with the efforts to "keep up appearances" in terms of maintaining the appearance of complying with the EU-imposed gender equality agenda, the AKP government pursued a contradictory policy of increasing Islamization in politics where traditional gender roles reinforced, women's roles primarily as mothers, wives, and caretakers emphasized through a family-based social welfare approach and this resulted in a decrease of the level of impact of the reforms (Özkazanç, 2020). The instrumental practice of women's rights enabled the government to accelerate an illiberal conservative gender ideology and consolidate its increasingly authoritarian rule by altering gender

rights norms and practices (Arat, 2021). The real perception of the ruling party has started to surface slightly. Especially, certain government supporters pushed for the adoption of explicitly Islamic family law regulations while emphasizing motherhood not just in religious terms but also as a national duty to ensure Türkiye's growth as a formidable nation, thereby replacing the focus on gender equality with "familism"; consequently, women's movements, LGBTQI+, and their organizations came across severe state repression, and a gender-biased state of emergency regime specifically targeted the Kurdish Women's Movement, leading to the devastation of its local organizations, the arrest of activists and political figures, and even instances of harassment within the parliament (Özkazanç, 2020). AKP managed to please its conservative supporters by changing its gender equality policies to consolidate its power at the top. The AKP's contemporary surge in anti-gender discourse, shaped through the securitization of gender issues and its alliances with hardliner anti-gender actors, should be understood within the framework of the party's growing populist tactics and its division of "us" (the "good" people) versus "them" (opponents) on both ideological and strategic fronts (Unal, 2023).

Gender equality policies have been a tool for reaching multiple goals by the governing party. First, it was useful for achieving the power to govern the party. The party acted as a liberal party that would like to join the EU and perceive EU norms. Gender equality was an easy element to get done to delude the eyes of the EU. It might be said that the party became successful in portraying itself in that way and making voters trust them. Once they jumped into the highest level of governing, their ideas started to shift into a conservative framework. To stay at the top of the mountain, they reversed gender equality policies where they pointed to religion, traditions, and patriarchal norms more intensely. Today this behavior of the party still exists. To win the last elections, the party aligned itself with more conservative parties. The invitation of more religious and conservative parties aimed for another win and to keep the power. Again, gender equality policies were the target of this election campaign and bargains between the parties.

The government party made two Islamist fundamentalist parties called YRP (New Welfare Party) and HÜDA-PAR (Free Cause Party) join their coalition with MHP (The Nationalist Movement Party) to broaden their voter ground against solid opposition bloc

and these two parties' main goal is mainstreaming the position of Islam in Turkish politics and bolster the Islamic perspective of national identity (Unal, 2023). Their idea of gender equality is far away from the EU's gender norms, and all the gender equality supporters. Gender issues are key in AKP's recent political alliances and the polarizing language used in its election campaigns such as YRP and HÜDA-PAR pushed AKP to emphasize a hardliner stance against "gender ideology to enter into a political coalition, and their most specific demands are the annulment of Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Combating Domestic Violence and women's right to alimony, the closing down of LGBTQI+ associations, and the introduction of an Islamist education system which are also stated in their election propaganda and apart from some female AKP members, referred as "sofliners", senior male AKP members claimed that there were no contradictions in applying these demands (Unal, 2023). Even though, it seems aligning AKP with those requests is logical in terms of achieving more votes, this is problematic for the party's female voters.

This situation was not only problematic in terms of voters as mentioned before, the female MPs of the AKP Özlem Zengin, and Derya Yanık reacted to the agreement to the annulment of Law No. 6284 as a part of the political bargains with Islamist fundamentalist parties with statements "Law No. 6284 is our red line" and "it is undebatable", however, senior party officials and Islamist fundamentalist circles were outraged with accusing Zengin and Yanık as harming the coalition and threatening AKP with not voting if Zengin would be a candidate (Unal, 2023). AKP's attempts to survive and keep the power by risking gender equality not only put the party's female MPs in danger but the support of female voters as well. Women who have been supporting Erdoğan had some doubts about voting for him again due to the newly established coalition with extreme Islamist parties for the elections, the concerns are related to domestic violence, mismanagement of the economy, and women's rights (Poyrazlar, 2023). Therefore, the new coalition has risked the victory of the ruling party in some perspective.

Overall, AKP instrumentalized gender equality policies since the beginning of its political journey. There are several occasions: seizing the power, commitment to EU

membership, and sustaining the power by attracting a conservative-religious voter base. Even though there have been times that risked these goals, in the end, it seems that AKP became successful in achieving its goal apart from the EU membership. The party reached its ultimate goal of being at the top.

4.2 Europeanization Phase of Gender Equality Policy in Türkiye

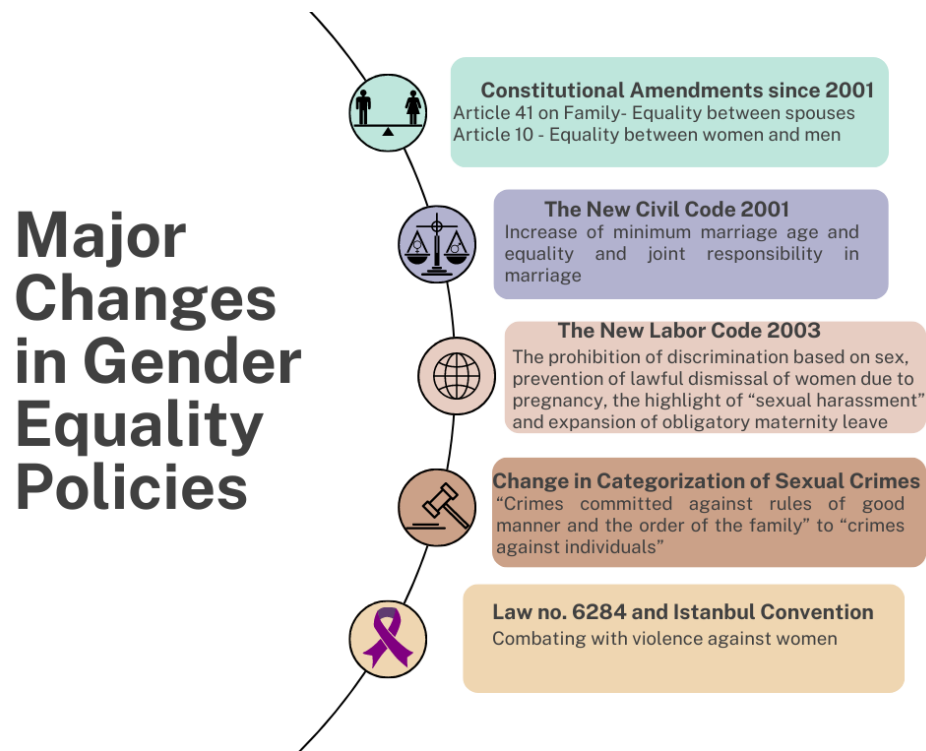
The gender equality policies in Türkiye have undergone significant changes, especially international developments such as The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing led to a major awareness among Turkish feminists and society should be pointed. The evolution of gender equality policies in Türkiye was not only influenced by them but also by the acceptance of candidacy to the EU in 1999 and the EU candidacy created a maneuvering place for all the gender equality supporters. Several changes were led in order to comply with the EU acquis. The EU membership was a vital promise at the beginning to promote gender equality by all means. This part will try to present the gender equality policy change since the start of the Europeanization period with the help of a policy structure approach, interviews, and primary and secondary sources.

Türkiye's pursuit of EU candidacy in 1999 introduced a new aspect to its domestic politics, emphasizing the need to meet EU membership criteria for progressing in the accession process and opening negotiations, a consequence of the emergence of a reform agenda spanning from 1999 to 2004 that surrounded women's rights and gender equality, with the European Commission firmly monitoring Türkiye's progress through its Progress Reports, which estimated several angles including legal gender discrimination, the engagement of women's NGOs in legal reforms, the freedom of association and assembly, attachment to UN CEDAW obligations, and efforts to address issues like violence against women, particularly honor killings (Özdemir, 2014). According to Bodur Ün and Arıkan (2022), the phase of forming Türkiye's gender equality policy with the EU standards was most evident between the years 1999 to 2011, during which extensive legislative and institutional groundwork was enacted to eagerly promote gender equality. However, I will

also include the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2012 as a last key point toward aligning policies. In this part of the thesis, changes in gender equality policy since the EU candidacy was tossed into the agenda will be scrutinized with the AKP government's existence in mind.

Regardless of Türkiye's signing and ratification of nearly all UN and European Conventions on human rights, including CEDAW, the country has been confronted with large-scale domestic and international criticism due to its human rights framework and violations of women's rights, prompting the EU to embrace a stricter policy stance following the Helsinki Summit of 1999; the European Commission's progress reports from 2000 to 2005 emphasized the urgency of aligning legislation with EU gender standards and addressing the significant issue of violence against women, and these messages were taken seriously by the AKP, which, right after its electoral victory in 2002, prevailed its dedication to the aim of EU accession, leading to the implication of political and economic reforms to accomplish the accession criteria (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022). The first period of the AKP government in power, up until 2011, was under the impact of AKP's enthusiasm for more European values or enthusiasm for the European Union, this was a major factor for developments in terms of gender equality (Interviewee 6). In this direction, the Turkish National Program for the Adoption of the EU Acquis, which became effective through its publication in the Official Gazette on July 24, 2003 (numbered 25178), not only aimed to align with the acquis on gender equality in the workplace but also concentrated on promoting and adequately applying egalitarian policies. Moreover, Türkiye has participated in the Gender Equality Community Program, a part of the European Union's Social Policy Programs, as indicated by the Council of Ministers Decision dated February 3, 2003 (numbered 2003/5224), announced in the Official Gazette on February 21, 2003 (numbered 25027). The program, initially launched at the EU level in 1982, aimed to ensure the effective integration of equality provisions in community policies and to guarantee equal treatment in areas such as employment, vocational training, promotion, and working conditions (KSGM, 2008).

Figure 4. 1. Major Changes in Gender Equality Policies



Even though Turkish women were able to receive their rights with the establishment of the Republic, the Constitution still promoted unequal practices at the beginning. Women were distinguished as dependent citizens rather than free individuals; they have either followed the decisions of their fathers or husbands. Prior to Türkiye's candidacy for the EU, women's role in the legislative structure was characterized as being reliant or subordinate (Dedeoglu, 2012). However, a promising attitudinal switch occurred at the beginning of the 2000s with legislative reforms: Constitutional amendments since 2001 [specifically the amendment in 2004], enactment of the new Civil Code (2001); the new Labour Law (2003); and the new Penal Code (2005) (Dedeoglu, 2012). The altered and newly included provisions in the family and marriage section of the Civil Code not only eliminated the subordinate status of women within families but also reinforced the legal framework to combat violence against women (VAW) (Özdemir, 2014). To go into a more in-depth explanation of these four concrete legislative reforms, firstly, Article 41 related to family made clear that family entrenched to equality among spouses is the groundwork of society and, additionally, a clarification of equality between

men and women added to Article 10 of the Constitution in 2004. Secondly, the amendment of the new Civil Code introduced new adjustments: the minimum age of marriage was raised and made equal between males and females, and as opposed to patriarchal arrangements in the old code, joint responsibility of marriage and identical authority to portray union externally were admitted. Thirdly, the new Labor Code initiated changes such as the prohibition of discrimination based on sex, prevention of lawful dismissal of women due to pregnancy, the highlight of “sexual harassment” for legitimate argument for termination of labor contract and demand of compensation, and expansion of obligatory maternity leave. Fourthly, the categorization of sexual crimes switched from “crimes committed against rules of good manner and the order of the family” to “crimes against individuals”, marital rape was encompassed to the crime of rape, imposes harsher penalties for workplace sexual harassment, includes "honor killings" as crimes with severe punishment, prohibits reducing or suspending punishment for rapists who marry their victims, made illegal to conduct virginity tests without proper authorization, and municipalities with over 50,000 people are required to establish shelters for domestic violence victims (Fougner & Tore, 2015). During its initial years in power, the AKP government made significant strides toward achieving gender equality, aligning with EU directives and regulations and the changes in the Constitution can be a sign of this issue as well (Dedeoğlu, 2013). Policymakers emphasized ‘gender equality’ as the key discourse and they disseminated it to the public, at the same time, a great number of legislative reforms included straightforward remarks about the necessities of EU membership (Aybars et al., 2019).

While Türkiye was going under serious promising policy changes, AKP proposed in 2004 an ultimate clause, where the criminalization of adultery was mentioned, to add to the Turkish Penal Code (Müftüler-Baç, 2005). However, this ended up with far-reaching reactions from both Turkish society and European countries and it resulted in the withdrawal of the proposal: The adultery crisis is a sign of the internal struggle between modernizers and the reactionaries, as Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has supported the proposal as well, it reflected the fact that when it comes to women’s issues, limits of the modernizing capacities of AKP becomes blurry (Müftüler-Baç, 2005). Nevertheless, as it was the prime time of Türkiye’s accession process to the EU, AKP

presented the other side of the coin where EU norms were trying to be reflected in a smooth way. For instance, good practices regarding the elimination of sex discrimination in family and cultural life might be seen as in response to various requests and criticisms from Europe regarding these issues as the Turkish government could not remain indifferent to concerns about its hold on power, thus, the government did not voluntarily grant these advancements; they were entirely influenced by external factors (Interviewee 6).

Table 4. 1. *Gender Equality Policy Change in Türkiye during the Europeanization Period*

	Before EU Engagement	Europeanization Period
Objectives	Poorly defined (no quantified goals)	Better defined (quantified goals)
Principles	Equality between men and women	Gender Equality
Procedures	Hierarchical	Hierarchical
Financial Instruments	National	European and National

Most of the interviews highlighted the EU accession process and its major impact on positive change in Türkiye’s gender equality policy when they were asked about whether there is a change or not under the AKP government:

“...I usually divide the last 20 years into several periods, and the first one is the 2000s, a time when Türkiye's relationship with the European Union was a bit more hopeful. Let's say it was from 2000 to 2007. During this period, AKP (Justice and Development Party) claimed to be similar to Christian democrats and still believed there was something left regarding EU accession. Perhaps there was a glimmer of hope because of this belief, or it was perceived this way, or because there was still some belief in the whole process, there was some light, or it was thought so, in the sense of gender equality... (Interviewee 3)”

“...In the first 10 years, there might have been some steps taken towards alignment due to promises made to the EU or a desire to comply with such issues, especially concerning the EU accession process. Chapters related to the EU's requirements might have been worked on... (Interviewee 7)”

“...In the early years, we witnessed changes related to women's rights during the European Union accession process, which were considered positive... (Interviewee 10)”

Under the EU Social Policy acquis, Türkiye managed to achieve major changes to reach the EU level of standards: Article 10 of the Constitution specifies equality between women and men and takes under the protection of the state, a constitutional basis for positive discrimination against people who require social protection such as women, children, the elderly and the disabled with the referendum decision in 2010, the Draft Law on the Anti-Discrimination and Equality Board was formulated to harmonize with the EU acquis in 2010, the Prime Ministry Circular on 'Increasing Women's Employment and Ensuring Equal Opportunity' was put into place, the policies established accelerated with the formulation of the Disadvantaged Groups Department in 2009 under the General Directorate of Labor, which consists of women, disabled and children units, employment incentive packages such as breastfeeding leave, maternity leave and parental leave, transferred into practice, with Law No. 6111, civil servants (men and women) who gave birth given the opportunity to use unpaid parental leave for up to one year, the employment of women and youth has been bolstered by Law No. 6111, The Law on the Approval of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence was entered into force in 2012 and within the scope of the Human Resources Development Operational Program in Türkiye, Operations on Increasing Women's Employment and Supporting Youth Employment are carried out under the priority of employment.¹

Türkiye, apart from Constitutional amendments, prepared additional documents, plans, and reports in terms of improving gender equality in the country. Some measurements were included as part of the 8th Five-Year Development Plan comprising the years 2001-2005. As part of regional development, one of the objectives was to prioritize courses, especially in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, to increase the female population's knowledge and skills and Multi-purpose Community Centers (Çok Amaçlı

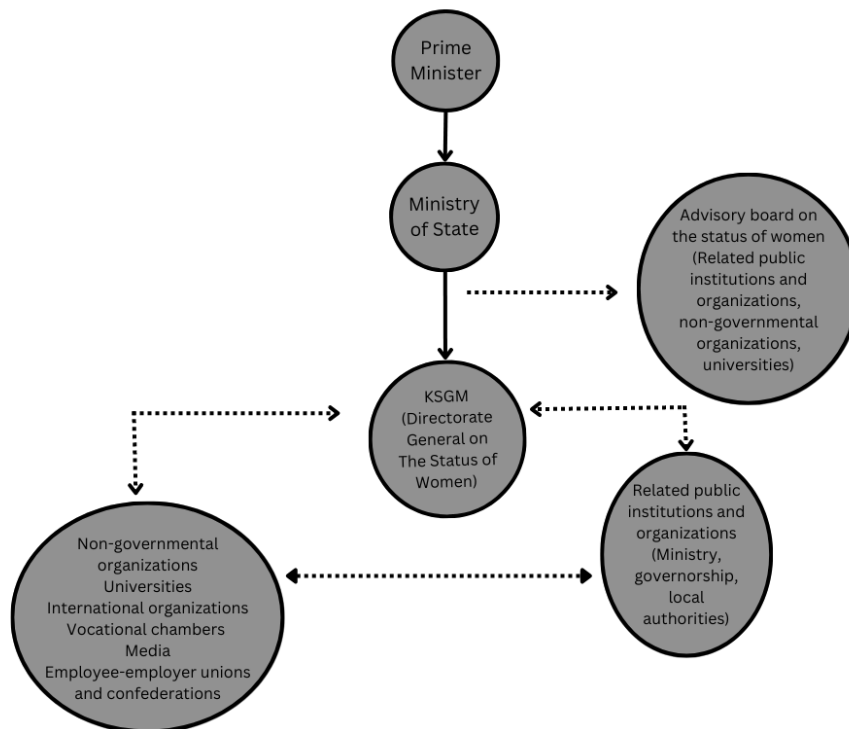
¹ Ministry for EU Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. 2013. The presentation is titled “EU and Women” https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/Duyurular/abgiy/2013/ab_kadin.pdf

Toplum Merkezleri, ÇATOM) were established to raise the status of women and integrate them to the development process under the framework of Social Action Plan. To enhance the social standing of women, broaden their spheres of engagement, and empower them with equal opportunities, the goal was shaped around elevating their educational attainment and facilitating their increased involvement in the development process as professional endeavors, and decision-making mechanisms. Initiatives were aimed to be formulated to enhance women's literacy levels, a combination of written and visual communication tools, alongside informal and non-formal educational approaches. Preventive measures were mentioned to address unemployment, with a particular focus on youth, women, and individuals at risk of unemployment employing active and passive employment policies. Value-added projects aimed to be developed specifically targeting unpaid family workers in the agricultural sector, as well as urban housewives and youth, in order to create opportunities for them. Special attention was planned to be given to vulnerable groups, including women, children, and people with disabilities, in the workforce to ensure their specific needs are met (DPT, 2000). The Five-Year Development Plan emphasized issues such as employment, unpaid family work, education and literacy levels, and the status of women in the less developed regions of Türkiye (Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia). However, the topics were only discussed in a superficial way. For instance, the saying “a project will be implemented to enhance the conditions” was there, but specific details regarding this project were not provided. It appears that this matter was mentioned merely for the sake of inclusion.

Afterward, the 9th Five-Year Development Plan (2007-2013) also included similar issues and it has been formulated in alignment with the vision and Long-Term Strategy (2001-2023) of a Türkiye characterized by steady growth, equitable income distribution, global competitiveness, transition into an information society, and successful completion of EU membership harmonization. It also stated that during the 8th Plan period, extensive constitutional and legal reforms were undertaken to align the justice system with EU norms, ensuring universal standards for fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as emphasizing gender equality through explicit provisions to adhere to Copenhagen Criteria. Most differential elements were mentioned in the document: EU criteria and EU statistics to compare Türkiye’s development, and violence against women. In terms of

violence against women, educational and awareness campaigns were being conducted to raise awareness within society and prevent violence and abuse against women. Some of the implication plans were targeting the prioritization and inclusion of young and women farmers, to be implemented through strengthened producer organizations. Efforts would be made to ensure equal opportunities for women, youth, long-term unemployed individuals, people with disabilities, and former convicts facing difficulties in the labor market, with a focus on facilitating women's employment and workforce participation through improved access to childcare and caregiving services. In order to promote women's economic and social inclusion, efforts would be made to enhance their employability through the development of professional training programs. Additionally, measures would be taken to raise awareness within society to prevent violence against women (TBMM Kararı, 2006). Similar to the previous Five-Year Development Plan, there was no section for only issues regarding women and gender equality. Such issues were dealt with in other sections such as employment and legislation. The EU membership goal gave a path for better-defined objectives to be included in these Plans.

Figure 4. 2. *Structure for the Development and Implementation of Women's Policies in Türkiye*



Source. KSGM, (2008). TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET EŞİTLİĞİ ULUSAL EYLEM PLANI 2008–2013. http://www.ceidizleme.org/ekutuphaneresim/dosya/502_1.pdf

The National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2008-2013) was formulated within the framework of regulations that promote gender equality in crucial policy documents, including the 9th Development Plan (2007-2013), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the EU Acquis, and the Millennium Development Goals, rather than being advanced as an independent policy. In the Plan, concrete strategies are presented for several areas: general gender equality development, education, economy (in terms of employment and participation in the workforce), poverty, authority and decision-making mechanisms, health, media, and environment. Within the scope of the Türkiye-European Union Pre-Accession Financial Cooperation Program in 2005, “Promoting Gender Equality” covering the years 2007-2008 was initiated, in which KSGM (Directorate General on The Status of Women) was the beneficiary institution. As part of the project in question, “National Action Plan for Combating Domestic Violence Against Women” covering the period 2007-2010 was prepared with the participation of all parties and was approved by the Minister of State for Women and Family and entered into force. In that, there were "legal arrangements", "social awareness and mentality transformation", "strengthening the socio-economic position of women", "protective services", "treatment and rehabilitation services" and "intersectoral cooperation". For this reason, the issue of violence was not discussed under a separate heading in the Gender Equality National Action Plan (KSGM, 2008).

Under the framework of the “Combating Domestic Violence Against Women Project” performed by the General Directorate with the financial assistance of the European Union and the technical assistance of the United Nations Population Fund, the expectation was to strengthen the institutional planning for the elimination of domestic violence against women, “2007-2010 National Action Plan for Combating Domestic Violence Against Women” has been prepared for three periods of implication (2007-2008, 2007-2009 and 2007-2010 and later on). In addition to public institutions and organizations, local governments, universities, and non-governmental organizations working in combating violence against women have also participated in the plan. Within

the plan, 6 areas came forward: legislative arrangements, public awareness, and mental transformation, empowering the socio-economic status of women, protection services, treatment and rehabilitation services, and intersectoral cooperation (KSGM, 2007). The National Action Plan for Gender Equality provided clear goals and activities. In terms of the EU's constraint on Turkish political elites and support for the women's movement's insistence indirectly promoted the enactment of new laws, in spite of the lack of strict conditionality on violence against women (VAW). This influence was achieved by adjusting domestic opportunities and regulating domestic expectations. Domestic women's organizations and activists took advantage of the EU accession process to encourage these reforms and it is relevant to stress that the EU's impact was influenced by domestic factors and processes (Özdemir, 2014). Legal action was taken when Law No. 6284 on the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women was ratified in 2012 as it presents preventive imprisonment acts against perpetrators of domestic violence (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022).

The EU soft law approach was found to be mostly impactful in shaping gender equality policy in Türkiye by the participants, especially in the first years of AKP:

“Very influential indeed. You mentioned that they are non-binding, but the European Union still has numerous directives. If you are a member of the European Union, you must adhere to certain directives, both related to equality and equal pay for equal work, etc., and establish a certain standard. Then, it tells you that if you are a member state of the European Union, the minimum standard should be this. It's up to you to figure out how to meet these standards internally, but you need to set these standards in this way... If you are a candidate country, it is also due to your status as a candidate country, and the Istanbul Convention is a convention of the Council of Europe, not the European Union, but the European Union has signed and approved the Convention this year. The approval of the Istanbul Convention means that, from the perspective of organizations, we now read that European Union member countries will also bind themselves to it.... (Interviewee 10)”

On the other hand, for some participants, it seems to be not that influential:

“The non-binding guidelines and recommendations of the EU, while not legally binding on any EU member state, are indeed sought to be improved upon by EU countries, much like binding treaties. However, this does not seem to be the case in Türkiye. These guidelines or recommendations, applicable to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) as well, do not have a binding effect on Türkiye. Thus, they seem to come and go without a substantial impact. I do not believe they have a significantly positive influence because there are no sanctions involved. If we were part of the EU and were eager to join, perhaps these chapters would have been completed long ago, and alignment would have been achieved. Yet, many chapters remain open. Progress reports are continually published. Since 2019, civil society members like us have been saddened to observe that no progress has been made in specific chapters, which we follow closely. (Interviewee 7).”

While asking about the impact of EU soft law, most of the participants touched upon the importance of the EU funds for civil society and how it is influential in terms of spreading EU gender equality norms in the case of Türkiye. Thanks to the EU funds, an opportunity is provided to civil society organizations to succeed by supporting them financially but also politically (Interviewee 6), prestige, ethical framework, and principles are presented (Interviewee 1), and research, surveys, and on-the-ground observations take place at the national level (Interviewee9). Accepting the fact that civil society is very important in terms of the improvement of gender equality, the assistance and impact of the EU funds should be highlighted.

To show the cruciality of women’s rights and roles, the EU and Türkiye prepared a common report concerning women’s position and problems in Türkiye and a comparison with the women’s position in the EU. Governance includes suggestions like embracing a gender equality approach at each EU level and National Development Plan, adopting gender-responsive budgeting in the EU and Türkiye, letting the Turkish Republic Parliament have more responsibility rather than only having a dialogue with the EU, and establishing a gender equality institution in harmonization with the EU legislation in cooperation with civil society organizations (Olsson & Onanç, 2010). Prior

to this report, in 2009, the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men (KEFEK) was created with the goal of protecting and developing women's rights, ensuring equality between women and men, informing the Turkish Grand National Assembly of these developments, discussing the issues that have been attributed to it as a basis or as a subsidiary, and to introduce laws submitted to the Turkish Grand National Assembly when inquired (Kadın Erkek Fırsat Eşitliği Komisyonu Kanunu [Law on Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men], 2009). These developments helped policy change to result in more alignment with the EU gender equality policy.

The positive developments thanks to the accession process to the EU cannot be denied, however, there has been always skepticism toward the AKP government and its progressive actions due to its religious background and conservative values. The idea of instrumentalization was out there, waiting to be discovered in the future. Arat (2010) touches upon this topic and explains the situation under the term ‘democratic paradox’. Her definition of democratic paradox comes from the apprehension of the diffusion of religious and patriarchal norms while showing religious freedoms as a logical excuse such as lifting the ban on the Islamic headscarf in higher education institutions and putting gender equality in danger. It is arguable that her concerns are connected to plausible explanations. Lifting the ban basis on the EU’s human rights framework and the argument came to the fore as a concern of individual rights and freedoms (Çağatay, 2018). Türkiye’s Foreign Minister at the time, Ali Babacan, made a comment on the issue of headscarf “Türkiye is a country which has to make political reforms to achieve the strategic goal of full membership in the European Union, which it has chosen.”² In spite of appearance, the initiative taken to lift the ban on headscarf was rooted in the idea of civil liberties. The issue was pictured as a ‘human rights’ struggle by headscarf advocates and turned into an excessively symbolic fact and one famous example of this fight would be the application of the former Turkish President’s wife to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) (Tremblay, 2014). Another fore coming case was ‘Leyla Şahin vs. Türkiye’ where a female student went to ECtHR due to her expel from the university as she resisted to take

² Ali Babacan, Türkiye’s Former Foreign Minister. 2008. “Turkey must lift headscarf ban for EU: formin”. REUTERS. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-headscarf-formin-idUSL0218889420080202>

off her headscarf during the exam. The final saying of ECtHR did not make happy religious part of the society whereas Turkish seculars were happy to hear that the ban on headscarves was not against the freedoms and this led to polarization within the society and the ideas on Europe (Fisher Onar & Müftüler-Baç, 2011). Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, at the time, responded against the fears of seculars in terms of future restrictions to women who do not use headscarf “We are calm. Everyone is doing their duty, and nobody should be disturbed by this. Here I see headscarved women as well as uncovered women. This is Türkiye which we desire to see.”³ Turkish state took one step further for women with headscarves to provide a free space for everyone. The main concern reflected the idea of whether Türkiye becomes restrictive specifically regarding women’s status in public as it grew into “freer” in political standards by enabling a conservative majority and lessening authoritarian secularism (Fisher Onar & Müftüler-Baç, 2011). Even though this change seems to be positive, the actions taken to change the direction were instrumentalization steps.

While it is possible to discuss the Europeanization of gender equality policy at the beginning of the 2000s, there seem to be problems in this area that are mentioned in the Country Progress Reports of the EU. In 2001, the issue of gender equality was discussed under the Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights section: while the country was appraised for its progress in terms of some amendments of articles in the Constitution, the serious problem of ‘honor killings and violence against women within the family was pointed out (Commission of the European Communities, 2001). Similar to the previous year's report, the country’s improvement was not denied, however, the issues related to women’s employment in certain sectors and the ongoing honor killings problem was mentioned as part of the concerns (Commission of the European Communities, 2002). Furthermore, progress in Labor law was mentioned, and the abolishment of reduced sentences for honor killings was canceled, however, the violence against women, and low representation of women in elected bodies and government persisted (Commission of the European Communities, 2003). Including the above-mentioned improvements (amendments and

³ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Türkiye’s Former Prime Minister. 2008. “Turkey must lift headscarf ban for EU: formin”. REUTERS. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-headscarf-formin-idUSL0218889420080202>

legislative reforms), increased awareness related to violence against women, and women's empowerment were touched upon as well with the help of NGOs, and state institutions. On the other side, the Directorate General for the Status and Problems of Women awaited to be established (Commission of the European Communities, 2004). Later, in November 2004, the Law creating the Directorate General for the Status and Problems of Women was ratified but still major problems previously mentioned endured (European Commission, 2005). While a year previous Country Progress Report mentioned the problem of not introducing the law on the Directorate General for the Status and Problems of Women, the following report confirmed the ratification of the law. The EU reports and recommendations seem to be influential on the state decision. Even though the legal framework was considered adequate, the implications have had still problems: Continuation of honor killings, lack of data on domestic violence and suicides related to family pressures, not registering girls at birth, shortage of shelters, lack of staff in Directorate General for the Status and Problems of Women, low literacy rate, and low level of participation in decision-making mechanisms (Commission of the European Communities, 2006). Regardless of continuing problems, improvements were visible as well: an increase in the number of staff in the Directorate General for the Status and Problems and a broadening of awareness in terms of participation in decision-making mechanisms and violence against women (Commission of the European Communities, 2007). With the Prime Ministerial circular coordination among public institutions strengthened in terms of fighting honor killings and institutions and led to several new implications such as gender sensitivity training programmes to create awareness among the public as well, however, gender equality still occurred to be a major challenge with the problems mentioned before, specifically a Gender Equality Body and a Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality still awaited to be created. (Commission of the European Communities, 2008). A consultative parliamentary Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women was created in 2009 to monitor gender equality improvements and provide ideas on draft laws. However, the persistent problems still awaited to be solved (Commission of the European Communities, 2009). Apart from the negativities, introductions such as a Prime Ministerial circular to advocate women's employment and equal opportunities, and a tripartite protocol by the Social Services and Child Protection Agency, the Directorate-General for Women's Status, and the Turkish national police

were positive developments in terms of gender equality (European Commission, 2010). Nearly 10 years of reporting proves that Türkiye tried to adopt EU norms and rules related to gender equality in addition to others. Nonetheless, the success of the country is debatable as the problems continue to exist today. Europeanization of gender equality is not deniable, but the level of it and the reasons behind its success or failure are open to discussion.

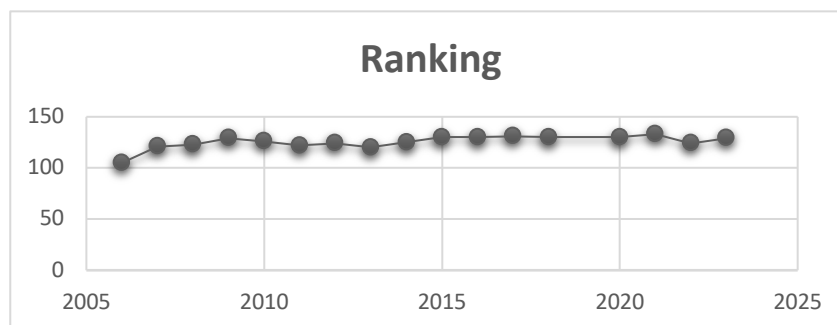
Looking at the four dimensions of the policy structure, before the accession period, the objectives of the gender equality policy of the Turkish state were not clearly defined. The principles of policy were mostly aimed at equality between men and women rather than the use of ‘gender equality’. It had a hierarchical way of doing and it was supported by national financial instruments. However, after 1999, it is visible that the Turkish state changed its way of seeing in terms of policy. This is visible in terms of change in certain reports and policies such as the Five-Year Development Plans of Türkiye or National Action Plans. The principles turned into gender equality, objectives occurred to be well defined (compared to previous), and European and National financial instruments were put in place. Remembering Graziano’s (2011) classification, it might be arguable that there has been a policy adjustment in gender equality policy in Türkiye which is more aligned with the EU principles and norms. Here the EU’s influence on policy change cannot be denied.

As a last major development in terms of gender equality policy developments, Türkiye signed in 2011 and ratified in 2012 Istanbul Convention (Action against violence against women and domestic violence) and it entered into force in 2014 (CoE, 2023). After the ratification of the Convention, the country replaced its old Law No.4320 with Law No.6284 in 2012 where the scope of the law has broadened, and it supported this with by-laws and national action plans (GREVIO, 2018). Nevertheless, the withdrawal of the country from the Convention is more aligned with (de)-Europeanization process of gender equality policies, as a result of this.

5 (De)-Europeanization Phase of Gender Equality Policy in Türkiye

Being an EU candidate country led to noteworthy development in Türkiye and endeavoring to be an EU member state encouraged the candidate country to emphasize EU norms and rules. As the EU defines itself as a normative power and one of the norms is gender equality, the Turkish state had to play the game with EU rules. Nearly the first 10 years of the AKP had relatively followed EU norms and rules and Türkiye had major positive changes, however, AKP's position has changed over time toward a faraway direction from the EU. The ruling party's conservative and religious position became stronger and stronger day by day and the gender equality policy had to face a sharp decline. Reforms on gender equality were only symbolic to prove to the international community that a religion-based political party was a supporter of human rights and that universal values were advocated (Arat, 2021). Feminists, women's and LBTQI+ organizations are fighting to resist change and improve the conditions in the country, but the space of maneuver is not adequate as the state is determined to keep its eyes blind. Why have gender equality policies gone under change? There might be several reasons behind this change: AKP's desire to please more conservative groups, the EU's soft law approach rather than hard law, and religion as a justification for AKP. The governing party has fluctuated between the obligation to stand by the norms imposed by the EU and the devotion to symbolize 'common' values from AKP's outset (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017). In this part, the evolution of gender equality policies and the position of AKP until the current day will be analyzed to understand the reasons and process of the shift in (de)-Europeanization period.

Figure 5. 1. *Ranking of Türkiye in the Global Gender Gap Reports between (2006-2023)*



Source. Global Gender Gap Reports. The World Economic Forum (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). <https://www.weforum.org/reports>

Türkiye’s ranking in Global Gender Gap Reports has been stable in the range of 120-130 in recent years as can be seen in the table above. While the expectations would be improvement toward this issue, the country dropped its ranking since the first report was published in 2006 where the ranking was showing 105. The gender equality policy change might be the key explanation for the drop in the ranking. The institutional and financial incapability of the state or late intake of legal steps at the public stage is not abundant to explain the weak record of Türkiye as the flow of EU grants, a compelling number of projects and programmes continue to increase awareness and broaden the perspective of gender equality implementation, major backing from civil society organizations, women’s NGOs, feminists, and universities to the ministries, for influential implementation of legal regulations the government has the absolute majority in parliament but the prevention of implementation of these are resulting from the adaptation of a conservative gender climate with a forthright address to religion, custom, and tradition which is incompatible with international agreements such as CEDAW and Istanbul Convention (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017).

Table 5. 1. *Gender Equality Policy Change in Türkiye during (de)-Europeanization Period*

	Before EU Engagement	Europeanization Period	(De)-Europeanization Period
Objectives	Poorly defined (no quantified goals)	Well-defined (quantified goals)	Somehow well defined
Principles	Equality between men and women	Gender Equality	Gender Justice/Equity
Procedures	Hierarchical	Hierarchical	Hierarchical
Financial Instruments	National	European and National	European and National

Aybars et al. (2019) separate Türkiye’s gender equality policy’s transition into three parts between the years 1999-2015: ‘gender equality’ (1999-2007): peak of

Europeanization, women as ‘mothers’ women as ‘mothers’: weakening commitment to the EU (2007-2011), ‘gender justice’: Europeanization without substance (2011-2015). Furthermore, the second section (2007-2011) is characterized by AKP securing its place by increasing its votes by its second term, however, it does not mean that Europeanization has stopped but the family values have taken the place of gender equality and framed women’s role as mothers. From 2011-2015, the Turkish government concentrated on raising female employment by adopting quantitative measures lined up with the European Employment Strategy but simultaneously applying incentives that discouraged women from joining the public sphere. Additionally, Türkiye's endeavors for EU membership substantially decreased, resulting in a shift in governmental discourse that again and again challenged EU norms, including social policies and gender equality (Aybars et al., 2019).

The AKP’s conservative vision of women’s role as mothers, also mentioned by Aybars et al. (2019) above, is supported by interviewees:

“The ideal woman is considered to be one who stays at home and serves her husband and children. Preferably, she wears a headscarf, follows Islamic rules, and does not work. Even if she does work, it should be in line with Islamic principles, and she should obey her husband's wishes, listen to his words, and give birth to children. There are statements from above that suggest a woman who is not a mother is considered less acceptable. This is because the primary duty of a woman is seen as giving birth, taking care of children, serving her husband, and managing household chores – it's a very traditional role. Instead of being an independent individual in society, a woman is often seen as a means to serve the patriarchal system – fulfilling a mediator role that supports the traditional gender norms. (Interviewee 7)”

“... the AKP's and Erdoğan's expectations and thoughts regarding women revolve around a traditional female figure who does not engage in opposition, remains silent, and fulfills traditional female roles, such as taking care of children, getting married, and managing household affairs. This figure is seen as delicate, dependent, and submissive. If necessary, she is expected to endure violence. This profile often includes being

conservative, modest, and wearing traditional clothing. If not needed, women are discouraged from going out in public... (Interviewee 1)”

“In Türkiye, under the AKP government, women are seen as belonging to the family, associated with the family, with their sole duty being to bear children, and even then, they are expected to bear a certain number of children. They are considered unequal to men in every way, and their work is often seen as intrusive. Even when they work, they do not work on equal terms with men, and they do not receive equal pay. They are viewed as the subordinate gender, as individuals who serve men within the household and are considered weak. Women's rights to their own freedom, their own bodies, and their own existence are not recognized or accepted in any way... (Interviewee 8)”

Aligning with Aybars et al. (2019), Bodur Ün and Arıkan (2022) identify Europeanization and (de)-Europeanization periods at approximately the same time slots: the most obvious time of Europeanization is determined as 1999-2011, and the start of (de)-Europeanization remarked with electoral victory in 2011. Most significantly one early shock out of others resulted from Prime Minister’s speeches in July 2010 where he declared that he does not believe in equality between males and females (Kandiyoti, 2016). His exact words were “I do not believe in gender equality anyway. That's why I prefer to call it equal opportunity. Women and men are different, they are complementary to each other.” (Sol Tv, 2010). He believes that women's core and chosen role is homemaking and motherhood that align with their biological and divinely ordained nature (fitrat) (Kandiyoti, 2016). His own political base, centered on political Islam, has shifted towards Eastern Islamic-led states in terms of both foreign policy and economics (Interviewee 2). Additionally, he promotes traditions and customs that attribute a certain sanctity to women, making it a dominant religion-centered policy (Interviewee 6). The state-led ideology of egalitarianism is changed to state assistance and security of motherhood by the AKP government that conforms with conservatism and neo-liberal policies adopted and it helps to mitigate its conservative electorate (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017). Nevertheless, following the literature, this thesis also begins to explain (de)-Europeanization period starting from 2011.

The AKP might have prioritized a liberal or conservative agenda over a religious one, meanwhile, the religiously conservative segment of their constituency has boosted its confidence in promoting and invoking discriminatory conservative values, principally affecting women (Arat, 2010). As there is an existing divergence in women's status in the legal content and the labor market, the dual essence of the relationship between gender and the welfare state in Türkiye can be called a *veiled Europeanization*, as claimed by Dedeoğlu (2013), of the welfare state, Europeanization has not been successful that much to change women's role as mothers and wives in the public. Moreover, the conservative approach of the AKP government to women and its concentration on the three-children demand, and the restrictions implied on abortion during the veiling of the advancement of the EU accession procedure boosted the role of women as homemakers in the private sphere and the lack of active policy measures only lets a small group of females enjoy the legislative reforms due to a powerful class-based character of gendered welfare regime (Dedeoğlu, 2013). AKP begins visibly pushing women into the private sphere whereas the EU promotes women's active involvement in the public sphere where they are vigorously engaged in every occupational sector. For instance, in a panel for World Women's Day, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan demanded at least three children from each family and justified the idea with the necessity for increasing the population to have a better economic situation (Hürriyet, 2008). A decorative approach to gender issues has been pursued by the AKP: Legal and citizenship rights of women take a satisfying place, however, real states of women in public stay unaffected due to the lack of affirmative policies for transforming women's position as secondary citizens in public (Dedeoğlu, 2013). With negative discourses against gender equality, Prime Minister actually has started to show the other side of the coin in the latest years of the Europeanization period.

AKP created a polarization among women based on religious values and traditional norms. The shift toward a more religio-conservative atmosphere rather than an egalitarian one has been happening since 2007 based on quotations from religion and tradition (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017). Precisely women's attitudes and correctness and gender norms are at the center of laying out the edges between 'us' (God-fearing, Sunni, AKP supporters), and a 'them' picked as possibly treasonous and immoral and

including every political critic and minority (Kandiyoti, 2016). Not following the ideal type of being a woman leads to ostracization and it ends with a witch hunt in the eyes of AKP leaders and their supporters. Within Islamist rhetoric, a clear division appears between two: the "veiled, modest, chaste, virtuous, obedient sisters and mothers" and the "sexually assertive, unchaste, rebellious" individuals who are criticized for openly laughing in public by a top governmental official, with feminists positioned as the epitome of this latter group, were seen as morally corrupt because of their stand to policies promoting early marriage, thereby being accused of supporting adultery and putting the institution of family in danger (Özkazanç, 2020). After AKP secured its political dominance with its electoral victory in 2011, populist authoritarian discourses were adopted, the power of the military and judiciary were diminishing, the secularist-Islamist division was expanding, and more religious and conservative values were echoed in its anti-gender, pro-family discourses and policies were bolstering (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022). Furthermore, the debate over women's bodies being the battleground for reconciling "European" and "Islamic" ways of political modernity sooner or later attracts the conflict between a woman's religious obligation to veil and another woman's right to unveil, prevailing tensions between pro-secular and pro-religious parties, which reached a top in February 2008 when the AKP attempted to pass a constitutional amendment allowing university students to wear headscarves, resulting in a Constitutional Court case filed against the party in April 2008 for allegedly undermining the secular nature of the state, and although the Court ruled against closing the party in August 2008, polarization continues to remain (Fisher Onar & Müftüler-Baç, 2011). When the ban on headscarves was lifted by Erdoğan in 2013, it was seen as a positive step towards freedom and democracy, but it ultimately failed to improve the overall freedom of all individuals as Erdoğan used it as part of his broader agenda to establish an executive presidency and promote Islamic dominance in various aspects of society, resulting in increased discrimination against women who prefer not to wear headscarves and its significant example is a female TV show host was criticized for having a revealing blouse on air and she was dismissed right after (Tol, 2022). Abolishment of the ban on headscarves did not lead to the spread of AKP's religious and conservative values but the impact of Islamic communities in the educational and administrative ranks determines the traditional patriarchal society (Arat, 2010).

One of the setbacks for gender equality was the replacement of the Ministry of State for Women and Family with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011 and later on, it was reorganized as the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services in 2018 (Arat, 2021). The backlash started with the transformation and the removal of the word “women”, then, the gained rights, which were related to the constitution, the penal code, and different aspects of the Turkish civil code, had been a defense area that women's movements had been accumulating for years at the domestic level (Interviewee 10). The establishment of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011 sparked strong debate within feminist groups as they advocated to include terms like 'women' or 'equality' in the ministry's name, but the government accepted none of them, the naming choice itself signifies the incorporation of family dynamics into the realm of gender politics at a top governmental level. The Ministry's said objective is to promote a prosperous society constructed of happy individuals and strong families while attributing intra-family conflicts to adverse effects of modern life such as poverty, cultural shifts, migration, lack of communication, and alcoholism (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017). KSGM was also integrated into the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011 (Fougner & Kurto, 2015). The reorganization of the General Directorate for the Status and Problems of Women (KSSGM) under the Ministry resulted in a diminished role and ability to make an impact on public policies, as it was merged with units focusing on women, family, the elderly, and the disabled. This convergence of disparate units under a single administrative umbrella has given rise to conflicting principles regarding gender equality and has hindered the formation of a coherent agenda (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017). AKP did not wait a minute to eliminate women and gender from the public eye by canceling them from the name of the Ministry.

In 2013 AKP initiated KADEM (Women and Democracy Association, GONGO) in order to advocate its family-centered gender policies at the civil society level in a better way, thus KADEM turned into a major player in women's rights activism field in a short period of time meanwhile several women's rights NGOs were marginalized (Kütük-Kuriş, 2022). With this GONGO, the government tried to establish its ideology through fragmented readings where there are incorrect and incomplete cultural elements (Interviewee 3). To give examples of the increasing role of KADEM, it was the host

organizer of the Women20 Summit in 2015, part of NGOs that wrote a Shadow Report in 2016 on the implementation of CEDAW, and worked at the Istanbul Convention workshop in 2015 closely with the government (Ayhan, 2019) and in a short period of time, it spread around the Türkiye with forty-five branches (currently it has fifty-two, (KADEM, 2023)) and with the idea of gender justice (equity) as a supplement, if it is not a total substitute, for the idea of gender equality (Kütük-Kuriş, 2022). According to Aydın Yılmaz (2015):

“Gender justice is a concept that is appealing to certain circles of women’s movements all around the world due to the fact that equality, set forth by modernity, is not concerned with particular differences among women. As a modern concept, equality provides standard monotypes [for women] grounded in Western culture by attempting to equalize women and men, whereas “justice” points to a superior concept in which equality is inherent and refers to equity, balance, a higher understanding of fair treatment, and liabilities between men and women.” (p.108)

Like KADEM, AKP also emphasizes the idea of gender justice and promotes it. KADEM is one element to create an ideology for themselves with incorrect and incomplete cultural elements (Interviewee 3). Present-day, it almost dictates both the government's women's policies and gender equality policies in Türkiye, and according to the latest information, it has also begun to form a significant hegemonic relationship with universities (Interviewee 4). The ideology sustains the religious base by acknowledging God's creation and justice, meanwhile conforming to the traditional gender-based distribution of tasks within the family and society (Çelebi, 2022). The supporters of this idea failed to highlight the patriarchal consequences of this arrangement, where individuals with lower economic power would become reliant on and submissive to those with greater economic power (Arat, 2021). However, the Islamist conservatives condemned KADEM brutally because of its some kind of promotion of a gender equality agenda which is seen as a Western concept that is presumed inconsistent with Islam. Muslim conservatives became successful in certain areas as the AKP faced losing its conservative support: jeopardizing some gender equality gains in schools and universities such as the Ministry of Education and the Council of Higher Education annulled gender equality programmes, gender equality was not included in the 2020 national budget and

AKP did not give any funding, withdrawal from Istanbul Convention (Kütük-Kuriş, 2022).

Türkiye's nearly 85% of the people who have knowledge about the Istanbul Convention were not backing a possible withdrawal from the Convention in September 2020 and even some of the people who are part of the governing party were defending it while the discussion against it was started among far-Right (Altan-Olcay & Emrah Oder, 2021). The major saying of the opponents is shaped by the (purposeful) misreading of the articles of the Convention which their claim is that there is a promotion of 'third gender' and 'same-sex marriage' and traditional family values would be eroded conclusively (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022). While the discussions around the convention were continuing, the negative quotations toward the EU were a sign of the sliding of the political/normative role of the EU/Europe in Türkiye (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022). The country withdrew from the Istanbul Convention on 20 March 2021 by a presential decision that was published in the Official Gazette, even though it was an abrupt declaration, it was not totally unexpected as most of the right-wing populist governments have been key to the repercussion against women's rights (Altan-Olcay & Emrah Oder, 2021). Before this decision, the Convention was contested among conservative state officials and the public. Even Erdoğan's daughter and her organization, KADEM, were criticized by a few pro-government Islamist writers due to their somewhat commitment to a gender equality framework and for carrying EU-funded projects (Özkazanç, 2020). At the end of the 2010s, AKP members started to litigate against the amendments of the Penal Code and Istanbul Convention (Arat, 2021). In reality, the AKP government was neither substantively interested in the amendment of the constitution's gender equality clause nor in the prevention of violence against women (Arat, 2021). Resistance against the Convention was described as a response to top-down policy measures connected to globalization and Europeanization by a few right-wing commentators and their claim was based on a democratic deficit argument as there is a lack of popular support for pro-women policies in Türkiye and as any activity to popularize gender equality is a consequence of international promises, efforts of "submissive governments" and the "bureaucratic elite", thus, the resistance is formed as an issue of citizens voicing their concerns demanding participation in public policy making (Altan-Olcay & Emrah Oder

2021). However, this is an unrealistic explanation as there was visible support during the approval of the Convention.

President Erdoğan utilizes the discourse on the EU as a normatively inferior ‘intruder’ to enact Türkiye’s moral superiority based on an argument of being a member of a culture and religion that forbid violence against women and he claimed that there is no need for the Convention and if there would be a necessity, the country as a normative actor is powerful and capable for formulating a better (‘fairer, better, and stronger’) version and it could be named as the Ankara Convention (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022). The rivalry against the EU from the governing party side is non-negligible. Intensification of quotations based on “our culture” and “our traditions” has accompanied the decision of withdrawal which are general arguments of far-Right opponents of gender equality and women’s rights in every place, thus, the resistance is transnational rather than “unique” to cultures such as the legitimization of Turkish government was coming from actions of other countries like Poland’s ultra-conservative groups to secure ‘traditional’ values against LGBTQI+ rights and the skepticism of the governments of Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic to ratify the Convention (Altan-Olcay & Emrah Oder, 2021). When it comes to the soft law approach of the EU here, some claim that this is an internal problem for the European Union because right now, in Poland, Slovenia, Hungary, and even Italy EU is aware that women's rights are regressing in the European Union (Interviewee 3). Thus, the hesitation of EU countries became an excuse for the Turkish government party to refuse comments such as Türkiye’s alienation from the EU values (Interviewee 6).

The Progress Reports by the EU starting from 2011 are a clear example of how Türkiye’s gender equality policies have been going in the opposite direction. In comparison to the Europeanization period, we see mostly negative developments in the area, it becomes more contrary to gender equality. In 2011, Women's rights, gender equality, and combating violence against women were still major challenges, while the legal framework existed, its implementation needed improvement and problems like honor killings, forced marriages, and domestic violence persisted (European Commission, 2011). Though problems remained as they were, legislation on women's

rights and gender equality has improved, particularly with the Law on the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women, including positive steps such as urgent case procedures and civil society consultations, although some NGOs expressed their concerns about last-minute amendments (European Commission, 2012). Throughout all the years, the main problems continued to persist, and the states' behavior of not doing anything for the development of gender equality and even negative actions by the state created room for backsliding. Hate against LGBTQI+ is increasing day by day, even, the Minister of Interior targeted the EU and the US for providing funds for LGBTQI+ NGOs (European Commission, 2021). Not only actions of the state are not aligning with the EU, but also there are visible discourses against the EU.

During the campaign for the last elections, President Erdoğan aligned himself with more religious and conservative groups and to please those groups, decided to go in a direction that would diminish the power of gender equality policies. AKP's political coalition of the 2023 elections with YRP (New Welfare Party) and HÜDA-PAR (Free Cause Party) which are two Islamist fundamentalist parties, representing an Islamist fundamentalist political standpoint with a goal of prevailing the role of Islam in Turkish politics and reinforcing the Islamic framework of the national identity, to broaden its voter base against the solid opposition bloc and this might be taken as a hint for the possible strengthening of the gender backsliding (Unal, 2023). Furthermore, gender issues being central to this coalition with using polarizing language during the last election campaign, YRP and HÜDA-PAR put pressure on AKP to emphasize a stronger attitude against "gender ideology" to join the coalition and their demands are: the abolishment of Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Combating Domestic Violence and women's right to alimony, the closure of LGBTQI+ associations, and the establishment of an Islamist education system and apart from a few female AKP actors, senior male officials have signaled that those demands could be applied and there is no conflict among parties' features (Unal, 2023). Participants also highlighted the relation between AKP's pleasing of conservative groups with its party choices to create a coalition, however, this puts in danger:

“Their view of women, how they define women, especially in recent times, is reflected in the practices of their alliance partners, the Felicity Party and HÜDA-PAR, and especially in the recent constitutional debates. They are trying to redefine women's role in society starting from the most regressive standpoint, and they are doing this through HÜDA-PAR and the Felicity Party, particularly through the headscarf debate. In general, their evaluation of women is in line with how the Taliban views women, as openly stated by Felicity Party and HÜDA-PAR, among others (Interviewee 8).”

“In the recent elections, Erdoğan, who incorporated the political extension of the Hizbullah terrorist organization, HÜDA PAR, into his ranks, is using HÜDA PAR as a puppet to achieve his goals. In their election manifesto, HÜDA PAR criticized the parliamentary system, waged war against mixed-gender education, targeted indefinite alimony, aimed to limit women's presence in the workforce, and conducted a black propaganda campaign to change Law No. 6284. Erdoğan, on numerous occasions, disregards women's acquired rights, revealing his stance on gender equality. Erdoğan, who came to power promising "freedoms," has long abandoned the discourse of democracy. Erdoğan, who does not even feel the need to conceal his true intentions, is showing his real approach (Interviewee 9).”

In recent years, women and LGBTQI+ people are already facing an escalated danger in Türkiye: An increased number of femicide and gender-based violence, a comparison of abortions to murder in 2012 by Erdoğan, an attempt to introduce a law to ban abortions after six weeks of pregnancy (failed), struggles to access safe terminations, a “de facto abortion ban”, rising police violence during Women’s Day marches, ban of the Istanbul Pride parade since 2015, increasingly sidelining of feminist and women’s rights groups, and closing of a myriad of civil society organizations fighting against discrimination and gender-based violence since the 2016 military coup attempt (Letsch, 2023). Thus, after Erdoğan’s last victory and his alliance with conservative parties risked the already existing achievements of gender equality policy, this situation left most of the public, especially feminists and women’s NGOs, with fear for the future. AKP’s vital engagement with the anti-gender movement, policy backsliding, and suppression of gender equality have diverse versions which encompass a wide plan: Demolishment of

gender-sensitive policies (e.g., Istanbul Convention), detraction of policies still in force and formulating the place for their annulment (Law No. 6284, women's alimony rights), lobbying for new anti-equality policy frames (e.g. legalizing underage marriage), constitutional adjustments to bringing in constitutional barriers against same-sex marriage, strategies to establish gender segregated higher education institutions (e.g. women's universities) and family research centers to curb the area of gender studies, and assemble knowledge options to counterbalance "gender ideology" and repression of feminist and LGBTQI+ activism (Unal, 2023).

All those developments against gender equality put fear into the hearts of the public, unfortunately, the impact of the EU is not that much visible as it does not go beyond recommendations or comments by high officials at the EU institutions. On the one hand, even though the soft law approach seems to be impactful, the possibility of having more stringent requirements was found more desirable by some of the participants:

"The EU has legal sanctions over its member countries. The same responsibility continues during the negotiation process. Unfortunately, in contractual situations, there is no legal sanction or binding aspect. However, considering the attitude and behavior of our country during the negotiation process, binding agreements could certainly have produced positive results (Interviewee 9)."

On the other hand, some of the participants presented their concerns about the applicability of more stringent requirements due to legal concerns about how the EU can impose something on the Turkish state (Interviewee 7), the state's act of not being irresponsible (Interviewee 2), and risk on individuals living within the country when sanctions are applied could be much more severe such as LGBTQI+ community (Interviewee 7). It is arguable that the soft law approach helps the EU to endorse its norms and principles, but it is not enough to influence fully, the need for more stringent requirements is somehow clear with some issues to be considered.

Compared with the Europeanization period where the policy structure dimensions present the change that is aligning with the EU, (de)-Europeanization phase also presents

us policy adjustment process. Principles now focus on the idea of gender justice/gender equity rather than gender equality as emphasized by the EU. Further, objectives face the risk of being somehow defined. Thus, the Turkish state gender equality policy drifts apart from the EU gender equality policy. Even some of the participants claimed that the Turkish state currently does not have a gender equality policy:

“...After 2016, when the religious orders became more influential, everything fell apart. Türkiye does not really have a gender policy or a genuine concern for gender equality; there are women's rights in Türkiye, which is important because the concept of "gender" has gone too far in Europe. When I respond to this, I refer to the women's movement because there is no real concept of gender equality in their minds; it did not happen. Besides, homosexuality is one of our biggest fears in life... (Interviewee 3)”

“...The AKP does not have a gender equality policy. Because there is no belief in gender equality. There's no ownership of the policy... (Interviewee 7)”

Femocrats, women's NGOs, feminists, and LGBTQI+ activists are not giving up on securing the already existing rights and policies and they are trying to get some improvement even though there are existing preventions and provocations of the governing party and its supporters such as the GONGOs (Government Organized Non-Governmental Organizations) to hamper efforts of gender equality supporters.

6 Conclusion

After carefully considering the developments that led to gender equality policy change in Türkiye, it can be claimed that there is a change depending on the periods of the governing party. The first 10 years, before and after 2011, (Aybars et al., 2019; Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022) prove that the EU was influential in the Turkish state where policy adjustment happened, resulting in more alignment with the EU. However, the policy adjustment has not stopped there, after 2011, it turned into a reverse shape. Some of the diverse motives are mentioned to provide a better understanding. Studying the topic from the Europeanization framework gave this study an eye-opening opportunity to analyze the gender equality policy change. The policy structure approach assisted in terms of presenting this change analytically. Where the EU gender equality mostly sustained its objectives, principles, procedures, and financial instruments, the Turkish gender equality policy changed over these two periods: In the first period, objectives, principles, and financial instruments faced a change and in the second period, objectives and principles have gone under a change.

The EU membership goal was one of the main drivers behind the support that AKP received when it came to power. The period was shaped by the enthusiasm to become an EU member state, thus, AKP had to act according to the needs and desires of the people. The changes were merely moves made to align with the political conditions of that time. For instance, if we talk about the early 2000s during the EU accession process, laws, and constitutional articles were amended, or if we look further ahead into the 2010s, the implementation of legislation such as the Istanbul Convention and Law No. 6284, however, the foundation and awareness of these changes were lacking (Interviewee 2). Not only the gender equality field, but almost every area had gone under the reform processes. For the purposes of the thesis, only gender equality policies are analyzed to see how gender equality policy change occurred in Türkiye. There were no clear gender equality policies before the AKP government as well. In fact, in the parliament, the KEFEK is a commission that was established after the AKP government. After the AKP government, gender equality studies became more evident, but these progressed within the framework of the AKP government's own political discourse rather than the revolutionary process of gender equality that is seen in Europe or at work in

America, a slightly more conservative, somewhat more traditional perspective on gender equality has become available (Interviewee 6). The first period is the time when major policy changes happened such as Constitutional amendments since 2001, enactment of the new Civil Code (2001); the new Labour Law (2003); and the new Penal Code (2005). Even though the Istanbul Convention was not signed in the first period, it can be considered the last positive act by the current government as mentioned previously. The state's willingness is not the only reason for this, but the pressure from the women's movement and the impact of the EU. The Women's Ministry was established years ago due to the legal regulations required by the European Union adaptation process and during the Women's Ministry period, gender equality practices, gender-related education, and gender-related information became implemented in government and state institutions (Interviewee 8). At one point, under the period of EU impact, there was a usual period between 2002-2007 and 2011-2013 when LGBTQI+ organizations could be established such as Kaos GL in Istanbul and the Pink Triangle in Izmir and these people could genuinely hold pride marches (Interview 3).

In terms of the soft law approach of the EU towards shaping gender equality policy, both positive and negative factors can be mentioned. During the Europeanization period, the approach was considerably influential. Here most important element is the EU membership as a carrot, it has a strong effect on the Turkish state. However, it is important again to look at the soft law approach from different periods of time because the state's willingness or goals might change, and this might influence the level of the impact of the soft law as mentioned:

“Until 2016, the Turkish government took quite seriously, or at least converted them into internal directives or regulations within ministries, some documents. However, since 2016, when polarization turned into a foreign policy, unfortunately, these are not given much attention anymore. For instance, there were the Yogyakarta Principles regarding LGBTQI+ rights, formulated in Indonesia and signed by a coalition that came together with significant support from the United Nations and the European Union. Since 2016, there has been a significant reluctance in Türkiye to accept such documents or even to establish a framework. These are almost disregarded now. Moreover, I would like to add

that the current political profile of the European Union, especially following Poland and Hungary, has actually emboldened Türkiye to a great extent. We can see that the AKP government, especially with Erdoğan at the helm, has adopted different policies and used similar rhetoric when faced with these two examples. Therefore, before and after 2016, there are two different perspectives, and these documents are no longer taken very seriously. (Interviewee 6).”

On the one hand, to spread gender equality norms and principles of the EU, the EU funds have a key role, this also counts for the case of Türkiye. The fact that the EU provides funding for gender equality area, especially to civil society, reflects an approach where civil society organizations, as donors, can support institutions that uphold their own values, when civil society organizations engage with the EU as a funder, and when the European Union structures itself in a way that preserves and upholds its own conditions and values, it leads to the spread of this approach in the areas where civil society organizes itself (Interviewee 8). The EU's funding support opens the way for important initiatives to address the issue of the lack of budget in terms of conducting research, surveys, and on-the-ground observations (Interviewee 9). Women's associations or LGBTQI+ organizations, due to not receiving any support from the government, are forced to rely on external funds, the EU supports them in a certain way, and their standards and priorities are set hence, the EU's gender equality policy spreads in this manner and, through funding, certain projects that genuinely advance gender equality can be carried out by civil society in Türkiye (Interviewee 7). These developments are positive because the funds provided by the EU and by member states of the EU enable civil society to achieve things that civil society would otherwise not be able to attain, financially operating in Türkiye can be very challenging, but beyond the financial aspect, having these funds provided, for example, by a French, Dutch, or German Consulate is also an implicit sign of political support, therefore, one of the major reasons why civil society have brought gender equality to this point today and have accumulated such a wealth of knowledge is, in fact, the funds received from the European Union (Interviewee 6). The funds keep a significant place for women's and LGBTQI+ organizations in Türkiye, and this is also beneficial for the EU to disseminate its norms and principles.

On the other hand, there are some problems related to both the soft law approach and EU funds. Some of the problems arose during the (de)-Europeanization period. Firstly, the problems related to the soft law approach result from turning the government's face away from the EU and aligning with more conservative countries and not considering EU guidelines and recommendations (Interviewee 8), gender inequality problems occurring in the member states such as Hungary and Poland (Interviewee 3) and being not legally binding (Interviewee 7). Secondly, the issues related to EU funds can be claimed, as individuals living in Turkey are criminalized for organizing in any civil society organization (Interviewee 8), face strict requirements and steps to access EU funds (Interviewee 10), and are limited in their real resonance within Turkish society (Interviewee 5). Thus, the solution might be the adaptation of more stringent rules by the EU, it might be more impactful in terms of influencing governments. The EU has legal sanctions over its member countries and the same responsibility continues during the negotiation process, unfortunately, in contractual situations, there is no legal sanction or binding aspect. However, considering the attitude and behavior of the country during the negotiation process, binding agreements could certainly have produced positive results (Interviewee 9). Poland can serve as an example in this context, groups opposing gender equality tried to find a space for themselves by targeting LGBTQI+ individuals, their efforts to create LGBTQI+ free zones within Poland were strongly opposed by the European Union, which threatened to cut off funding to Poland and upon hearing that funding could be cut off, the Polish government initially backed away from implementing this policy (Interviewee 8). However, there are also still problems with the implication of stringent requirements:

“...Whether the EU introduces strict policies on gender equality today or not, it will not matter much because there are no sanctions they can impose in response to this strictness, and we are in a state where we cannot even comply with less strict policies. So, when these conditions become stricter, I do not think there will be any positive or negative outcomes. I only think that Türkiye might move further away from this possibility and bring about some change, but I do not think these strict policies will have much impact (Interviewee 2).”

“Even the existing Turkish national legislation often lacks enforceability or effective implementation, let alone being influenced by any binding legal framework imposed by an external entity like the EU. Frankly, I do not believe that the EU, or any other external organization for that matter, can establish any binding legal authority over Türkiye. I do not think such a binding measure would be viable in any EU member state either. As for the EU accession process, I cannot predict what would happen post-accession, but there would likely be consequences. However, what kind of sanctions could the EU impose? They cannot force us to do anything. They might express their disapproval, but it will not change if we are unwilling to comply. Therefore, I do not believe that the EU's binding legal framework would have a significant impact, even if we were to join (Interviewee 7).”

The second part is time considered as (de)-Europeanization period (Aybars et al., 2019; Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022), the time when the policy change started to turn against EU norms and rules. While the early years of the AKP government witnessed positive developments in women's rights that garnered support from liberal segments, civil society consistently raised concerns about these changes, including constitutional amendments, warning of potential unforeseen consequences and their potential to undermine women's rights, and as time passed, it became increasingly clear how these alterations were affecting women and girls at the local level in fundamental ways (Interviewee 10). Indeed, one could contend that regression has occurred, particularly within the last decade, despite legislative advancements safeguarding anti-discrimination and equality, such as labor law reforms, which are universally endorsed by feminist organizations; regrettably, however, a notable lack of positive strides in their enforcement exists, particularly in the sphere of combatting violence against women and the decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention as a component of the battle against these issues, thus placing the only remaining safeguard, Law No. 6284, in jeopardy due to ongoing preparations for new legislation with uncertain content and a conspicuous absence of input from subject matter experts, shifting the burden of responsibility primarily onto legal professionals, given the prevailing inclination of society to adhere to traditional gender roles; the prevailing lack of widespread societal awareness concerning gender equality consequently constrains advancements, leading to the conclusion that substantive progress remains notably

limited (Interviewee 7). Currently, the situation is characterized by the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, the targeting of LGBTQI+ individuals, and a persistent onslaught on women's rights, with daily occurrences of such attacks (Interviewee 10). Comparing the first period, this period might be defined as 'reverse gear' as well (Radaelli & Salter, 2019).

The multifaceted nature of this issue is undeniable. The traditional gender approach has been completely abandoned, with the very term itself removed from the discourse. The paramount focus has unquestionably shifted towards achieving gender equality. This transformation is attributed to the influential role played by religious orders, commonly referred to as tarikats. They possess a robust infrastructure that sustains them, and where the imperative of securing electoral support or, in some cases, safeguarding their survival transcends geographical boundaries. This results in a shrewd adaptation of policies, whether liberal or conservative, to align with the specific demands and requests arising from their respective cultural and religious foundations. Therefore, a detailed examination of this intricate dynamic is best suited for a more comprehensive exploration (Interviewee 10). Specifically, after 2016, a period marked by the increasing influence of religious orders in Türkiye, wherein the absence of a comprehensive gender policy or authentic commitment to gender equality becomes conspicuous, the discourse on women's rights assumes pivotal significance, especially in light of the perception that the European concept of "gender" has been taken to an extreme; consequently, this issue invariably invokes the women's movement as it underscores the absence of a substantive conception of gender equality, which remains largely unrealized, while concurrently highlighting the profound societal anxiety surrounding homosexuality as a prominent source of apprehension and concern (Interviewee 3). As mentioned before, the coalition choice of the government party and their thoughts regarding gender equality is aligned with the group opposing gender equality in the country is not actively working towards it but rather seems intent on steering the state away from democratic values, and in recent elections, Erdoğan has aligned with HÜDA PAR to advance his objectives, which include undermining gender equality and democratic principles, as evidenced by HÜDA PAR's manifesto criticizing the parliamentary system, opposing mixed-gender education, and seeking to curtail women's workforce participation, all while Erdoğan openly reveals his

true intentions without concealing his actual approach, despite his initial promises of "freedom" and democracy when he came to power (Interviewee 9). When AKP led this party to join its coalition, it also led their controversial ideas on gender equality to have a voice in the public arena. The only reason why they allowed them to join the coalition was not the idea that they share mutual principles and objectives but AKP's fear of losing the elections and being in need of voters' support. Thus, AKP aimed to satisfy conservative groups.

In the AKP government, even within their own ranks, women are primarily associated with a single role, which is motherhood (Interviewee 6). Thus, The AKP and Erdoğan promote a traditional, submissive female archetype conditioned on domesticity, discouraging women from public engagement, and suggesting that reducing their visibility could lower rates of violence against them (Interviewee 1). Behind AKP's ideal woman type, there are religious justifications. There is a pervasive belief system in which the country's governance is consistently oriented towards Islamic principles (Interviewee 5). Undoubtedly, a noticeable divergence exists between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's initial gestures of support for LGBTQI+ issues, such as sending flowers to KAOS GL's party during his candidacy, and his subsequent shift towards different priorities, particularly evident in his first post-election statement, a transformation largely attributed to the influence of his political base, the principles of political Islam, and his alignment with Eastern Islamic-led states in both foreign policy and economic realms, reflecting the evolving dynamics within his constituency (Interviewee 2). The use of religion as a justification is indeed a fact and the government's goal and acts to reach the goal of restricting women only into the private sphere and giving them only the role of a mother and a caretaker. However, the AKP government is not that much successful in this sense. AKP's politics and policies have inadvertently engendered a complex dynamic for women, positioning them within a framework that discourages interference, conformity, maternal responsibilities, marriage, loyalty, and submission, portraying them as fragile, vulnerable, and susceptible to violence when necessary, and promoting a conservative, modest, and veiled female archetype, thereby inadvertently both disempowering and empowering women (Interviewee 1). On the one hand, the pursuit of gender equality remains imperative, particularly for women's engagement in education and employment,

necessitating the effective implementation of government policies, as exemplified by the slight reduction in violence against women following the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and subsequent government directives stressing its importance to public institutions, highlighting the pivotal role comprehensive and rigorously implemented policies can play in addressing gender disparities; therefore, it is evident that the actions and inactions of the AKP have indeed contributed to the weakening of women's status and rights (Interviewee 2). On the other hand, the increased organization and resilience displayed by the women's movement in response to the policies of the AKP government can be attributed to a combination of factors, including improved access to education, the emergence of a structured oppositional female figure, and the heightened pressure exerted by a single central authority, all of which have collectively contributed to the strengthening of the women's movement in Türkiye (Interviewee 6). The women's movement in Türkiye is one of the few highly organized movements in the world (Interview 10), the gender equality policy of the government is not successful in the sense of decreasing the power of the movement, in contrast, women and LGBTQI+ people get more passionate about their fight to reach equal rights for everyone.

Which strategies or mechanisms can the EU employ to engage the AKP in constructive dialogue and collaboration regarding gender equality policy? Suggestions would be: What will actually bring change is the cultivation of a collaborative culture within the foreign ministry and active involvement of member states, such as Germany, France, Italy, and Spain, within the European Union Council, where key decisions regarding policies, including gender equality, are ultimately made, reflecting their diverse interests in their relationship with Türkiye (Interviewee 10), financial initiatives (Interviewee 7) and by recalling its democratic values and prioritizing them when engaging with Türkiye (Interviewee 8). Overall, not only the EU but member states also should have a role in the empowerment of gender equality, when they are in touch with the Turkish state, they can consider gender equality as part of their agreement and policy. This could make Türkiye more aligned with the gender equality policy of the EU and providing more financial resources with more stringent requirements related to gender equality could be another factor to reinforce norms as the current situation of the Turkish state is in need of financial aid. Lastly, the EU could more efficiently emphasize its values

and principles during the engagements with Türkiye on any topic such as the migrant issue.

When it comes to whether the gender equality policy change would have an influence over the future relationship between the EU and Türkiye, the gender equality policy change seems to be inefficient to have an impact. The potential for the European Union to exert substantial influence on Türkiye regarding gender equality as it resumes membership negotiations and strengthens ties is challenged by Hungary's example of endorsing anti-LGBTQI+ policies despite EU membership, and global issues like conflict threats, refugee concerns, and economic instability, which may limit the impact compared to a decade ago (Interviewee 8). Türkiye's role as a part of Europe and the close attention to European affairs by its populace creates a dynamic where advancements in gender equality within Türkiye can contribute to improved Türkiye-European Union relations; however, it is noteworthy that gender relations are not extensively debated within the European Union and Türkiye is increasingly positioning itself as a pivotal player in Türkiye-European Union relations, yet skepticism persists among those well-versed in European Union matters, owing to substantial gender equality issues observed within Europe, exemplified by situations in countries such as Italy (Interviewee 3). While Türkiye ratified the Istanbul Convention, several countries abstained from its initial signing, and despite Türkiye's withdrawal from the convention two years ago, the European Union has not enforced any sanctions, yet given the current government's stance, prospects for achieving the desired gender equality goals appear limited, constituting a potential adverse factor in EU-Türkiye relations, albeit within a broader context of multiple issues impacting these relations, including the presence of open chapters and unaddressed topics in Türkiye's accession process; thus, although improvements in gender equality could conceivably influence a specific chapter positively, the absence of evident desire or political will in this direction prevails (Interviewee 7). The divergent approaches to gender equality observed among certain EU member states have provided Türkiye with a basis for legitimizing its evolving attitude on this issue, thereby prompting an examination of the potential transformation in the gravity of gender inequality concerns as determinants of the future diplomatic engagement between the EU and the Turkish state. With the current situation in the world

such as the war in Ukraine, the priorities of global actors have changed, they are more focused on creating a stable and peaceful environment.

This research was only able to carry out a limited perspective of the topic, thus, there are many areas to discover. Further research can be carried out to discover the influence of gender equality policy change on the relationship between the state and the EU as gender inequality is still the problem of the current day and the EU claims to be the leading actor in reaching gender equality. Secondly, the problematic dimension pertaining to gender equality within EU member states and the EU's capacity to address and mitigate this issue represent salient fields warranting further scrutiny and analysis. Thirdly, the extent to which global problems influence the prioritization of gender equality within the EU constitutes a pertinent area for additional academic investigation.

In conclusion, this thesis focused on two periods, Europeanization and (de)-Europeanization, of Türkiye's gender equality policy change under the AKP government. While investigating the policy change, it studied also whether the AKP government aimed to please conservative groups and triggered (de)-Europeanization of gender equality policy, whether the soft law approach was influential on conservative government, and whether religion as a legitimization of women's role in society. Türkiye's gender equality policy might be changed in a negative direction and even though it might be considered as gone (as claimed by most of the participants), the fight of the women's movement and women's and LGBTQI+ civil society organizations continue.

7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1

Gender Equality - Türkiye Progress Report in Europeanization Period

Year	Developments	Challenges
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amendment of Article 41 (equality between spouses as a basis for the family) - Amendment of Article 66 (No discrimination on the basis of gender in the case of a foreign parent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic violence and honor killings - A new disciplinary regime for students in the health sector by The Minister of Health: students who are found to have had sexual intercourse or to have engaged in prostitution will be expelled from their school - Low literacy rate - Human trafficking - Not ratifying CEDAW
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amendment of new Civil Code (abolishment the concept of “head of family”, right to file for divorce if husbands commit adultery, equal sharing of assets that are earned during wedding, right to request alimony for men if the woman earns more, increased legal age (18) for both female and male, right to inheritance to out of wedlock born - Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women - Elimination of ban on female civil servants from wearing trousers in the work place the right of women to attend public religious services with that of men 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Violence against women: Case of Gündüz - The new Labor Law 2003: not guaranteeing the effective prohibition of discrimination in employment - Not accepted Article 8 of the European Social Charter on the right of employed women to protection of maternity - Limited implementation of the equal sharing of goods acquired during marriage - Low representation of women elected bodies and government - The internal code of the Parliament is still not in line with the provision lifting the ban on the wearing of trousers by female civil servants - Not accepted Article 15 of the European Social Charter on the rights of disabled people
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amendment of Penal Code, especially related to “honor killings” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Violence against women: Case of Gündüz - The new Labor Law 2003: not guaranteeing the effective

<p>2003</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annulment of Article 462 of the Penal Code, allowing reduced sentences for “honour killings” - Amendment of Article 453 of Penal Code: raising the sanctions for the “honour killings” of out-of-wedlock children - The new Labor Law 2003: the principle of equal treatment in employment - a ministerial position covering women’s issue for the first time within the Government - Ratification of CEDAW and its optional protocol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> prohibition of discrimination in employment - Not accepted Article 8 of the European Social Charter on the right of employed women to protection of maternity - Limited implementation of the equal sharing of goods acquired during marriage - Low representation of women elected bodies and government - The internal code of the Parliament is still not in line with the provision lifting the ban on the wearing of trousers by female civil servants - Not accepted Article 15 of the European Social Charter on the rights of disabled people
<p>2004</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Article 10 of the Constitution: men and women shall have equal rights and that the state has the duty to ensure that this equality is put into practice - The new Penal Code: life imprisonment for honor killings, Sexual assault within marriage can lead to legal investigation, increases in prison sentences for polygamy and non-registration of religious marriages, not allowing virginity tests without a court order - A circular by Prime Minister: ensuring gender equality when recruiting for the public services - Increased awareness of violence against women - Promotion the role of women within Islam and appointment of women as Muftis - A regulation to extend civil servants’ maternity leave to 16 weeks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited progress on the adoption of legislation aimed at guaranteeing the effective prohibition of discrimination in employment - Physical and psychological violence within the family - Limited scope and lack of implementation of the 1998 Law on the Protection of the Family - Insufficient provision of shelters and counselling - Lack of education and high illiteracy - Not accepted Article 8 of the European Social Charter on the right of employed women to the protection of maternity - the Directorate General for the Status and Problems of Women awaits to be established - Under representation of women in elected bodies and government

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The internal code of the Parliament is still not in line with the provision lifting the ban on the wearing of trousers by female civil servants
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A new Committee on Violence Against Women and Children - A Parliamentary Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality - The Law establishing the Directorate General for the Status and Problems of Women at the end of 2004 - A nationwide awareness campaign regarding violence against women with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) - The establishment of an Advisory Board on the Status of Women - A circular by The Minister of State for Women's Affairs to improving security for the residents of women's shelters by guaranteeing confidentiality - The 'Human Rights in Textbooks' project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic violence and "honor killings - A high illiteracy rate - Low participation in Parliament, local representative bodies and the labor market - Inadequate implementation of existing legal reforms - Physical and psychological abuse within the family - An absence of statistical data on such violence, a lack of effective monitoring for victims, obstructs efforts to tackle - Need to ensure implementation of the Law on the Protection of the Family - Need to further increase the provision shelters - Lack of education and a high illiteracy rate - The non-registration of girls in population - Not accepted Article 8 of the European Social Charter on the right of employed women to the protection of maternity
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The report of the ad hoc Parliamentary Committee on "crimes in the name of honour, violence against women and children" and A circular by the Prime Minister's Office - "Stop domestic violence" and the education of girls campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementation of legal framework - The Law on the Protection of the Family is only partially implied - The non-registration of girls in population - Honor killing and suicides - Need to further increase the provision shelters - Lack of education and a high illiteracy rate

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low participation in Parliament, local representative bodies and the labor market - Lack of staff in the Directorate General for the Status of Women - The Advisory Board on the Status of Women has not been gathered during the reporting period
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amendments to extend the Law on Protection of the Family to all individuals in the family - Abolishment of all fees for applications and administrative transactions related to court proceedings - Circulars to governorates, judges and prosecutors, with the aim of improving services to victims of violence - Application of the prime ministerial circular to combat honour killings and domestic violence against women with the assistance of Directorate-General for the Status of Women - Improvement of cooperation between public institutions and civil society and regular meetings with public institutions and women's NGOs to monitor the implementation of the circular - Campaigns to prevent violence against women and raise awareness about participation by women in politics and to promote female candidates - Increasing number of shelters - Additional staff for the Directorate-General for the Status of Women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic violence against women - Honor killings, - Early forced marriages - Lack of data on violence against women and of honour killings - Need of increasing training for law enforcement bodies, judges and prosecutors - Low participation in Parliament, local representative bodies and the labor market
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Prime Ministerial circular on combating honor killings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low number of women in the labor force and decreasing

2008	<p>and domestic violence against women improved cooperation between public institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness-raising activities for members of the judiciary and law enforcement bodies, ender sensitivity training programmes for health worker - Increase of the number of shelters for women victims of domestic violence - Application of the amended Law on protection of the family - Adoption of the "Employment Package" amending the Labour Law and certain other laws to promote women's employment - Decrease of the gender gap in primary education further 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low level of political representation of women at both national and regional levels - Use of discriminatory language against women by the Diyanet's (Presidency for Religious Affairs) site - Low level of access to education - Domestic violence, honor killings, and early and forced marriages and need to improve reliability of data - A need of establishment of a Gender Equality Body and a Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment of a consultative parliamentary Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women in a consultative parliamentary Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women - A legislative amendment granted public servants employed under labor contracts the right to paid maternity leave of 16 weeks and plus the possibility to return to the same post at the end of their maternity leave - An improvement in mother and child health indicators over the last five year - Continuation of awareness-raising activities and gender sensitivity training programmes for public service and health personnel - A protocol between the Directorate-General for Women's Status and the Ministry of Justice to training prosecutors and judges on violence against women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A gender equality body as required by the acquis has yet to be established - Low level of political representation of women at both national and regional levels - No provisions to practice to adequate political representation of Turkish women in the Law on Political Parties and the statutes of the parties - Low level of women's participation in the labor market - Low level of access to education and low level of education - Domestic violence, honor killings and early and forced marriages - Opuz v. Türkiye case - Long time to issue restraining orders to protect women facing the threat of violence under the Law on Protection of the Family - Low number of shelters

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Campaigns to increase female participation in local elections by women's NGOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of awareness among law enforcement forces and public administrations of the Ministry of the Interior's circular on violence against women and children - Lack of an effective dialogue of the civil society organisations with the government on gender-related issues
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An amendment to the Constitution provides that positive discrimination measures in favor of women can be adopted - A Prime Ministerial to promote women's employment and equal opportunities and establishment of a national board for monitoring and coordinating matters - A tripartite protocol between the Social Services and Child Protection Agency, the Directorate-General for Women's Status and the Turkish national police to improve the services for women and children victims of domestic violence - Continuation of trainings for police officers and awareness-raising activities for public servants - Decrease of the gender gap in primary education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low level of women's representation in politics, senior positions in public administration and in trade union - Low level of women's participation in the labor market due to the lack of sufficient child-care facilities, difficulties in access to secondary and further education and the existence of stereotypes, unpaid work in subsistence agriculture and employment in the informal sector - No social inclusion mechanisms for women to counterbalance the impact of poverty, migration and other socio-economic problems - Attention to drop-outs and increase the quality of education and the safety of minors - Persistence of the gender gap in secondary and other levels of education - Existence of stereotypes about women's role and status in school textbooks - Increase in honor killings - Limited number of shelters for women and other preventive and protective services

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early and forced marriages and lack of reliable data on the issue - Lack of sufficient human and financial resources on implementation of the national action plan on gender equality and violence against women - Not having firm and measurable targets in the Action Plan
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Source. Country Progress Report on Türkiye. (2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010). https://www.ab.gov.tr/regular-progress-reports_46224_en.html

Gender Equality - Türkiye Progress Report in (de)-Europeanization Period

Year	Developments	Challenges
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction of parental benefits to harmonize better private and professional life for civil servants - Reports on women's issues by The Parliamentary Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men - The Parliamentary Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men developed its institutional capacity by incorporating with the aid of training - the Law on obligations in 2011 to tackle workplace bullying, and followed by a Prime Minister circular - An increase from 26% in 2009 to 27.6% in 2010 in female participation in the labor market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preventing violence against women, including honor killings, early and forced marriages and sustainability of girls' attendance at higher levels of education remain as main challenges - Still, the results of the constitutional amendment providing for positive discrimination in favor of women are expected to be seen - Limited representation of women in politics, managerial positions in the public administration, including education - Poor work conditions, unregistered and unpaid family work - Incompetent funds to encourage women to become self-employed - A need of re-design for existing labour market measures,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A virtual closure and decrease of gender gap in the primary education at national level - An increase in the number of women in the parliament nearly from 9% to 14% in 2011 elections - Development of the dialogue with women's NGOs since the arrival of the new minister of family and social policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> including training courses to prevent gender-based segregation of employment - An increase of the gender gap in secondary education - Eliminating gender bias from school textbooks still awaits and gender stereotyping is preserved by media - Increase in incidents of violence against women, including killings - Insufficient capacity of family courts - ECtHR judgment in the Opuz v. Türkiye still awaits to be implemented - the number of shelters and other protective and preventive mechanisms are still insufficient - Implementation of the national action plan on gender equality and violence against women lacks sufficient human and financial resources - A need for improvement for implementation of Prime Ministerial circulars - Need of gender-mainstreaming in law-making and public administration - Portrayal of women as slightly responsible for harassment, rape or violence due to their behavior or dress by public figures and judicial decisions - Discrimination in favor of NGOs promoting conservative values - Concerns related to fundamental rights of LGBTQI+
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Law on the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women adopted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Biggest problems are still gender equality, combating violence against women,

<p>2012</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generally positive procedures for urgent cases, inclusive consultation practice with civil society - A National Action Plan to combat Violence against Women (2012-2015) - A protocol between The Ministry of Family and Social Policies and the Gendarmerie for Gendarmerie staff to be trained in the prevention of violence against women and gender equality issues - The Capital Markets Board announced that at least one board member of publicly traded companies should be female The Capital Markets Board - A protocol between The Ministry of Family and Social Policies and the Ministry of Labor and Social Security for increasing female employment and labor participation rates, including those of women subject to violence - 20 opinions on draft legislation since being set up by The Parliamentary Committee on Equal Opportunities between Men and Women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> including honor killings, and early and forced marriages - the Committee needs to more participate in mainstreaming gender equality via the legislative process, in monitoring the implementation of laws and circulars issued on gender equality and in participating with women's organizations - Concerns about last-minute amendments to the Law on the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women - A law on caesarean sections without enough preparation and consultation with civil society, a similar debate on abortion - Still low participation of women in the labor market - Unpaid family work and no social protection - Lack of childcare facilities for working women and work on a regulation on parental leave did not proceed - Not taking into consideration the need for avoiding gender-based labor market segmentation - Still limited number of women in politics and at senior level in the administration - Underrepresentation of women in the management of trade unions - Claims by the women's movement toward revision of the Law on Political Parties and the Law on Elections for making the inclusion of women legally binding on political parties did not find a respond from government
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuation of Women's negative portrayal in the media and a male-dominated discourse - Unavailability of detailed statistics on violence against women, including murder - Troubling court judgments attempted to justify violence against women and juveniles based on victim's background - The capacity of family courts is still insufficient - Some police officers tried to convince domestic violence victims to return to their alleged abusers - The ECtHR judgment in the Opuz v. Türkiye case has not been implemented - Needs to promote changes in stereotypes and in the perception of gender roles in all spheres by government
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Law on the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women of March 2012 - The Ministry for Family and Social Policies' National Action Plan to Combat Violence against Women (2012-15) - Database on violence against women in progress - Minister actively tackled domestic violence and spoke publicly - Adaptation of a regulation on the management of shelters - A department by Ministry of Labor and Social Security to deal with cases of harassment at work as part of efforts to build up capacity in the public sector. - Awareness-raising and training on new legislation for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NGOs sought increased engagement with the Committee and law monitoring; anti-discrimination board pending - No follow-up mechanisms for municipalities without women's shelters - Limited statistics on violence against women, including killings but media reports highlight partner-related and honor killings - Early and forced marriages, and inadequate family courts - Sentencing reductions based on controversial justifications; delays in forensic reports - ECtHR judgment implementation in Opuz v. Türkiye case pending for effective deterrence

	<p>the members of the judiciary and law enforcement officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Violence Prevention Centres in 12 pilot cities - Initiatives to increase women's participation in the labor force by public and private sector representatives - Two opinions on draft legislation by The Parliamentary Committee on Equal Opportunities between Men and Women - Employers obliged to provide childcare services for work-life balance if employing 150+ women - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The low level of participation of women in the labor force and women's access to education - Affordable childcare facilities for working women lacking - Limited women in politics and senior administration; no legislation amendments for inclusion - Prohibition of women from using exclusively their maiden name after marriage, despite ECtHR ruling - Gender equality education lacking in training of public officials: law enforcement, health professionals, social workers, and teachers - Limited stakeholder consultation; dialogue with civil society limited to government-aligned organizations - Gender inequality remains a key challenge in Türkiye's development agenda (indicated by annual statistics from TÜİK) - Work needed to break stereotypes and change gender role perceptions in all areas
<p>2014</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuation of implementation of Law on the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women - Continued implementation of the National Action Plan (2012-2015) of the Ministry for Family and Social Policies' to combat violence against women - 14 Violence Prevention Centers established, including 2 additional pilot cities - Women's participation in the labor force showed a slight increase but remained low at 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Criticism on implementation of Law on the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women in terms of effectiveness, provision clarity, and staff adequacy in dealing with domestic violence - Civil society organizations lamented the absence of indicators, objectives, monitoring, and funding for activities - Regulation of Violence Prevention Centers on operation pending, incomplete staff appointments and

	<p>33.2% in terms of gender equality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More female candidates participated in the March local elections, leading to three women holding metropolitan mayor positions - Private sector shows some improvement on gender imbalance in decision-making - Parliamentary committee issued 9 opinions on draft legislation for equal opportunities - Training on gender equality for law enforcement, health professionals, social workers, and teachers - 	<p>inadequate training for appointed staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of financial support prevents NGOs from opening additional shelters, and there are no clear follow-up mechanisms for municipalities without shelters - Women under judicial protection being killed questions legislation's effectiveness - Issues of violence against women, including honor killings and early and forced marriages and no official statistics on them - Societal acceptance contributes to underreporting of gender-based violence - Sexual harassment incidents reported during rallies, in police custody, and police vehicles - Sentencing reductions based on controversial justifications; Forensic Medicine Institute criticized for delayed reports on sex crimes - ECtHR judgment implementation in Opuz v. Türkiye case pending for effective deterrence - Shortcomings reported in implementing the circular for increasing women's employment and equal opportunities - Gender-based domestic duties and limited childcare and eldercare services hinder women's labor market participation - Gender gap in unpaid family work persists, and greater efforts are needed to enforce equal pay for equal value of work
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Still low level of women’s political representation - No legislative changes for women's inclusion in politics - Gender imbalance in public sector decision-making - No amendments made to Turkish legislation on women using maiden name after marriage, despite ECtHR ruling and Constitutional Court permits married women to exclusively use maiden name
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The legislative and institutional framework for gender equality is established - Gendarmerie strengthens capacity to combat violence against women - Politicians and officials must uphold gender equality principles and avoid derogatory statements against women - Efforts to align existing laws and national action plans on violence against women with the Council of Europe Convention should be intensified - Shelters for victims of domestic violence have expanded their capacity, but further development is required to meet international standards - Number of women members of parliament increased from 79 to 98 after June general election (but decreased to 82 in the November election, constituting 15% of the 550-seat parliament) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concerns related to promotion of traditional gender roles, ineffective legislation implementation, and inadequate service quality - Insufficient protection of women from violence and inadequate legal redress for victims pursuing judicial proceedings - Situation worsens with trafficking, forced prostitution, and sexual exploitation, particularly among Syrian refugees - Legislative framework requires amendments to strengthen preventive and deterrent effect of judicial decisions - Legislative framework should be amended to enhance the preventive and deterrent effect of judicial decisions - Low increase in women seeking formal help or reporting to the justice system - “Consent,” “undue provocation,” and “appearing older” persist as justifications for lenient sentences in sex crime cases - No system for collecting comprehensive data on gender-based violence

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Significant delays in the preparation of forensic reports - The budget does not allocate funds specifically for preventive measures - Expansion of training for law enforcement personnel and improved coordination between institutions are necessary - Substantial gender disparity in education, with significant dropouts due to early marriage or child labor - Under-represented in managerial positions in the public and private sectors
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Certain institutions, including private sector, strengthened their capacity to combat violence and discrimination against women through training initiatives - Tax incentives promoting the establishment of private nurseries and day-care facilities were adopted in August - Shelters for victims of domestic violence have expanded their capacity, but further development is needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insufficiently addressing discrimination against women and gender-based violence due to weak legislation implementation, service quality, and political commitment to gender equality - Since ratification of Istanbul Convention, no concrete steps have been taken to align domestic legislation with the Convention or raise awareness on its provisions - Additional efforts are required to implement the existing law and national action plan for the protection of families and prevention of violence against women - Early and forced marriage are still a major concern, including the Syrian refugees - Insufficient protection and legal redress for women in cases of violence and judicial proceedings - Low increase in women seeking formal help or reporting to the justice system - “Consent,” “undue provocation,” and “appearing

		<p>older” persist as justifications for lenient sentences in sex crime cases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No system for collecting comprehensive data on gender-based violence - Limited administrative follow-up on domestic violence cases and a lack of connection with social services - Concerns related to fundamental rights of LGBTQI+ - The new Law on the National Human Rights and Equality Institution does not specify sexual identity and sexual orientation among grounds for discrimination - Homosexuality is still called as a ‘psychosexual disorder’ in the military disciplinary system and in the military’s medical regulation as an illness
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender equality is established in the legislative and institutional framework - The state adopted an action plan for 2016-2020 and has begun raising awareness on the topic of preventing and combating violence against women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weak legislation implementation and low-quality support services hinder addressing discrimination against women and gender-based violence - Weak political commitment to gender equality is evident through frequent public statements by high-level officials reflecting conservative views on the role of women - Girls' school enrollment, particularly in secondary education, needs improvement - Early and forced marriage remains a significant concern - During the state of emergency, 11 independent women's NGOs were closed down, and in certain provinces, events on International Women's Day were prohibited

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provincial and district muftis given civil marriage powers, risking early and forced marriages and undermining civil code's secular principles - The country has not yet adapted its legislation to align with the Istanbul Convention - In 2017, domestic violence resulted in the death of 282 women - Cases of domestic violence receive very limited follow-up and no referral to social services - As of now, there are 137 shelters for victims of domestic violence, but some of them were closed down in the south-east region - Comprehensive data on gender-based violence is lacking, and the low number of reported cases raises doubts about the reporting level - Concerns related to fundamental rights of LGBTQI+ - No changes to the military disciplinary system and medical regulations on LGBTQI+ - LGBTQI+ marches were banned for the third time and activists were sued <p>Discrimination against LGBTQI+</p>
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender equality is established in the legislative and institutional framework - Government's positive steps for gender equality in action plans on education, employment, and violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender disparity persists in decision-making, employment, education, and health due to weak legislation implementation and inadequate support services - Action plans not fully implemented, lacking systematic monitoring - Weak political commitment to gender equality; stereotypes in textbooks and media perpetuate low social status and violence against women

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education for both women and men vital to prevent domestic violence - In 2018, gender-based violence caused 440 women's deaths, and only 317 sexual violence cases were reported - Serious concerns pertain to early and forced marriages, and discretionary mitigation in court cases of violence against women, which may reflect sexist prejudice and victim blaming - Closure of women's associations and centers during the state of emergency impacted support services for women victims - Concerns related to fundamental rights of LGBTQI+ - No changes to the military disciplinary system and medical regulations on LGBTQI+ - January 2018 law: 'Abnormal/pervert' actions result in dismissal for security personnel - LGBTQI+ marches were banned and activists were sued - In 2018, the Court of Cassation redefined hate speech, considering it freedom of expression to call LGBTQI+ individuals 'perverts'; hate speech against the LGBTQI+ community persisted from government officials and the media - Discrimination against LGBTQI+
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender equality is established in the legislative and institutional framework - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender disparity and violence against women remain concerning due to weak implementation, lack of coordination between

<p>2020</p>		<p>institutions, and insufficient awareness among law enforcement officials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the Civek v. Türkiye judgment of February 2016, Türkiye was again condemned by the ECHR for inadequately protecting victims of violence against women - Recent reliable official data on the prevalence of femicides is unavailable; over 2,600 women murdered in Türkiye since 2010; 474 women killed in 2019 stated in reports - A comprehensive data collection system should be implemented to assess the scale and nature of the issue, aiding future planning, policy-making, and monitoring - Limited services for women survivors of violence; inadequate number of centers (As of December 2019, 146 women's shelters) - Concerns on child, early, and forced marriages as discretionary mitigation in court cases of violence against women, potentially reflecting sexist prejudice and victim blaming; Civil society reports an increase in incest, but there is no policy action or acknowledgment by the authorities - Lack of political commitment to gender equality; reluctance to use 'gender equality' in official documents. - Last national action plan on gender equality in 2008-2013, has not been renewed. Instead, a women's empowerment strategy document for 2018-2023 was issued and the national action plan on
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		<p>combating violence against women (2016-2020) stays</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Independent women's rights organizations excluded from drafting laws and policies, while pro-government and conservative groups consulted instead - High-level policymakers and influential politicians' statements emphasizing traditional gender stereotypes discriminate against women and hinder international conventions' effective implementation - No steps taken to harmonize domestic legislation with the Istanbul Convention - Authorities, including the HREI, increasingly argue against CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, claiming they contradict 'Turkish family values' - Issues related to LGBTIQ+ rights persist
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The President revealed the Fourth National Action Plan aimed at addressing violence against women from 2021 to 2025 - Parliamentary commission formed to investigate violence against women and propose measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in March 2021 is a clear regression on the rights of women and girls; compromises women and girls' rights and the fight against gender-based violence, setting a dangerous precedent - After the withdrawal, hate speech against women's organizations increased in the media - In July 2021, the Constitutional Court rejected the request to suspend the enforcement of the withdrawal, ruling that it was within the President's authority to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concerns on weak implementation of legislation, low-quality support services, and negative rhetoric from high-level officials and parts of society against gender equality, lack of deterrence against perpetrators of crimes against women - In 2021, 300 women were killed and 171 women died under suspicious circumstances - Lack of a comprehensive data collection system to assess the scale and nature of the issue of violence against women - Discretionary mitigation continued in court cases of violence against women - Female unemployment, extreme poverty, and hunger increased, especially in the east and south-east - Civil society reported increasing incest, but authorities took no policy action or acknowledgment - Stereotyped gender roles in school textbooks and media require urgent attention - Statements by the Ministry of Interior linking women's organizations and feminists to terrorism threatened the existence of women's associations - Independent women's rights organizations continued to be excluded from drafting relevant laws and policies on women's issues - The Government should ensure that domestic violence investigations, prosecution, and specialized services meet international standards - Issues related to LGBTQI+ persists: shut down of the
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		<p>Boğaziçi LGBTQI+ Studies Club, an 18+ warning on "LGBTQI+ and rainbow-themed products" on e-commerce sites, court case against Middle East Technical University (METU) students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Minister of Interior and certain media outlets blamed the EU and the USA for funding LGBTQI+ NGO
<p>2022</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fourth National Action Plan for Combating Violence against Women (2021-2025) is being implemented, but 339 women were killed in 2021 The fourth judicial package adopted in July 2021 increased penalties for violence against women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The regression concerning the rights of women and girls persisted - Court cases challenging the annulment of the presidential decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention are still ongoing - The Council of State ruled in July that the Presidential decree on withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention was lawful and rejected the cases seeking its reversal, affirming the President's authority to withdraw from international conventions - Lack of comprehensive data collection to assess the issue's scale and nature; Data collection is crucial for evidence-based policies and strategies on violence - No effective deterrence policy for perpetrators of crimes against women - Weak judiciary commitment and limited support services were worsened by negative rhetoric from authorities - April 2022 Constitutional Court judgment limits women's protection - Need to improve domestic violence legislation

		<p>implementation and services to meet international standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women's limited participation in decision-making, politics, and employment; Conservative attitudes toward gender equality worsened socio-economic conditions for women, leading to increased unemployment, poverty, and hunger - Hate speech increased against women's organizations, and the Ministry of Interior targeted feminists for alleged terrorist links; Women's marches faced police violence, and the 'We Will Stop Femicides Platform' was threatened with closure - Issues related to LGBTQI+ rights persist - Increase of hate speech and discrimination toward LGBTQI+ <p>The court case against METU students involved in a pride gathering in May 2019 resulted in their acquittal in October 2021</p>
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Source. Country Progress Report on Türkiye. (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). https://www.ab.gov.tr/regular-progress-reports_46224_en.html

7.2 Appendix 2

Interview Questions

1. Could you please introduce yourself in terms of educational background and status of occupation?
2. In your opinion, do you think that the gender equality policies of Türkiye have changed under the AKP government?
3. What do you think about the evolution of Türkiye's gender equality policy from under the rule of the AKP government related to the following items/issues: (I will ask this question in case they say 'yes' to the previous question)
 - a. Principles of non-discrimination on the basis of sex/gender and equality between men and women established in the Constitution
 - b. Legal reforms to guarantee non-discrimination and equality between men and women in family and cultural life
 - c. Existence of any customary, religious law or common law principles/provisions that discriminate against women in family and cultural life
 - d. Good practices that you can share regarding the elimination of sex discrimination in family and cultural life
4. Why do you think there is a change in the gender equality policy approach of the AKP?
5. In your opinion, what are the domestic and external drivers behind the change in the gender equality policy approach of the AKP?
6. To what extent do you think the EU soft law approach (such as guidelines, recommendations, declarations, and opinions) is effective in shaping the gender equality policies of Türkiye?
7. How would you consider support of civil society by the EU (such as providing funds) for spreading the EU gender equality policy?
8. In your opinion, would it be better if there were more stringent requirements by the EU?
9. How would you assess the AKP's position on women's role in society?

10. In your opinion, are there any key ideological or cultural factors that the AKP cites as justifications for its stance on women's roles in society?
11. How do you perceive the AKP's overall impact on gender equality and women's empowerment within Turkish society?
12. From your perspective, what strategies or mechanisms can the EU employ to engage the AKP in constructive dialogue and collaboration regarding gender equality policies?
13. What kind of results will arise on the membership perspective and bilateral relations with the EU under the changes in gender equality policies (such as withdrawal from Istanbul Convention)?

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