

# Germany's Role in Turkey's Accession to the EU

Written by Yilmaz Kaplan

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YILMAZ KAPLAN, AUG 18 2011

European integration is an ongoing process in which nation states are the main architects who govern both horizontal (enlargement) and vertical (deepening) integration. As Moravcsik points out, from the Treaty of Rome through today, the European Union has evolved through a series of intergovernmental bargains among member states (1993, p.473). Especially with regard to horizontal integration, national consideration of the states (both applicants and member states) underlies the dynamics of enlargement, and in a rational manner, a member state supports any applicant's accession to the EU if there is a potential benefit from it (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005, p. 12). For example, Slovenia blocked Croatia's accession talks with the EU on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008, due to a border dispute with Croatia and used its blockade card until it reached an agreement with Croatia.[1]

In this sense, Turkey, as an applicant country, always found it profitable to be part of European integration from the beginning of the process. It signed an Association Agreement with the EEC in 1963, just 5 years after the establishment of the EEC. It applied for full membership in 1987, and after some ups and downs, finally started accession negotiations with the EU on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2005. However, the beginning of accession negotiations is a new phase for Turkey's EU membership bid, and in this new era, member states' national policies toward Turkey play a crucial role in determining the destination of Turkey's accession talks with the EU. In this process, Germany played an important role in beginning the accession negotiations with Turkey. In other words, enlargement is a subject used for inter-state bargains within the EU, and the power of member states is a distinctive factor which determines whose preferences matter (Cini, 2010, p. 98). For instance, Germany persuaded Greece to recognize Turkey as a candidate country at the Helsinki European Council in 1999 and insistently supported the opening of negotiations with Turkey on October 3, 2005 (Szymański, 2007, pp. 34-35). In fact, Schröder's Social Democrat government, which supported Turkey's full membership, was in power during the period from 1998-2005, in which Turkey first acquired candidacy status and later began the EU accession talks. However, the Merkel government, who is sceptical about Turkey's full membership, came to the power in 2005, and after which Turkey's accession process has stalled. Thus, Germany's position toward Turkey's accession to the EU is very important in order to see the destination of Turkey's, open-ended, accession negotiations. Therefore, this paper will focus on the question: how do domestic dynamics affect Germany's position toward Turkey's accession to the EU?

To answer this question, a theoretical framework will be established as the main lens of the study. Then, Germany's general position towards Eastern Enlargement and this enlargement's impact on Germany will be investigated. Furthermore, in regard to domestic dynamics, German's attitudes and the main German parties' policies related to Turkey's accession to the EU will be analysed.

### Theoretical Framework

Liberal intergovernmentalism as a European integration theory is quite efficient in explaining member states' affect on EU policies like enlargement. Liberal intergovernmentalism has evolved from intergovernmentalism, which is a traditional school of thought in European integration studies (Schimmelfennig, 2007, p.75). Hoffman, one of the leading scholars, underlines that integration is a cooperative agreement carried out through bargains by national interest oriented sovereign states (2003, p.164). Moravcsik uses the model of a 'two level game' in his European integration analysis (1993, p.514), and according to Putnam, the founder of the "two level game" approach:

# Germany's Role in Turkey's Accession to the EU

Written by Yilmaz Kaplan

*Domestic politics and international relations are often somehow entangled (p. 421)... At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favourable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments (1988, p. 434).*

Moreover, Moravcsik stresses the issue of interdependence, and according to him, "economic interdependence determines the preferences of actors at the national level [...]" (Schneider, 2009, p. 37). Specifically, bargaining power between the member states and the applicants depends on asymmetrical interdependence, and the applicant countries are in a weak negotiating position compared to member countries in terms of enlargement (Moravcsik and Vachudova, 2005, p. 199-206). As a result, the attitudes of member states toward the applicant country play a crucial role in the accession process.

As for enlargement as a specific field; despite not being well formulated to completely explain the process of enlargement in the EU polity, there are some approaches that are quite efficient in analysing the phenomenon. It should be underlined that there are both constructivist and rationalist, ontological and epistemological, assumptions on which several approaches are formulated to explain the EU's enlargement policy in general, and member states' policies towards applicant countries in particular. While rationalists tend to analyse the issue of enlargement by putting individualism (every actor is unique) and materialistic cost-benefit calculation (every actor behaves according to its self-interest) at the centre of their analyses, constructivists try to identify common norms and values as reasons behind enlargement (Barnes and Barnes, 2010, p. 422; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005, p. 12). The rationalist approach emphasizes individual actors (the member states) much more, unlike the constructivist approach that mainly refers to the common outcomes for enlargement within the EU (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005, p.12). Moreover, Sjursen has an efficient approach that explains the interplay between the issue of enlargement and member states. Sjursen formulated three hypotheses regarding EU polity in general and the issue of enlargement in particular. According to this understanding, the EU can be formulated as an interest-based, value-based, or right-based polity. In the interest-based view, member states design their enlargement policy in line with their materialist interests (a cost-benefit calculation). However, the value-based view points out that member states also have a sense of kinship-based duty toward the applicants, in addition to their material interests. The last view focuses on the universal principles of human rights and democracy as the main reason for existence of EU polity, and accordingly, any applicant that shares the same principles with the EU, in relation to human rights and democracy, should be an equal member.

In light of these explanations, the study has a liberal intergovernmentalist lens, meaning that member states are seen as sole actors in terms of the enlargement of the EU, and their domestic dynamics also have an effect on their enlargement policies. However, this macro-perspective is not enough to sufficiently explain how they domestically develop their position towards candidates. At this point, it is clear that Sjursen's formulation is quite effective in viewing relations between the issue of enlargement and member states, therefore, this formulation will be the theoretical starting point of this study. From this point, it can be expected that the domestic dynamics in Germany determine their position towards Turkey's accession to the EU, under the influence of interest, right, and, or, norm based perspectives. Later, these dynamics reach a consensus that will illuminate the final position on Germany's position towards Turkey's accession to the EU.

## Germany and Eastern Enlargement

A historical dimension should be added to the analysis to figure out Germany's current enlargement policy and especially its position towards Turkey's prospective membership. It can be easily argued that Central and Eastern Europe, and the Balkans, have historically been under Germany's influence. After German unification in 1871, Eastern Europe and the Balkans came under German economic influence, and in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire also established strong political and economic ties with Germany. The loss of WWI temporarily stalled this process, but later the Nazis deepened relations with the region, and "in the mid thirties Germany had set about transforming the Balkans into her economic hinterland" (Deringil, 1989, p. 23). WWII became another turning point, with Soviet Russia increasing its power in the region at the expense of Germany, and the Cold War's antagonistic

# Germany's Role in Turkey's Accession to the EU

Written by Yilmaz Kaplan

climate between Western capitalism and Eastern socialism isolating Germany from Central and Eastern Europe, and the Balkans. However, this was not the end for German activism in the region because Will Brandt developed "Ostpolitik" which was a sort of rapprochement policy towards the East, and West Germany again emerged in the region via economic relations as a "soft power." The collapse of communist regimes in the East alarmed the EC due to economic and mostly security concerns. However, as Sedelmeier points out, Germany had more interests in the region compared to other member states because "the West German government was keen to re-establish historical ties in the region, particularly with the German Democratic Republic" (2005, p.407).

In addition to Sedelmeier, Schweiger also points out that Germany gave strong support for Central and Eastern enlargement, and he gives some other reasons for this strong support in addition to historical links. Briefly, according to him, "the German desire to take the former communist countries on board the EU stems from a mixture between the desire to create a secure neighbourhood, which also provides new trading opportunities for Germany, and a feeling of post-Cold War obligation to compensate" (2007, p. 151).

However, Central and Eastern European enlargement has also become a factor which affects Germany's enlargement policy. First, despite it being a traditionally strong supporter of Eastern Enlargement, the expected costs of massive migration pushed Germany to be somewhat sceptical of enlargement (Schneider, 2009, p. 30). In a similar way, Harmsen and Spiering also argue that "although party-based Euroscepticism remains a marginal phenomenon in Germany, public opinion has shown itself to be increasingly sceptical of the integration project" (2004, p. 26). As a result, the German government's concern about losing votes shifted Germany to a strong protectionist stance against migration from the East (Schneider, 2009, p. 90) and Germany strongly opposed the immediate liberalization of labour markets in the Eastern Enlargement process (ibid., p. 68). Therefore, as mentioned in the theoretical part, domestic preferences have affected Germany's enlargement strategies during the CEECs enlargement process, and as a result of recent EU enlargement, German domestic considerations and preferences have become more active in adopting Germany's position towards enlargement.

Additionally, the Eastern Enlargement was like a "big bang" which changed the relatively homogenous nature of the EU, and today's more heterogeneous EU needs common norms and values to keep European nations together. Thus, Eastern Enlargement accelerated the discussions on European identity, and now the issue of enlargement is mostly integrated with European identity in these discussions. This means that Europeans are included much more in the issue of enlargement, and so the enlargement issue has been domesticated.[2] Moreover, normative items have also started to play a more active role in the enlargement process. For example, Lundgren investigated why member states gave priority to Romania, while Turkey was thrust aside. According to his findings, Romania and Turkey had a similar economic level, proximity for the EU's security concerns, and human rights and democracy standards. If that is so, then what made Romania superior? According to him, it was a stronger feeling of cultural affinity with Eastern European countries (Lundgren, 2006, p. 139).

## Germany and Turkey's Accession Process

Unlike Eastern Enlargement, Germany does not have a persistent position towards Turkey's full membership to the EU because domestic dynamics have a different affect on Germany's position at different times. For example, when the SPD-Green coalition, which was in favour of a right-based European Union, came to the power in 1998, Germany became one of the main member states who highly supported Turkey's membership. However, when the CDU (the Christian democrats), which are in favour of a value-based European Union, came to power via coalitions, Germany became one of the leading member states against Turkey's full membership. Therefore, it is useful to comprehensively analyse the main domestic dynamics in Germany, namely, public opinion and the main political parties.

## German Public Opinion

If recent polls are viewed to see the general attitudes of German citizens, it is clear that most of the German people are continuously against Turkey's accession to the EU. According to Eurobarometer 64.2, which was carried out in 2005, while 21 percent of Germans supported Turkey's membership, 74 percent were opposed (Ruiz-Jimenez and

# Germany's Role in Turkey's Accession to the EU

Written by Yilmaz Kaplan

Torreblanca, 2007, p. 8). In parallel, Special Eurobarometer 255 (2006) found that 69 percent of German citizens were against Turkey's membership while just 27 percent supported it. In 2007, an FT/Harris poll showed that only 21 percent of Germans supported Turkey's accession to the EU (Barysch, 2007, p. 1). Finally, a recent poll carried out by Emnid for "Bild am Sonntag," a German daily, found that 69 percent of Germans oppose Turkey's EU membership and just 29 percent are in favour.[3]

These surveys empirically show that there is a German majority who are against Turkey's membership, and so they sufficiently answer the question of whether German citizens are for or against Turkish accession to the EU. In addition, to clearly understand German citizens' attitudes towards Turkey's membership, another question should be asked; which factors have an impact on these attitudes? Ruiz-Jiménez and Torreblanca had a quantitative study that was conducted using data from Eurobarometer, in 2007, and this research can be a watershed in answering the question. As given in Appendix 1, the researchers found that most Germans think that to join the EU in about 10 years, "Turkey will have to respect systematically Human Rights" (Human Rights – the percentage of consensus: 88 %), "Turkey will have to significantly improve the state of its economy" (Economy – the percentage of consensus: 78 %), "Turkey's joining could risk favouring immigration to more developed countries in the EU" (Immigration – the percentage of consensus: 54 %), and "The cultural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are too significant to allow for this accession" (Cultural Differences – the percentage of consensus: 50 %) (Ruiz-Jiménez and Torreblanca, 2007). In the same vein, Servantie[4] also points out similar arguments by using data from Eurobarometer, and according to him there is higher opposition in member states where a high percentage of Turkish immigrants live, and this may be a reflection of their poor integration level. Particularly, he shows that there is a link between the level of education and income of Germans surveyed and their attitudes towards Turkey's accession. According to him, this means that, for example, people with lower income may perceive the potential immigration influx from Turkey as a threat, in case of Turkey's membership.[5] Additionally, Barysch also underlines the point that "issues of immigration and integration are a key ingredient of the debate about the Turkish accession [in Germany]" (2007, p. 4).

Public opinion naturally depends on a social, political, and economic framework, and any change in one of these frameworks has a potentiality high ability to affect public opinion. For instance, the EU recently suffered an economic crisis, therefore, it is also a necessity to look at recent data related to German public opinion towards the issue of enlargement, and Turkish accession in particular. A special survey was conducted by Eurobarometer[6] in 2009 to see recent views on enlargement. According to this survey, 73 percent of German citizens think that Eastern Enlargement (in 2004 and 2007) has made the European Union more difficult to manage, 59 percent think that it has contributed to job losses in their country, 65 percent (this percentage is the highest among member states) think that it has created problems because of the existence of too many different cultures and values among the different countries of the European Union, and 50 percent think that it has increased the feeling of insecurity in Europe as whole. In addition, Eurobarometer 73 (2010) also shows that while 60 percent of German citizens think that Germany's EU membership was a good thing in 2009, this percentage decreased to 50 percent in 2010. After analysing the recently collected data, it is clear that German's support for the EU's enlargement has recently been decreasing and it can be expected that this trend will also decrease German support for Turkey's membership, which is already at a low level.

To sum up, there is no doubt that most Germans are against Turkey's membership, however, when asked why they are against it, there is not only one answer, and it can be argued that Germans' attitudes towards Turkey's membership are affected by interest-based, norm-based, and right based considerations. For example, as noted above, 88 percent of Germans have a negative attitude towards Turkey due to human rights (right-based), 78 percent due to the economy (interest-based), 50 percent due to cultural differences (norm-based), and 54 percent due to migration (it can be a mixture of norm, right, and interest based). In addition to this specific consideration, German's support for EU enlargement is also decreasing, and this also negatively affects their attitudes towards Turkey's membership. As a result, it can be asserted that despite their generally negative attitudes towards Turkey's membership, interest-based, norm-based, and right-based considerations affect these attitudes.

## The Main Political Parties

# Germany's Role in Turkey's Accession to the EU

Written by Yilmaz Kaplan

Turkey's accession to the EU is one of the issues on which German parties cannot reach a consensus. If we look at the German governments' positions towards Turkey's bid for full membership by taking the Customs Union's entry into force into account from the beginning of the analysis, it is clear that while Christian Democrat governments are sceptical about Turkish accession, Social Democrat governments support Turkish membership. At this point, the main difference between Christian Democrats and Social Democrats stems from their European integration vision, and while Christian Democrats attach more importance to the norm-based perspective, the Social Democrats have a right-based EU model.

The period in which the Customs Union between the EU and Turkey came into effect was the eve of the Eastern Enlargement. However, the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) government, led by Helmut Kohl, was in power, and Kohl was not sympathetic to Turkish accession. Actually, good economic relations with Turkey constituted a sufficient basis for German support for the Customs Union but the Kohl government had a norm-based agenda for Eastern and Central European enlargement, and Turkey's accession was not consistent with this enlargement perspective. In parallel with this argument, Szymański also claims that "unlike the central and eastern European countries Turkey was not considered by Germany to be a nation with the same shared values and democratic principles" (2007, p.29). For example, in one of his speeches, Kohl argued that the EU is a civilization project in which Turkey has not any place (MacMillan, 2010, p.454). In practice, Kohl played a critical role in the Luxembourg Summit, in which "Turkey was treated separately from other candidate countries and put in an ambiguous European strategy" (Eralp, 2000, p. 7), and prevented the candidacy status of Turkey (Orent, 2010, [www.bilgesam.org](http://www.bilgesam.org)).

However, the red-green coalition[7] had a right-based perspective regarding EU enlargement, and when the government came to power in Germany, the shift from norm-based politics to right-based politics became noticeable. For example, Zaborowski emphasizes this change by claiming that "the change of government in 1998 produced a certain shift in emphasis from normative, value-related arguments towards more universal rights-based and political considerations" (2006, p. 118). In addition, Eralp points out this shift while explaining how the EU position changed from the Luxembourg Summit to Helsinki, and how Turkey attained candidate status (*ibid.*). In addition to it being a social democratic party with universal norms, the SPD also had a different voting base (electorates) among German society that encouraged the SPD to follow a right-based EU enlargement policy. If we look at the 1998 federal election in Germany, it is clear that the SPD received its votes mostly from Protestant and non-religious groups, contrary to the CDU which was mainly supported by German Catholics (James, 2000, p.36). Moreover, Turks who had German citizenship (almost 700,000) also strongly supported the SPD (Aktürk, 2010, ?). As a result, this voting base gave flexibility to the SPD to implement a different policy towards Turkey's accession to the EU, instead of following the CDU's stance. However, that change did not mean that Germany would immediately support Turkey, and actually, Schröder's governmental support was conditional and it depended on improvements in Turkey related to human rights and democracy. Because of this reason, Schröder's government began to speak out in favour of Turkey's membership after the acceleration of reforms in Turkey in 2001 (Szymański, 2007, p. 32). As a result, Turkish reforms and universal right-based support encouraged each other, and Turkey finally started accession negotiation talks in 2005. Additionally, as Lees contends, the Social Democrats' position towards the EU was more pragmatic than idealistic in general, therefore their discourse mostly focused on tangible benefits in the areas of the economy or security (2008, pp. 26-27).

Another government change happened in the 2005 federal election, in which the CDU became the first party and formed a grand coalition together with the SPD. The result of this election is a good indicator that shows to what extent the EU's enlargement is a domestic issue in Germany. Germany suffered from increasing unemployment in the 1990s, which increased negative sentiments against immigrants, and especially against Turkish immigrants, due to their huge numbers and them being different from other immigrants originating from the rest of Europe. Thus, the flows of immigrants were more strictly combined with the issue of European enlargement. Turkey's accession was naturally combined to increasing rates of unemployment and clashes within German society. In other words, the developments of the 1990s paved the way for populism in Germany, and subjects related to Turkish immigrants and Turkey have become a discourse for populism. For example, Ronald Koch launched a petition campaign against the red-green coalition's dual citizenship project in Hessen, and became minister-president of Hessen by using this propaganda technique in 1999. Later, by benefiting from populism, he became quite effective in the CDU.[8] Poguntke also highlights this issue by arguing that "the Leadership of the CDU and the CSU responded to the

# Germany's Role in Turkey's Accession to the EU

Written by Yilmaz Kaplan

substantial scepticism about Turkish accession among its own rank-and-file and electorate by calling for a 'privilege partnership' before the 2005 elections" (2007, p.112). In parallel with this political atmosphere, that was quite good for populism, a norm-based discourse emerged strongly after Merkel became Chancellor. For example, in one of her speeches, Angela Merkel said that "A Europe with Turkey as a fully fledged member won't be a Europe that is fully integrated" (MacMillan, 2010, p. 458). In another speech, she pointed out that the EU should determine its borders to operate conclusively (Schweiger, 2007, p. 165). However, as Poguntke underlines, Merkel's election propaganda did not turn into a campaign practice (2007, p. 112), and the new government was established as a grand coalition between the CDU and the SPD that had an optimum position between right-based and norm-based perspectives. The European Stability Initiative lists several reasons for this. First, the pro-Turkish SPD balanced the anti-Turkish CDU within the grand coalition because despite Merkel's Chancellorship, Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) became Germany's foreign minister. Second, Merkel was not in the opposition anymore, and as Chancellor, she needed to follow the international rule of *pacta sunt servanda*. This means that Merkel would respect the promise to Turkey for an "open-ended" accession negotiation. Third, Edmund Stoiber (who was more radical), the leader of the CSU (the sister party of the CDU), decided to stay in Bavaria rather than going to Berlin, and this decreased the pressure on Merkel.[9]

After the federal election in 2009, Merkel did not need the SPD to form the government anymore, but it could also not receive enough votes to form its own single-party government. Therefore, Merkel needed the FDP (Free Democratic Party) to form the current government, and in this government, Guido Westerwelle, the leader of the FDP, serves as the Foreign Minister of Germany. The important point here is that Westerwelle openly supports Turkey's accession to the EU, and so the counter-balance role against the CDU is now played by him. For example, when he visited Turkey in July 2010, he pledged his full support for Turkey's accession.[10] As a result, it can be argued that there is no change in the position of Merkel's second government towards Turkey's membership, and actually, Merkel needed to play her opposition policy against Turkey's membership without infringing on the "*pacta sunt servanda*" rule. If we look at Merkel's speech given in her visit to Cyprus, it can be argued that the deadlocked Cyprus issue will constitute one of the main reasons Merkel opposes Turkish membership, because she never mentioned the privileged partnership for Turkey. However, she mostly emphasized Turkey's obligation to extend the Ankara Agreement to Greek Cyprus.[11]

## Conclusion

This study focused on the question: how do domestic dynamics affect Germany's position towards Turkey's accession to the EU. The aim of the study was to point out the relations between German public opinion, domestic politics, and Germany's position towards Turkey's membership. In parallel with this aim, an efficient theoretical lens was developed to carry out the study in an analytical way. At the macro level, the point of departure for the study was that member states are the main actors in terms of the enlargement of the EU, and their domestic dynamics also play a role in determining their position towards any possible enlargement. However, to understand their attitudes towards any specific enlargement issue, such as the Eastern Enlargement, further approaches were needed. At this point, Sjursen has a well formulated approach, and according to it, interest-based, norm-based, and, or, right-based considerations affect the member states' position towards new enlargements in the EU.

Before focusing on Germany's position towards Turkey's membership, Germany's Eastern Enlargement policy was discussed to set a general framework. Later, the study focused on the domestic dynamics of Germany and German's attitudes towards Turkey's membership. In this sense, German public opinion and the main political parties were taken as units of analysis. In terms of German public opinion, it is clear that most German citizens are against Turkey's membership, but they have different reasons for their opposition (interest, norm, and, or, right based reasons). As for the political parties, while the Christian Democrats are against Turkey's membership under the influence of norm-based considerations, the Social Democrats and the liberals have a right-based perspective, and they support Turkey's membership to the EU if Turkey completes the EU's human rights and democracy criteria. However, recently, German coalition governments have been established with these parties, therefore, the CDU's norm-based opposition has been balanced with the right-based SPD and FDP.

As a result, it is clear that Germany does not have a stable position towards Turkey's membership despite Merkel's

# Germany's Role in Turkey's Accession to the EU

Written by Yilmaz Kaplan

recent speculative speeches, and Turkey should develop policies that encourage right-based dynamics in Germany to progress the process and to accelerate its accession negotiations with the EU.

Appendix 1

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# Germany's Role in Turkey's Accession to the EU

Written by Yilmaz Kaplan

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[1] <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/slovenian-vote-clears-croatia-s-main-obstacle-eu-accession-news-494916>, accessed on 01.11.2010.



## Germany's Role in Turkey's Accession to the EU

Written by Yilmaz Kaplan

[2] The enlargement has not been yet a foreign policy issue on which the elites give decisions or at least European nations' consideration has increased about the issue.

[3] <http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article10168942/69-Prozent-sind-gegen-den-EU-Beitritt-der-Tuerkei.html>, accessed on 12.01.2011.

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