

# Europeanization: Analyzing the Domestic Change in Turkey

Written by Diğdem Soyaltın

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Europeanization has been a valuable tool to examine the EU-induced change in its member states (Duina 1997; Heritier *et al.* 2001; Börzel 2003; Börzel/Risse 2003; Falkner *et al.* 2005; Zürn/Joerges 2005). Yet, the transformative power of Europe has reached well beyond its boundaries with the implementation of its theoretical models to examine the domestic change in the recently acceding states, candidate, and non-members countries (Lavenex 2004; Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier 2005; Sedelmeier 2011; Börzel/Risse 2012; Elbasani 2012). Mostly inspired by this thriving research agenda, an increasing number of scholars have become interested in analyzing the transformative power of Europe on domestic change in Turkey.

### Europeanization and Domestic Change: Theoretical Approaches

There is a lively debate in the literature over the concrete definition of Europeanization (Ladrech 1994; Cowles *et al.* 2001; Radaelli 2000; Olsen 2002; Börzel/Risse 2003). Yet, within the framework of this article, the term is understood as 'the domestic impact of the EU' (Sedelmeier 2006: 4). With the enlargement of the EU to the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) this transformative impact has become more evident on the domestic structures since we witnessed a comprehensive political and economic transformation in the CEE countries after the collapse of the Communist regimes. In this regard, accession Europeanization has emerged as a separate research area (Kubicek 2003; Kelley 2004; Schimmelfennig/ Sedelmeier 2005; Pridham 2005; Vachudova 2005; Jakoby 2006; Grabbe 2006).

As in the case of member state Europeanization, two institutionalist approaches, rationalist and sociological institutionalism, provide explanations for domestic change in the accession countries (Börzel/Risse 2003, 2007). Yet, the literature on accession Europeanization largely relies on the rationalist mechanisms of 'reinforcement by reward' for making candidate countries adopt and implement the *acquis communautaire* (Schimmelfennig/ Sedelmeier 2005; Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier 2004). Coupled with the misfit between the EU and domestic institutions, policies and political processes, the accession conditionality has been, to a large extent, effective to empower reformist coalitions bringing about domestic change in the CEE countries (Börzel/Risse 2003, 2007; Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier 2005; Vachudova 2005). However, it has been highly challenged in Western Balkans (WB) mostly due to the limited state capacities and ethnic conflicts in these countries (Börzel 2011; Elbasani 2012). The studies examining the theoretical premises of Europeanization literature for the case of Turkey by comparing it with the CEE countries (Kubicek 2003; Schimmelfennig *et al.* 2003; Dimitrova 2011) and with the other candidates in the WB (Noutcheva/Düzgüt 2012) demonstrate that approaches to accession Europeanization largely count for the Turkish case as well (see Börzel 2012; Börzel/Soyaltın 2012).

### Europeanization Hits Turkey

In 1999, Turkey obtained an accession perspective with the decision of the Helsinki European Council. Since then, the concept of 'Europeanization' has become a buzzword in most of the studies dealing with the EU-Turkey relations (Bölükbaşı *et al.* 2010:468). While the Europeanization has been mostly conceptualized as a normative or legal framework (Bölükbaşı *et al.* 2010:465), scholars mostly use the term to examine the democratic change in the

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political regime as a result of political reforms in order to meet the Copenhagen criteria (Ugur 1999; Aydın/Keyman 2004; Bac 2005; Keyman/Önis 2007; Faucompret/Konings 2008; Bardakci 2008; Grigoriadis 2009). Yet, recently there are emerging empirical studies on the domestic impact of EU accession process on specific policies, political institutions, and political processes in Turkey using the well-equipped analytical toolbox of the Europeanization research (Nas/Özer 2012, Noutcheva/Düzgit 2012).

The scholars analyzing the domestic change in Turkey have, most of the time, relied on the conditional incentives exerted by the EU (Schimmelfennig *et al.* 2003). There is, to a large extent, a consensus in the literature on the fact that EU incentives created pressure for the adaptation of the EU rules, and resulted in comprehensive reforms, especially between 1999 and 2004 when the credibility of EU conditionality towards Turkey was high (Aydın/Keyman 2004; Baç 2005; Tocci 2005; Önis 2009; Noutcheva/Düzgit 2012). Between 1999 and 2004, Turkey introduced several constitutional reform packages in order to meet the political aspects of the Copenhagen criteria, which were virtually of a revolutionary character in that they required fundamental changes in the political structure, and were perceived as a direct challenge to Kemalism [1] (Glyptis, 2005; Önis 2006; Grigoriadis 2009).

It was the strong EU incentives that promoted the democratic reforms in the country. "Without the EU incentive, those changes would have been much harder to adopt" (Bac 2005:30). Although Europeanization and democratizations are strongly linked, several authors claim that the reform process in Turkey did not occur simply through a linear relationship based on EU policies of conditionality, and underline the existing domestic agenda of the constitutional reforms (Kalacycioglu 2011) and democratization *per se*, which has recently coupled with the Europeanization process (Ugur 1999; Oguzlu 2004; Ulusoy 2007). Whether Europeanization has been an anchor or a trigger for domestic transformation process in Turkey is an open question. Yet, one can confidently claim that Turkey passed through a major political reform process, between 1999 and 2004 (Aydın/Keyman 2004; Baç 2005; Tocci 2005; Griogriadis 2009). While the external incentives provided by the EU empowered the pro-reformist coalitions vis-à-vis the Kemalist and nationalist powers to push through domestic reforms they also provided opportunities to the Justice and Development Party known in Turkey by its Turkish acronym, AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) to overcome the resistance of veto players in the military, judiciary and bureaucracy in general, and consolidate its power in the state structure (Noutcheva/Düzgit 2012).

The picture, however, started to change after 2005 since the credibility of the EU accession perspective has dropped dramatically. First, the rhetorical changes in EU's enlargement strategy had an extensive negative impact to the EU reform process in Turkey (Saatcioglu 2010:8-9). The change in the EU's way of handling enlargement has become more evident with the EU's decisions underlining the open-ended nature of the accession negotiations and the importance of Union's capacity to absorb new members without risking governability of itself.[2] Second, the 'privileged partnership' debate that flourished among several EU member states (especially in France, Germany and Austria) questioning the decision of launching accession negotiations with Turkey also sent blurred signals to the policy makers in Turkey (Öniş 2009:41-2; Lavenex/Schimmelfennig 2006: 140). This downward trend was reinforced by European Council's decision partially suspending of the negotiations in eight chapters in December 2006 in protest to Turkey's refusal to open its ports and airports to trade with Cyprus.[3] As a result, EU conditionality lost its credibility after 2005 (Saatcioglu 2010; Noutcheva/Düzgit 2012; Yilmaz 2012). This, in return, paved the way to the rise of anti-European sentiments in Turkey, which made it more difficult for the AKP government to mobilize support in favor of implementing EU demands for reform, and weakened its hand in its pro-EU politics (Patton 2007; Onar 2007; Çarkoğlu/Kentmen 2011).

Since then, the EU reform process in Turkey slowed down in general which triggered a debate on AKP's limits as a reformist government (Patton 2007; Önis 2008; Schimmelfennig 2009; Saatcioglu 2010, Önis 2013). Yet, the story is not that straightforward when different policy fields are taken into account. Therefore, scholars should analyze domestic politics more thoroughly before reaching quick conclusions and claiming that the overall reform process stalled in the country. The empirical evidence suggests that there are instances of ongoing domestic reforms in several policy areas (e.g judicial and military reforms, fight against corruption reforms, minority rights, Ombudsmanship reform), which are mostly motivated by domestic priorities and motivations (Aydın/Carkoglu 2009; Buhari-Gulmez 2011; Noutcheva/Düzgit 2012; Yilmaz 2012; Yilmaz/Soyaltın 2013). Like most of the countries in south-East Europe (Spendzharova/Vachudova 2012; Börzel/Pamuk 2012; Ademmer/Börzel 2012), the political

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actors in Turkey selectively adopt the EU policies in a way to pursue their own political agenda, attract votes in the elections and consolidate their power in the national structure (Börzel 2012; Yilmaz 2012). In sum, the domestic impact of the EU has been differential, it varies across policies and institutions. As mentioned by Börzel (2012) *It is the domestic scope conditions, stupid!*” what matters the most for the differential impact of the EU on the domestic change in Turkey.

Besides being selective, the Europeanization process also remained, to a great extent, shallow in Turkey. While Turkish authorities adopted a massive amount of legislation in many policy areas in the last decade, the practical implementation of the domestic reforms remained rather limited. Scholars already identified such implementation pathologies in the CEE countries. In most of the CEE the adopted EU rules are still often not properly and fully applied and enforced (Börzel 2009; Falkner *et al.* 2008). This has given rise to “shallow Europeanization” (Goetz 2005: 262) “Potemkin harmonization” (Jacoby 1999) or “world of dead letters” (Falkner *et al.* 2008). In the Western Balkans, the change in the formal structures is not properly followed by the practical implementation, as well (Elbasani 2012).

The empirical evidence shows the story also repeats itself in Turkey in several policy areas. For example, the deeply entrenched mechanisms of patronage and clientelistic networks, and weak institutional capacities (Adaman 2011; Aydin/Carkoglu 2009; Baran 2000) resulted in problems with regard to the practical implementation of fight against corruption reforms in the public sector (Ömurgönül/Doig 2012, Soyaltın 2012). Constrained by the political culture, administrative capabilities, and centralized decision-making system, compliance with the EU's rules and practices in the environmental policy (Unalan/Cowell 2009) or in the regional policy (Celenk/Güney 2010; Ertugal 2011) also echo the country's wider problems with regard to the practical implementation. In this regard, the EU's twinning exercises where the Turkish officials work with their EU counterparts and capacity building activities have gained more importance for the strengthening of the state capacity and enforcement of the legal changes (Aydin/Carkoglu 2009; Bac 2005; Noutcheva/Düzgüt 2012). Last but not least, the role of civil society organizations and social learning mechanisms are likely to have greater impact in increasing the acceptance of the adopted EU rules and promoting their internalization, as the process unfolds.

As the empirical evidence suggests, the reform process in Turkey is far from being completed. Time will tell whether the political actors will pursue further change in line with the European rules and practices which is very much related with the flexibility of the secular republic, and existence of the grassroots actors demanding a more democratic and liberal state. Furthermore, clear signals of Brussels concerning the accession negotiations have immense importance in strengthening the hands of the reformist actors in Turkey, especially at a time when the country is perceived as a role model for the emerging Arab democracies.

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[1] Kemalism, as the national state doctrine, defines the basic characteristics of the Republic of Turkey, and is based on two core principles: one, secularism, the strict separation of religion and state, and two, a nationalism reflecting a single Turkish identity. Turkey's identification with Europe, and West in general was the product of the Kemalist ideals.

[2] European Commission 2006: Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006-2007. Including annexed special report on the EU's capacity to integrate new members, COM (2006) 649 Final, Brussels.

[3] European Council 2006: Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council, 14/15 December 2006, 16879/1/06, Brussels

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