

# Assessing Turkey's Foreign Policy Choices towards the European Union

MELTEM MÜFTÜLER-BAÇ\*

**ABSTRACT** Turkey adopted a new strategy for its European Union accession process in 2014, in an attempt to revitalize its relations with the EU. Turkish foreign policy towards the European Union has remained consistent with full membership as its main goal. However, since 2013, there have been significant challenges for the realization of that foreign policy objective, with the altering geopolitical environment and the changing preferences in the European Union. Turkey's own foreign policy choices towards the EU were impacted by the loss of both EU's credibility in its enlargement policy and its attractiveness as an economic magnet. This paper analyzes the role of the EU specific external factors on Turkish foreign policy, and assesses the reformulation of Turkey's relations with the European Union after 2014. The main conclusion of the paper is that Turkey's foreign policy towards the EU has altered and a new pattern of cooperation is emerging between these two players.

## Introduction

**W**hen Turkey adopted a new strategy for its relations with the European Union in 2014 in order to revitalize the accession process as well as open new avenues of integration, this constituted a critical step in marking the priorities in Turkey's foreign policy. While Turkey's accession to the EU still seemed far off, the new strategy, nonetheless, signaled a renewed commitment to the EU. The changing geopolitical conditions since 2013 –increasing uncertainty in the Middle East, a more proactive Russian presence on the European soil, and instability around the Turkish borders –necessitate the continuation and strengthening of Turkey's institutional ties to the part of the world that still resonates some stability. Yet, since 2014, the EU faces unexpected consequences of external crisis and internal challenges.<sup>1</sup> First, the EU confronted a militarily aggressive Russia over Crimea in 2013, second the Syrian crisis and the unprecedented flow of refugees into the European lands paralyzed the EU leaders, and finally when the British voted to leave the EU in 2016, it led to an existentialist struggle for the integration project.

\* Sabancı University, Turkey

## Along with its 2014 new EU strategy, Turkey found itself engaging with the EU beyond the key instruments of EU accession negotiations

The enhanced uncertainty over the EU as a project of peace and stability seems to indicate that even if and when Turkey aims to solidify its relations with the EU, it depends on the European willingness to do so.<sup>2</sup> As a result, this paper aims to illustrate the multiple layers of complexities in Turkey's foreign policy choices towards the European Union by focusing on how changing external conditions shaped and constrained these choices.

Turkey has always had a highly turbulent relationship with the European Union, dating back to its Association Agreement, the Ankara Treaty, signed in 1963.<sup>3</sup> Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU, which began in 2005, were stalled in 2013, partly because of the EU member states' diverging material interests.<sup>4</sup> As of 2017, the Turkish chances of acceding to the EU remain slim. While the Cold War years more-or-less determined Turkey's role in Europe and its relations with the European countries in line with the balance of power system at the time, the end of the Cold War and the structural transformation underway since then challenged the pillars of that order.<sup>5</sup> The European Union also went through significant changes in the last 15 years, both in terms of institutional reforms and widening the Union to encompass most of the European geographical landmass.<sup>6</sup> The inclusion of the Central and Eastern European countries into the EU in 2004-2007,<sup>7</sup> the changing geopolitical landscape and internal developments within the EU influenced Turkish foreign policy towards the EU.

This paper looks at these changing dynamics of the Turkish-EU relations and proposes that while the EU remained an important actor in Turkish foreign policy, the EU driven dynamics impacted Turkey's foreign policy choices. The EU's credibility as a negotiating partner coupled with new security risks posed by instability in the Middle East, in particular the Syrian civil war and the refugee crisis, led to significant changes in Turkey's relations with the EU. Along with its 2014 new EU strategy, Turkey found itself engaging with the EU beyond the key instruments of EU accession negotiations. For example, on November 29, 2015, an EU-Turkey summit was held in Brussels where both parties emphasized the critical importance of their relationship, most importantly giving Turkey the role to control and patrol the EU borders. What is more, the bilateral summits between Turkey and the EU, and the newly adopted tools of High Level Dialogues- Political, Economic and Energy- indicate a transformation in the Turkish foreign policy towards the EU and the EU's stance towards Turkey going beyond the traditional forms of accession negotiations.

The paper first provides a background for the Turkish foreign policy towards the EU, second, it analyzes the EU's enlargement policy and its credibility, and

finally, it proceeds onto an analysis of Turkey's relations with the EU as evaluated within the EU's enlargement policy. The key premise of the paper is that Turkish foreign policy towards the EU is shaped by the EU's own stance in its external relations and its credibility as a negotiating partner.<sup>8</sup> While there were also significant domestic level determinants of Turkish foreign policy leading to this change, specifically in terms of political preparedness,<sup>9</sup> the paper does not focus on these determinants due to lack of space. It highlights the major factors in shaping Turkey's foreign policy towards the EU as the EU driven dynamics, its credibility towards Turkey as a negotiating partner and its ability to act as a magnet. By isolating the EU's credibility as an anchor for Turkish foreign policy, the paper aims to contribute to the literature on Turkish foreign policy as well as on EU's enlargement process.

## Turkey and the European Union

Turkey's relations with the European Union have always been characterized by a high degree of uncertainty and ambivalence. However, in the last few years, the two parties have increasingly moved in different, diverging directions. Turkey, despite its candidacy status and accession negotiations, never fully adopted the EU's accession criteria while the EU never seemed to fully embrace the idea of Turkey's accession. Yet, Turkish foreign policy remained committed at least in rhetoric to the EU accession goal. This is reflected by Ahmet Davutoğlu, then in his capacity as the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2011 as "Turkey will accede to the European Union as a full member by 2023."<sup>10</sup> This objective seems to be far out of reach in 2017. When Turkey first applied to the then European Economic Community in 1959, its application was motivated by its position in the Western Alliance as shaped by the Cold War dynamics, as well as the Greek application to the EEC that preceded the Turkish application. The Cold War years determined the Turkish allegiance into the Western order demarcated by the ideological differences. Turkey's membership in the key European/Western institutions –the Council of Europe (1949), the OECD (1948) and NATO (1952)– added up in building strong ties between Turkey and the West European countries. At that time, there were no major doubts that Turkey was an integral part of the European order. When the 1963 Ankara Treaty stated that Turkey is part of Europe, and once it is ready to assume its obligations arising from membership, it would accede to then European Economic Community; it established the legal basis for Turkey's eligibility for EU accession. It is for this reason that the 1963 Ankara Treaty set the path dependent process for Turkey's association with the EU. Without the Ankara Treaty's ultimate goal that Turkey is destined to join the EU, which was reiterated in the 1999 Helsinki summit that elevated Turkey's position to a candidate country, the Turkish-EU relations would be at a different platform right now. However, despite the legal basis for Turkey's

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, hold a joint press conference following the Turkey-EU High Level Political Dialogue Meeting on September 9, 2016 in Ankara.

AFP PHOTO / ADEM ALTAN



eligibility, there are, of course, no guarantees that Turkey would become a member of the EU.<sup>11</sup>

The Turkish fit into Europe was never easy. There were serious reservations from the EU members about the position it occupied in the European order, and these reservations became more pronounced over time.<sup>12</sup> When Turkey was finally included into the EU's enlargement policy in 1999 as a candidate for accession with the Helsinki summit, this opened a new chapter in Turkish foreign policy towards the EU. The opening of accession negotiations in 2005 strengthened the ties further.<sup>13</sup> The EU's 2005 Negotiations Framework for Turkey stressed that even if negotiations do not end with accession, Turkey should be bound with the strongest ties to the European order. This clause signaled that an alternative outcome for Turkey might be possible compared to the other candidates/acceding states, which did not have a similar a clause in their Negotiations Framework, even at the onset of the negotiations process. In hindsight, had the EU treated Turkey with the same objective standards it had evaluated the candidates from the Central and Eastern Europe in 2005, Turkey-EU relations would have taken a different turn. These signals coming from the EU influenced Turkey's foreign policy choices. It is possible to see different periods in Turkish foreign policy priorities towards the EU in response to the signals and stimuli coming from the EU and its member states. For example, in the 1999-2006/7 period, the EU's commitment to Turkey seemed high with the candidacy, opening of Community programs to Turkey, as well as the opening of accession negotiations, despite

the above-mentioned clause. As a result, Turkey was eagerly adopting the harmonization packages in order to meet the EU requirements. In the 2007-2013 period, as the prospect of EU accession became dimmer, a general slowing down of the reforms in Turkey as well as the pace and nature of the negotiations could be observed. There are a number of reasons for that, first Nicholas Sarkozy was elected as French President in 2007 after which he began to openly oppose Turkey's accession, blocking the opening of chapters that were ready for negotiations. A French official reported in 2007; "President Sarkozy, because of geography, does not believe that Turkey should be a member of the EU, and has made this clear and he will not change his mind."<sup>14</sup> The French resistance was coupled with the internal disputes in other EU members and the Cyprus vetoes. More specifically, after 2006/7, Turkey felt the main impact of Cyprus's accession through bilateral and multilateral vetoes. While the EU member states were increasingly hesitant towards Turkey in 2007, the EU's economic problems emerged as a further complicating factor.

Nonetheless, from 2005 to 2011, Turkey remained committed to the EU accession goal, harmonized its laws to the EU *acquis*,<sup>15</sup> and adopted the EU's positions in its foreign policy towards third parties. However, with the stalling of the EU accession process, Turkey began to move away from the EU. First, it began a proactive foreign policy in the Middle East, establishing close relations with multiple countries. Second, it followed a policy of active presence in international institutions, from the G20 to its rotating membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2009-2011. Third, it did not always act in tandem with the EU, as seen with its attempt to strike a nuclear deal with Iran together with Brazil in 2010. Yet, a clear break with the EU was never realized, and Turkish pro-activeness in other platforms did not present an anomaly given the vast differences within the EU itself, as member states such as United Kingdom or Germany did not always follow the rest of their fellow members in their foreign policy choices and in their UN voting patterns.

When the EU adopted a Positive Agenda for deepening relations with Turkey in 2012, it emphasized foreign policy coordination and further cooperation in mutual areas of interest as critical areas for deepening the EU-Turkish ties even if Turkey does not accede to the EU in the near future. The 2012 Pos-

**From 2005 to 2011, Turkey remained committed to the EU accession goal, harmonized its laws to the EU *acquis*, and adopted the EU's positions in its foreign policy towards third parties. However, with the stalling of the EU accession process, Turkey began to move away from the EU**

## **The adoption of the new European Union Strategy in 2014, the establishment of High Level Dialogues and the bilateral summits, all indicate that Turkey has moved from a candidate country for EU accession to a country that is seemingly creating a new type of an institutional integration with the EU**

go beyond the accession negotiations. It covers all important elements of our relationship.”<sup>16</sup> Yet, a change in the EU’s rhetoric could be seen with its emphasis on Turkey and the EU as equal partners, signaling a different relationship compared to the EU’s relations with other candidate countries. In line with this goal, in 2014, High Level Dialogues were created which provided for platforms of debate between the EU officials and Turkey on critical issues. This is important in terms of demonstrating that Turkey-EU cooperation is essential on its own beyond accession.

In 2014, the Turkish government adopted a new ‘European Union Strategy’<sup>17</sup> in line with its governmental program aiming at creating a new momentum in its relations with the EU. This new strategy consists of three different pillars that to a certain extent fit into the EU’s 2005 Negotiations Framework for Turkey. The pillars are enhancing the political reform processes, enabling a socio-economic transformation and the adoption of a new Communication Strategy towards the EU. With the adoption of the revised National program, an action plan, and the Communication Strategy in November 2014, Turkey took a proactive role in reshaping its relations with the EU. This is particularly visible in areas of mutual concern, such as foreign and security policy, terrorism and the refugee crisis.<sup>18</sup> In the two main meetings of the High Level Political Dialogue between Turkey and the EU organized respectively in January and September 2016, Turkey and the EU furthered this dialogue, most notably concerning issues pertaining to the Syrian crisis, Libya and Iraq.

The changes in the Turkish foreign policy towards the EU become more visible with the inception of bilateral summits between Turkey and the EU. On November 29, 2015, Turkey and the EU held their first bilateral summit, which aimed to deepen their cooperation dealing with the refugee crisis, and em-

itive Agenda, of course, was not a new instrument separate from the Turkish accession process, but was adopted to revitalize and to complement the ongoing negotiations. These critical areas stressed in the Positive Agenda were political, economic, and energy related. The European Commissioner responsible for Enlargement at the time, Štefan Füle, summarized the Positive Agenda as “It is about a new way of looking at the accession negotiations...how we look at each other as two equal partners. The positive agenda is not only to support, but to

phasized terrorism as a mutual concern. The bilateral summit in March 2016 reemphasized the new institutional ties between Turkey and the EU in coordinating their responses to the refugee crisis and terrorism. This point was raised again in the Turkish-EU Counter Terrorism Dialogue meeting held in June 2016. The refugee deal<sup>19</sup> between Turkey and the EU is an important turning point for Turkish foreign policy towards the EU, where Turkey emerged as an equal partner to the EU. It is for this reason that Turkey negotiated a deal, in which it agreed to control and curb the flow of refugees using Turkey as a base to cross to the European lands, in return for a revamping of its accession process, and visa facilitation for Turkish citizens. The Joint Action Plan adopted to deal with the refugee crisis underlines these new modalities of Turkey's cooperation with the EU.

In short, the adoption of the new European Union Strategy in 2014, the establishment of High Level Dialogues and the bilateral summits, all indicate that Turkey has moved from a candidate country for EU accession to a country that is seemingly creating a new type of an institutional integration with the EU. This also indicates that while Turkey's relations with the EU remain paramount, they could be increasingly characterized as relations between equals. The urgency of dealing with the refugee crisis threatening the European borders through Turkish cooperation motivated the EU to approach Turkey in this new light. This is a rupture in Turkey's foreign policy towards the EU, where Turkey moved from being the smaller partner in its relations with the EU, aiming at accession as a candidate country to one that carried equal weight in the EU's external relations. That weight was significant enough on its own that the EU ended up creating new institutional mechanisms to increase dialogue and cooperation with Turkey. These changes are largely resulting from the alterations in the geopolitical order, the EU's external environment. Sweden's former Prime Minister Carl Bildt summarized the Turkish importance for the European strategic interests as: "It would be a strategic stupidity of the first order for the EU to unilaterally abandon its relationship with Turkey."<sup>20</sup> This might be the main reason behind the EU's proposal to revamp the Customs Union with Turkey, extending to products other than industrial products, and to include Turkey into the EU's trade policy in December 2016. While the accession process is seemingly on hold, Turkey now has new avenues of cooperation with the EU, indicating a change in its foreign policy, where full membership seems to be no longer the goal, or even the priority. This is an unexpected turn of events in the Turkish-EU relations.

It is important to understand the main reasons behind this foreign policy adjustment in Turkey with regards to its relations with the EU, and the key to that lies partly in the European Union's treatment of Turkey. The external environment has always shaped the Turkish foreign policy choices towards the EU. The EU's own stance towards Turkey similarly is a product of its own external



The European Parliament voted in Strasbourg to recommend a temporary suspension of Turkey's negotiations with the European Union in November 2016.

AA PHOTO / MUSTAFA YALÇIN

constraints. That is why, in order to understand the motivations behind the Turkish foreign policy changes towards the EU, the next section addresses the EU's enlargement policy.

## The European Union and its Enlargement Policy

The European Union has never been an international actor with significant capabilities neither did it have an independent foreign policy of its own going beyond those of its member states. While the 2007 Lisbon Treaty aimed to alter that with new institutions, posts and responsibilities, the EU remained relatively weak in its projection of power. The EU's responses and lack of willingness to act were highly visible in the 1990s in the Balkans crisis, the 2011 Libya intervention, the slowness in dealing with the Arab Spring, the 2011 Syrian civil war and its aftermath as well as the 2013 Ukrainian crisis. In all these major European and international crises, the EU was unable to act in a unified manner.<sup>21</sup> Given its economic influence and the normative power instruments at its disposal, the EU's lack of power and inaction are puzzling. However, the most powerful tool that the EU had at its disposal as an instrument of foreign policy has always been its enlargement process.<sup>22</sup> The post-Cold War period was a prime time for this policy, with the former Warsaw Pact countries waiting in line to become EU members.<sup>23</sup> However, these countries did not face major security risks, and their incorporation into the EU did not necessarily bring major conflicts into the EU, with the exception

**The EU's different patterns of prioritizing its applicants is also a measure of its credibility. As a result, the EU's stance towards different applicants, for example those in the Western Balkans, influence the EU's credibility in its enlargement goals**

of Cyprus. The EU used the material economic carrots it had with accession to shape these applicants into would-be EU members and enabled a transformation in Central and Eastern Europe. As a foreign policy tool, enlargement worked up until 2007.<sup>24</sup>

The EU's effectiveness and credibility as an international actor matter significantly in terms of its enlargement policy. The multilateral decisions and the intra-EU consensus among the EU member states strengthen the EU's credibility as a negotiating partner. The EU signals its credibility to the candidates in different ways, by giving clear deadlines, allocating significant financial compensation offsetting the costs of adaptation to the EU rules in the candidates, unanimously approving screening reports and/or opening of chapters. These signals demonstrate its willingness towards specific countries and reduce uncertainty. The candidate countries, in return, engage in a process of adaptation to the EU rules expecting the material benefits of accession. For example, in the previous round of enlargement, the Commission signaled to Estonia and Latvia that their respect for minority rights would be an important precondition for their accession; it also kept relations with Slovakia under the authoritarian President Mečiar relatively frozen.<sup>25</sup> These were important signals communicating the EU's priorities, but they were also credible because the EU was committed to their accession once those problems were solved. This is in contrast with the current candidates – Turkey and the Western Balkans. Not only are these countries relatively weak in terms of their own democratic development, but their ability to emulate the EU's rules remains limited.<sup>26</sup> Bosnia, Macedonia and Kosovo emerge as prime examples. In Bosnia, the prospect of EU accession has not been particularly strong or credible, and internal divisions run deep preventing any progress in the enlargement process. Kosovo suffers from internal divisions and the lack of a credible position among the EU member states, but it was still able to negotiate a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). In the Macedonian case, Greece blocked the opening of accession negotiations in the European Council due to their name dispute.<sup>27</sup> Even in the cases where some success and upgrading of candidates' relations with the EU are evident –for example in Serbia, Montenegro and Albania– the enlargement policy toolbox has only limited success in help-

## **A particularly important difference between other candidates for EU accession and Turkey, decreasing the EU's credibility in the Turkish eyes, was the absence of clear dates and deadlines**

ing candidates undertake far-reaching political, economic and societal reforms. The EU's different patterns of prioritizing its applicants is also a measure of its credibility. As a result, the EU's stance towards different applicants, for example those in the Western Balkans, influence the EU's credibility in its enlargement goals.

More importantly, ever since the 2004 enlargement to include the Central and Eastern European countries, as well as Cyprus and Malta, the EU's enlargement policy has lost its momentum, precisely because the intra-EU consensus over enlargement no longer holds. The EU faces an enlargement fatigue and it has its own integration problems as demonstrated by the British decision to withdraw in 2016. While the remaining candidates in the Western Balkans and Turkey wait for their turn to come, and prepare for their eventual accession, the EU is moving away from the enlargement process. When the Central and Eastern European countries aimed at EU accession, it was in the post-Cold War period while there was great uncertainty over the future of the European order and the role of Russia in this order. The concerns over building a new European structure and stabilizing the whole of the continent constituted the pressing reasons for the EU enlargement of 2004.<sup>28</sup> The EU's enlargement policy is effective only if it signals a commitment to an applicant country credibly. This is, however, not sufficient on its own as the candidate country needs to perceive that the EU's signals are communicating its intentions, and are believable. With the previous rounds of enlargement, in 2004, 2007 and 2013 with Croatia, the EU seemed to generate a consensus on the importance of achieving increased prosperity and security for the European continent. However, since 2013, the EU is no longer on track for further enlargement in general, and towards Turkey in particular. While the larger political and security considerations, as part of the external conditions, facilitated the accession process for all the Central and Eastern European candidates, this seems to be more challenging for Turkey.

### **Turkey's Foreign Policy Choices**

As argued in the previous section, Turkey's foreign policy choices towards the EU are partly shaped by the EU's credibility and commitment towards Turkey. However, one needs to point out that these are affected by the external environment within which the EU operates. The lack of pressing security threats and the absence of the high level of uncertainty – as in the immediate aftermath of the 1990 systemic restructuring – seem to be the main differences in

the external global context about Turkey. What sets Turkey apart is the lack of such pressing concerns, lessening the EU's commitment to Turkey's accession. Unlike the previous enlargement, the (un)certainly of the outcome of enlargement process remained subject to debate. As a result, the absence of clear deadlines, as well as the lack of an explicit EU commitment increased the uncertainty of the process in the Turkish eyes. Turkish foreign policy towards the EU, therefore, has altered in response to the changes in the EU's commitment to and credibility of the enlargement process. To illustrate the changing external context and its impact on the EU credibility, one needs to look at the differences in the previous candidates for EU accession and Turkey.

To start with, a particularly important difference between other candidates for EU accession and Turkey, decreasing the EU's credibility in the Turkish eyes, was the absence of clear dates and deadlines. While the Central and Eastern European countries were given concrete dates for accession, Turkey never received a similar signal from the EU. In particular, the 2000 Nice summit involved preparations for their membership with the adoption of far reaching EU institutional redesign, and the 2001 Gothenburg European Council reiterated the EU's firm commitment to enlargement. Finally, the EU's commitment to the CEEs was explicitly clear at the time with the expectation that the new members would participate in the June 2004 European Parliament elections. Thus, the 2004 enlargement and to a lesser extent the 2007 enlargement involved a multilateral EU commitment to the candidates, which prompted them to stay on course with their reforms. Turkey has never received any clear deadlines, nor were there any plans for its institutional representation once it accedes to the EU. There were no concrete deadlines, and neither did there seem to be a preparation for institutional redesign for its accession.

As a result, a key difference for Turkey is the absence of clear certainty and stronger appeal of membership; consequently, Turkey seems to regard the costs of compliance to the EU conditions as too high. That is because, the credibility of its accession process shapes the EU's effectiveness, and the member states' preferences and the visible divergences between them is a key variable undermining this credibility. Coupled with the EU's credibility issue, the economic attractiveness of the EU plays a key role in making a candidate such as Turkey to remain committed to the EU accession goal. When the EU began its most ambitious enlargement in the 1990s, Turkey was among the applicants along with the Central and Eastern European countries joining the line. In terms of their ability to meet the EU's economic criteria, it seems fair to argue that Turkish economic indicators were in par with the lower performing members of the EU as well as the applicant/candidate countries at the time. The following tables provide a comparison of these key economic indicators, for the EU members before the 2004 enlargement and for the candidate countries in the years where they finally joined the EU as full members.

**Table 1: Economic Indicators for EU-15 in 2004**

	GDP (US\$) <sup>29</sup>	Population <sup>30</sup>	GDP Growth Rate (annual %) <sup>31</sup>	Price Level Ratio of PPP Conversion Factor GDP to Market Exchange Rate <sup>32</sup>
<b>EU 15</b>	<b>2004</b>			
<b>Austria</b>	299,857,213	8,171,966	2.7	1.1
<b>Belgium</b>	370,445,741	10,421,137	3.4	1.1
<b>Denmark</b>	251,242,843	5,404,523	2.6	1.4
<b>Finland</b>	196,768,065	5,228,172	3.9	1.2
<b>France</b>	2,124,112,242	62,704,897	2.8	1.2
<b>Germany</b>	2,815,470,573	82,516,260	1.2	1.1
<b>Greece</b>	239,648,745	11,055,729	5.0	0.9
<b>Ireland</b>	193,034,765	4,070,262	4.6	1.3
<b>Italy</b>	1,799,125,900	57,685,327	1.6	1.1
<b>Luxembourg</b>	34,207,847	458,095	4.9	1.1
<b>Netherlands</b>	646,041,718	16,281,779	1.9	1.1
<b>Portugal</b>	189,187,484	10,483,861	1.8	0.9
<b>Spain</b>	1,069,555,500	42,921,895	3.2	0.9
<b>Sweden</b>	381,705,425	8,993,531	4.3	1.2
<b>UK</b>	2,298,042,841	59,987,905	2.5	1.2

The 2004/2007/2013 candidates and their economic levels of development are seen in Table 2. These figures demonstrate the attractiveness of the EU as an economic magnet, or lack of, motivating Turkish foreign policy towards EU accession.

**Table 2: Economic Indicators for the New Member States in their Years of Accession**

	GDP (US\$) <sup>33</sup>	Population <sup>34</sup>	Contribution of Imports to EU Intra Trade in % <sup>35</sup>	Contribution of Exports to EU Intra Trade in % <sup>36</sup>	GDP Growth Rate (annual %) <sup>37</sup>	Price Level Ratio of PPP Conversion Factor GDP to Market Exchange Rate <sup>38</sup>
<b>2004</b>						
<b>Poland</b>	253,525,770	38,182,222	2.7	2.3	5.1	0.3
<b>Hungary</b>	103,156,817	10,107,146	1.7	1.8	4.8	0.6
<b>Czech Rep.</b>	118,976,023	10,197,101	2.3	2.3	4.9	0.6
<b>Slovakia</b>	57,329,401	5,372,280	0.9	0.9	5.2	0.7
<b>Slovenia</b>	34,470,229	1,997,012	0.6	0.4	4.4	0.8
<b>Estonia</b>	12,057,639	1,362,550	0.2	0.2	6.5	0.6
<b>Latvia</b>	15,267,165	2,263,122	0.2	0.1	8.9	0.5
<b>Lithuania</b>	22,649,483	3,377,075	0.3	0.2	N/A	0.5
<b>Cyprus</b>	17,164,625	1,015,827	0.2	0.0	4.4	0.9
<b>Malta</b>	5,643,525	401,268	0.1	0.0	-0.5	0.7
<b>2007</b>						
<b>Bulgaria</b>	43,637,701	7,545,338	0.5	0.3	6.9	0.4
<b>Romania</b>	170,613,460	20,882,982	1.4	0.8	6.3	0.6
<b>2013</b>						
<b>Croatia</b>	57,868,674	4,255,700	0.4	0.5	-0.9	0.6

As seen in Tables 1 and 2, the EU members and the new members that joined the EU after 2004 have a relatively high degree of economic integration, but this is not the case with the current candidates, with the exception of Turkey as seen in Table 3.

**Table 3: Economic Indicators for the Current Candidates**

	GDP (US\$) <sup>39</sup>	Population <sup>40</sup>	Total Import Value (US\$) <sup>41</sup>	Total Export Value (US\$) <sup>42</sup>	GDP Growth Rate (annual %) <sup>43</sup>	Price Level Ratio of PPP Conversion Factor GDP to Market Exchange Rate <sup>44</sup>
<b>Current Candidates – 2014</b>						
<b>Bosnia</b>	18,344,278	3,817,554	3,329,647	5,025,384	1.2	0.5
<b>Macedonia</b>	11,323,761	2,075,625	3,025,055	3,820,769	3.8	0.4
<b>Montenegro</b>	4,583,198	621,800	249,201	973,307	1.5	0.5
<b>Serbia</b>	43,866,423	7,129,428	7,111,687	10,373,838	-1.8	0.5
<b>Albania</b>	13,370,191	2,894,475	1,248,250	2,471,046	1.9	0.4
<b>Kosovo</b>	N/A	N/A	95,602	728,665	N/A	N/A
<b>Turkey</b>	799,534,963	75,932,348	54,231,644	74,633,155	2.9	0.5

The economic differences between the Western Balkans, the EU-15, the CEE countries and Turkey are clearly visible in terms of their GDP, growth patterns and purchasing power. The candidates' readiness for economic integration with the EU plays an important role in shaping whether they could fit into the EU. At the same time, their levels of economic development shape the member state preferences about the economic value of candidates' accession to the EU – a material benefit. The CEE countries were clearly more economically developed compared to the Western Balkans, but also more economically integrated to the EU. A comparison of the EU candidates in 2004, 2007 and 2013 (in terms of their years of accession), the EU member states in 2004 before the big bang enlargement and the current candidates in 2014 demonstrate these key differences. As seen in the above tables, most of the Western Balkan countries lag behind the CEE candidates at the time of their accession negotiations in terms of their economic capabilities.<sup>45</sup> The economic attractiveness of the EU as a magnet matters in providing Turkey with the incentive to remain committed to its EU accession goal. However, this does not seem to be the case, and the EU, no longer, acts as an economic anchor for Turkey as in the 1990s. Coupled with the lack of credibility on the EU side towards Turkey, this does not bode well for stimulating the necessary patterns of adaptation and harmonization to the EU rules, and accepting the costs of adaptation as a result. While both the EU's attractiveness and credibility remained high in the 1999-2006 period, it is possible to see Turkey more proactive in its EU goal, but with a decline in both EU attractiveness and credibility, there is also a shift in Turkish foreign policy.

For Turkish foreign policy choices towards the EU, the indecisiveness, the loss of the EU credibility and the mixed signals coming from the EU members

## **It was to be expected that in the 2007-2013 period, the lack of EU credibility, the low levels of commitment combined with the decrease in EU's economic attractiveness moved Turkey further away from its accession goalpost**

After Cyprus became a member of the EU in May 2004, it became a veto wielding player at almost every turning point of Turkey's relations with the EU, blocking steering reports, adoption of new proposals, opening of chapters. As the Cypriot government relied on its veto power for blocking progress in Turkish-EU relations, it clearly expected a resolution to the long division of the island. As Cyprus unilaterally vetoed six more chapters for Turkey's accession, it became clear from Turkey's point of view that the EU accession process is not particularly fair. With perceptions of unfairness, Turkey's own foreign policy choices began to alter.

This situation is compounded with the loss of EU as an economic anchor. From 2008 onwards, the EU slowly lost its economic attractiveness when it found itself in the grips of a major economic crisis whereas Turkey remained on the surface untouched. As the Turkish economy continued to prosper, unlike some European economies, the EU's lure of membership through economic material benefits waned. It was to be expected that in the 2007-2013 period, the lack of EU credibility, the low levels of commitment combined with the decrease in EU's economic attractiveness moved Turkey further away from its accession goalpost. Ultimately, the high level of uncertainty associated with the lack of clear deadlines from the EU coupled with the open resistance from some EU member states, the mixed signals and the bilateral vetoes of member states influenced Turkish foreign policy goals towards the EU, becoming explicitly clear in 2013.

At the same time, a more visible proactive Turkish foreign policy towards regions other than the EU could be seen in this period with Turkey becoming active in the Middle East, developing friendlier ties with Russia, engaging diplomatically and economically with countries such as Syria and Iran. The slowing down of the EU negotiations altered Turkish foreign policy, making it look for alternative markets and perhaps other close diplomatic allies. This is why, in 2016, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan claimed "it was time for Turkey to openly think about alternatives to the European Union, suggesting the

changed its position towards the EU, especially after 2011. In particular, bilateral relations between some member states and Turkey played the most important role in lowering the EU's credibility. While relations with France and sometimes Germany did not help the Turkish perceptions of the EU as an objective anchor, Cyprus played the decisive role in Turkey's foreign policy choices towards the EU. Af-



Following the Turkey-EU refugee agreement, 23 refugees sent from Greece were transferred to the refugee camps in İzmir Province, Turkey.

AA PHOTO / CEM ÖKSÜZ

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).<sup>46</sup> While Turkey remained committed to the Western Alliance and its EU membership goal, it portrayed a different picture in transforming itself into a more global player. The subsequent result was a Turkey that did not resemble other candidates – neither economically nor diplomatically – but a candidate that demanded equal recognition. And, Turkey’s newly found activism and confidence in its external relations influenced its foreign policy towards the EU. However, as illustrated in the above section, while Turkey moved away from EU accession, it was transformed into an equal partner in different policy areas and constituted a unique example of a new mode of cooperation for the EU. This is also reflected by some EU members as a central claim as illustrated by Hungary’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Peter Szijjarto: “the EU needs to take account of the fact that its security is linked to Turkey’s security and stability.”<sup>47</sup> As a result, Turkey’s foreign policy choices towards the EU altered in the post 2013 period, making it more reluctant to pursue its accession goal. The changes in this aspect led to the adoption of the new strategy for EU accession in 2014, but this strategy emphasizes the Turkish role as an equal partner for the EU, rather than an acceding country.

## Conclusion

A pressing question that this paper tried to answer is whether and to what extent Turkish foreign policy is committed to its EU accession goal. There is not a clear cut, easy answer to this question. While Turkey did not stray away from its stated foreign policy objective, it is not necessarily due to the Turkish

choices alone that foreign policy objective could not be realized. The paper demonstrated that the alterations in the EU's own conditions – its enlargement policy, decline in its economic attractiveness – and the external geopolitical environment shaped Turkish foreign policy goals. If the EU could not deliver on the path of accession, and the EU accession no longer remained credible, then it is to be expected that Turkish foreign policy would change in response to these alterations. This is precisely what happened after 2013 in Turkey's relations with the EU.

However, both parties found themselves facing similar concerns in the post-2013 period, with a belligerent Russia, unstable Middle East, slowing down of global economic growth and the Syrian refugee crisis. As a result, Turkey adopted a new strategy towards the EU in 2014 resulting in a revitalization of this key relationship for Turkish foreign policy. This revitalization was not in terms of going back to the traditional modes of enlargement or full accession. It took a different form in terms of building new tools – such as the bilateral summits and the High Level Dialogues – that indicated a new phase in Turkey's relations with the EU is underway. It needs to be noted that both parties – Turkey and the EU – remain committed to the accession negotiations on paper, but as the negotiations do not seem to be going anywhere, perhaps the new modus operandi for Turkey's relations with the EU is emerging precisely through these tools. This opens up a previously uncharted path for Turkish foreign policy towards the EU. Instead of focusing on the goal of accession, establishing deeper patterns of cooperation might be the way ahead. This might also fit into the EU's own internal dynamics, in particular with the British exit and uncertainty over the EU's future as a model of political integration. ■

## Endnotes

1. Antoaneta Dimitrova, Elitsa Kortenska, and Bernard Steunenberg, "Comparing Discourses about Past and Future EU Enlargements: Core Arguments and Cleavages," *MAXCAP Working Papers No. 13*, (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2015).
2. Meltem Müftüler-Baç, and Aylin Ece Çiçek, "A Comparative Analysis of the European Union's Accession Negotiations for Bulgaria and Turkey: The Role of Bilateral Issues," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, (2016), retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14782804.2016.1198690>.
3. For an elaborate analysis for this relationship, see Senem Aydın-Düzgüt and Nathalie Tocci, *Turkey and the European Union*, (London: Palgrave, 2015); and Meltem Müftüler-Baç, *Divergent Pathways: Turkey and the European Union: Re-thinking the Dynamics of Turkey-EU Relationship*, (Berlin: Barbara Budrich, 2016).
4. Arzu Kıbrıs, and Meltem Müftüler-Baç, "The Accession Games: A Comparison of Three Limited-Information Negotiation Designs," *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2011), p. 402.
5. For an analysis of the EU's enlargement process towards the Central and Eastern European countries, see Mlada Vachudova, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration after Communism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
6. Antoaneta Dimitrova, *Driven to Change: The European Union's Enlargement Viewed from the East*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

7. The historical background of this process could be found in Georgiu Vassiliou, *The Accession Story: The EU from 15 to 25 Countries*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
8. The theoretical framework for EU credibility and its conditionality is provided by Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, "Theorizing EU Enlargement: Research Focus, Hypotheses, and the State of Research," *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2002), pp. 500-528; Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, "Governance by Conditionality: EU Rule Transfer to the Candidate Countries of Central and Eastern Europe," *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2004), pp. 661-679.
9. The role of these political factors in shaping the Turkish foreign policy choices towards the EU are analyzed in Meltem Müftüler-Baç, "Turkey's Ambivalent Relationship with the European Union: To Accede or not to Accede," *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 13, No. 52 (2016), pp. 89-103.
10. "Türkiye 100. Yılında AB Üyesi Olacak," *CNNTurk*, (March 23, 2011), retrieved from <http://www.cnn-turk.com/2011/turkiye/03/26/turkiye.100.yilinda.ab.uyesi.olacak/611224.0/>.
11. Chris Preston, *Enlargement and Integration in the European Union*, (London/New York: Routledge, 1997).
12. For illustrations of these reservations, see Helene Sjursen, "Why Expand?: The Question of Legitimacy and Justification in the EU's Enlargement Policy," *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2002), pp. 491-513.
13. For a discussion on the 1999-2007 period, see Meltem Müftüler-Baç, "Turkey's Accession to the European Union: The Impact of the EU's Internal Dynamics," *International Studies Perspectives* Vol. 9, No. 2 (2008), pp. 208-226.
14. Dan Bilefsy, "Sarkozy Blocks Key Part of EU Entry Talks with Turkey," *The New York Times*, (June 25, 2007), retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/25/world/europe/25iht-union.5.6325879.html>.
15. For an analysis of this harmonization, see Senem Aydın-Düzgüt and Yaprak Gürsoy, "The Rule of Law and Judicial Reforms in Turkey between 2002 and 2013," in Boğaç Erozan, Nihal İncioğlu, Pinar Uyan-Semerci (eds.), *Siyasetin Bilimi: İter Turan'a Armağan*, (İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015), pp. 327-341.
16. "EU Press Release," (May, 17, 2012,) retrieved from [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-12-359\\_en.htm/](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-359_en.htm/).
17. "Turkey's New European Union Strategy," (2014), retrieved from [http://www.ab.gov.tr/files/5%20Ekim/turkeys\\_new\\_eu\\_strategy.pdf/](http://www.ab.gov.tr/files/5%20Ekim/turkeys_new_eu_strategy.pdf/).
18. "Indicative Strategy Paper for Turkey (2014-2020)," *European Commission*, (2014), retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2014/20140919-csp-turkey.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20140919-csp-turkey.pdf).
19. "The Turkey-EU Refugee Deal in 2015," *European Commission*, retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news\\_corner/migration\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news_corner/migration_en).
20. Rod Norland and James Kanter, "Turkey and the EU near Breaking Point of Their Membership Talks," *The New York Times*, (November 23, 2016), retrieved from [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/23/world/europe/turkey-eu-membership-talks.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/23/world/europe/turkey-eu-membership-talks.html?_r=0).
21. The EU's stance in the Arab Spring is summarized by Rosemary Hollis, "No Friend of Democratization: Europe's Role in the Arab Spring," *International Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (2012), pp. 81-94.
22. Karen Smith, *The Making of EU Foreign Policy: The Case of Eastern Europe*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
23. Frank Schimmelfennig, "The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union," *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (2001), pp. 47-80.
24. Ulrich Sedelmeier, "Is Europeanisation through Conditionality Sustainable? Lock-in of Institutional Change after EU Accession," *West European Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2012), pp. 20-38.
25. Frank Schimmelfennig, Stefan Engert, and Heiko Knobel, "Costs, Commitment and Compliance: The Impact of EU Democratic Conditionality on Latvia, Slovakia and Turkey," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (2003), pp. 495-518.

26. Gergana Noutcehva, and Senem Aydın-Düzgit, "Lost in Europeanization: The Western Balkans and Turkey," *West European Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2012), pp. 59-78.
27. Greece opposes the use of the name "Macedonia" for the area of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which, it is argued by Greece, does not belong to the historical region of Macedonia with which many Greeks in the Northern part of the country still identify until this very day.
28. Helene Sjursen, *Questioning EU Enlargement: Europe in Search of Identity*, (London/New York: Routledge, 2006.)
29. "GDP Per Capita (Current US \$)," World Bank, retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>.
30. "Population (Total)," World Bank, retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>.
31. "GDP Growth Rate (Annual %)," World Bank, retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG/>.
32. "Price Level Ratio of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) Conversion Factor GDP to Market Exchange Rate," World Bank, retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/PA.NUS.PPPC.RF/>.
33. "GDP Per Capita (Current US \$)," World Bank, retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD/>.
34. "Population (Total)," World Bank, retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL/>.
35. "Intra-EU Trade by Member State, Total Product," EUROSTAT, retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tet00039&plugin=1>.
36. "Intra-EU Trade by Member State, Total Product," EUROSTAT.
37. "GDP Growth Rate (Annual %)," World Bank, retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG/>.
38. "Price Level Ratio of PPP Conversion Factor GDP to Market Exchange Rate," World Bank, retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/PA.NUS.PPPC.RF/>.
39. "GDP Per Capita (Current US \$)," World Bank, retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD/>.
40. "Population (Total)," World Bank, retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL/>.
41. Data for import value and export value have been collected from [http://exporthelp.europa.eu/thdapp/comext/ComextServlet?action=output&viewName=eur\\_partners&simDate=20140101&languageId=en&ahscode1=00&cb\\_reporters=000&cb\\_partners=all&list\\_years=2014&measureList=iv&measureList=ev](http://exporthelp.europa.eu/thdapp/comext/ComextServlet?action=output&viewName=eur_partners&simDate=20140101&languageId=en&ahscode1=00&cb_reporters=000&cb_partners=all&list_years=2014&measureList=iv&measureList=ev).
42. Data for import value and export value have been collected from [http://exporthelp.europa.eu/thdapp/comext/ComextServlet?action=output&viewName=eur\\_partners&simDate=20140101&languageId=en&ahscode1=00&cb\\_reporters=000&cb\\_partners=all&list\\_years=2014&measureList=iv&measureList=ev](http://exporthelp.europa.eu/thdapp/comext/ComextServlet?action=output&viewName=eur_partners&simDate=20140101&languageId=en&ahscode1=00&cb_reporters=000&cb_partners=all&list_years=2014&measureList=iv&measureList=ev).
43. "GDP Growth Rate (Annual %)," World Bank, retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG/>.
44. "Price Level Ratio of PPP Conversion Factor GDP to Market Exchange Rate," World Bank, retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/PA.NUS.PPPC.RF/>.
45. Arolda Elbasani, "EU Enlargement in the Western Balkans: Strategies of Borrowing and Inventing," *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans Online*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2008), pp. 293-307.
46. Serdar Karagöz, "Tired of Delay in Tactics," *Daily Sabah*, (November 20, 2016), retrieved from <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2016/11/20/tired-of-eus-delaying-tactics-erdogan-points-to-shanghai-pact>.
47. "Does the EU Need Turkey more than Turkey Needs the EU," *Middle East Monitor*, (November 18, 2016), retrieved from <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20161118-does-the-eu-need-turkey-more-than-turkey-needs-the-eu/>.