

Opportunities Missed: Turkey-EU accession since 2005.

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This special issue is a prime example of the difficulties faced in writing about moving targets. When the idea was conceived in 2014, the Turkey-EU accession process seemed to be stuck in a post-Gezi Park rut and, as David Phinnemore and Erhan Iceney say in their contribution to this special issue, not only had progress been “glacial” since 2005 the discourse surrounding it was dominated by words such as “impasse” and “stalemate” (2016). At that time, as co-editors, we were seeking to explain *how* the impasse had happened and *why* it was a missed opportunity for both Turkey and the European Union.

Since that time, and since some of the articles included here were written, Turkey-EU accession has been hit by two exogenous shocks which have changed the context in which it operates: the migration issue since mid-2015 and the attempted *coup d'état* on July 15th 2016. The extreme political imperative on the EU's elite actors to make the deals of November 2015 and March 2016, to stem the flow of people across the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece, appears to have obliged the EU to look selectively at Turkey's record of liberal democracy. It has pledged to “re-energise” the accession process even though Turkey's Freedom House rating is currently 3.5 or “partly free” and its press freedom rating is even lower at “not free”¹.

The November deal was described by the former EU Ambassador in Ankara, Marc Pierini, as “realpolitik” at its worst² as geostrategic pressure forced the EU to bend its previously immutable principles of liberal democracy. The July 2016 *coup d'état* attempt has further stretched the credibility of any semblance of commitment to liberal democracy in Turkey with the wide scale “purging” of tens of thousands of alleged conspirators not only in the military but in education, the judiciary and the media³. Whether continuing migration will oblige the EU to bend its rules even further, and what the long term effect might be, are yet to be seen. What is clear however is that the landscape in which Turkey-EU accession is currently taking place has changed dramatically in the two years since this special issue project began.

However, the co-editors contend that this actually adds weight to the argument that the stalemate reached soon after accession negotiations were opened in 2005 has

been an opportunity missed. It has to be considered that this was a prime chance for the EU to continue to incentivise Turkey to carry out liberal constitutional reform. It must also be considered that Turkey may not have become as illiberal if accession had remained a viable option. A more liberal democratic Turkey may even have stopped the migration issue becoming a crisis which required such a “realpolitik”-driven response.

Phinnemore and Icener look at the reasons why the door to Turkey is not closed but progress remains only at a “snail’s pace”. It concentrates on the EU side of events and explores how the EU has engaged with Turkey and how Turkey-EU relations fit into the wider enlargement dynamic. It identifies five variables for closer examination: integration capacity, member state preferences, public opinion, supranational activism and the ongoing enlargement narrative. This comparative approach highlights that Turkey has proceeded more slowly than other comparable accession states and argues that Turkey’s lack of progress cannot therefore be simply put down to wider enlargement fatigue.

It does concede that the Turkish case has been caught up in a wider desire to tighten the conditionality involved and to place more emphasis on chapters 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24 (justice, freedom and security). Hence Phinnemore and Icener conclude that: “The outlook for Turkey’s membership bid is far from rosy, and this is before consideration is given to the commitment of the Turkish government to the process and its capacity to implement the necessary reforms” (2016). However, they do add that the door for Turkey remains at least half open and has been “re-energised” by the migration issue.

Ebru Turhan’s paper also looks at member state preferences and their influence on EU policy towards Turkey. It pays particular attention to the preferences and positions of the so-called ‘Big Three’ (Germany, France, and the UK), as well as Greece and Cyprus. The paper provides a useful historical overview of Ankara’s relations with the EU since 1997 giving the reader a glimpse of the ebbs and flows in the relationship and the role of member state preferences within that. Turhan highlights that before 1999 the UK was an advocate of Turkish accession mostly for geostrategic reasons. However the Turkish case was opposed by the Franco-German axis within the EU until 1999 and also, crucially, Greece and Cyprus. The

attitude of Greece then shifted in 1999 in exchange for pay-offs in the Cypriot case. However the Cypriot factor re-emerged after accession negotiations were opened in 2005 and was instrumental in leading to the impasse and the blocking of numerous chapters thereafter. Turhan points out that Cyprus would probably not have been able to do this if its stance was not also backed by the French and German governments of the time.

More recently there have been moves to recharge the accession process with Turkey most notably after the departure of Sarkozy from the Elysee Palace and the election of Francois Hollande as President in France. However this was low key and very much hindered by growing illiberality in Turkey exemplified by the Gezi Park protests in 2013. It was not until the migration issue of 2015 that there was the political will in Berlin and Paris to properly “re-energise” the process. The potential political cost for Angela Merkel of the migration issue in late 2015 meant she was willing to make concessions to Turkey in order to secure a deal. Whilst Cyprus has continued to express reservations about the deal and to oppose the opening of some more significant chapters of the *acquis*, these developments demonstrate the continuing significance of member state preferences in the Turkey-EU accession process.

Isabel David’s contribution to this special issue is to argue that progress towards EU accession was always dependent on its compliance with the Copenhagen criteria and therefore, after, 2002, was in the hands of the AKP. Moreover the paper argues that the AKP never intended to democratise and used the EU instrumentally to consolidate its political power base within Turkey. In other words, the AKP took a strategic attitude to democratisation in accordance with an application of Rational Choice theory. It was a rational choice to use EU accession as a vote-winner in the first place and then to use conditionality instrumentally in order to bolster its own position. For example, reform of civil military relations were a particularly important part of EU conditionality which were stressed repeatedly in the European Commission’s annual progress reports. However the military were also a crucial part of the political establishment’s opposition to the AKP and Erdogan’s party was able to use EU “norms” to clip the political wings of the military.

David utilises a number of hypotheses to reach these conclusions. She argues that whilst the EU is influential in democratisation (and Europeanisation) this is less likely to happen in a political system with a dominant political party. The AKP has won every election since 2002 and can be considered as such. The paper argues that this was because democratisation would increase the plurality of the political system and thereby create political opponents. Moreover, David contends that democratisation is less likely in a country, like Turkey, with deep cleavages in socio-economic, ethnic and religious terms. Lastly, the paper theorises that the dominant party will use existing institutions to consolidate a power base and ultimately that democratisation will depend on the underlying inclination and motivation of the political actors in question.

Hence, the paper argues that the AKP used EU reforms to limit the powers of those actors that had previously sought to restrict political Islam in Turkey whilst stepping back from “reforms in areas liable of producing resistance to its dominant status or even of threatening that status” (David 2016). Hence she argues that the reason for the impasse in Turkey-EU relations is less the fault of the EU and its failing conditionality credibility and more the result of strategic democratisation by the AKP.

Gulay Icoz's paper proposes two important questions: Why there has not been a significant progress in Turkey's EU accession negotiations. How useful is historical institutionalism in assessing whether the issues that shaped Turkey-EU relations pre-2005 continue to effect Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU after 2005? Through study of the history of Turkey-EU relations, using the Factiva database and surveying the existing academic literature, Icoz shows that over time two path dependent issues have been most effective not only in the development of Turkey-EU relations between 1959 and 2005, but also in the EU accession negotiations.

The first is what she calls 'external and internal actors' interference with the functions of government'. By which she argues that there is good evidence that in Turkish politics independence of the bodies of the government have been undermined by the dominant presence and active role of i) external actors or Turkish armed forces (for they are not a branch of government) or ii) internal actors or President Erdogan (for it is a branch of government). According to Icoz this ultimately made it difficult for the

Turkish authorities to meet the democratic credentials of the EU, and hindered the implementation of the necessary EU reforms. The relationship between Turkey and the EU was problematised both before and after Turkey began the accession negotiations.

The second is Turkey's long-standing Cypriot and Kurdish problems. The ways in which the Turkish authorities have dealt with them have repeatedly affected Turkey's accession negotiations. Since the Cypriot and the Kurdish problems have not been resolved in the way the EU expected, no significant progress was made in Turkey's pursuit to join the EU. Finally, Icoz argues that these two issues are path dependent because they continuously contribute to the development and progress of the relationship. As for the future of Turkey-EU relations, Icoz predicts that unless Turkish authorities can reverse the path dependent issues she highlights in her article, Turkey's accession negotiations will continue to fluctuate and be inconclusive, regardless of the EU's need for Turkey's help on the refugee crisis.

In this way the special issue has provided several perspectives on *how* the Turkey-EU accession process has been a series of missed opportunities since 2005. It has also offered explanations as to *why* this may have happened: member state preferences, strategic action by the AKP government and security issues at home and in the near abroad of Turkey. It proffers a suggestion as to the consequences of these missed opportunities. As outlined above, in the years after 2005 the EU missed the chance to keep Turkey on the path to democratisation and Ankara has since diverged far from it. This has obliged the EU to deal with an unpredictable neighbour and ally over migration and also, we must not forget, over the situation in Syria and Ukraine. This has obliged the EU to deviate from norms and values which were previously very influential on its policymaking. The ultimate consequences of this divergence, from liberal democratic normative values, are yet to be seen.

Hence, this issue contributes not only a fresh approach to the study of Turkey-EU relations since 2005, but it is also a timely study of why Turkey is not a member of the EU in 2016 – more than a decade after accession negotiations began. Finally, it also carries on the work of Professor Chris Rumford of Royal Holloway College, University of London — who passed away in August 2016. Chris edited a special

issue of JCES on Turkey-EU relations in 2011 and was a great inspiration to us. We hope this continues Chris's work in the field and would like to dedicate the special issue to him.

*This special issue is the result of the panel 'Turkey and the EU - ten years on from Brussels 2004' at the UACES 44th Annual Conference, 1-3 September 2014, Cork, Eire.

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¹ See: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey>

² Pierini quoted in Agence France Presse, November 30th 2015, *Less to Turkey-EU deal than meets the eye: analysts*

³ Agence France Presse, September 2nd 2016, *Over 10,000 sacked in new Turkey post-coup purge*