

Europeanization in Turkey: stretching a concept to its limits?

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Arbeitspapier / working paper

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Börzel, T. A., & Soyaltin, D. (2012). *Europeanization in Turkey: stretching a concept to its limits?* (KFG Working Paper Series, 36). Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, FB Politik- und Sozialwissenschaften, Otto-Suhr-Institut für Politikwissenschaft Kolleg-Forschergruppe "The Transformative Power of Europe". <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-371731>

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WORKING PAPER

KFG
The
Transformative
Power of Europe

EUROPEANIZATION IN TURKEY

Stretching a Concept to its Limits?

Tanja A. Börzel and Digdem Soyaltin

No. 36 | February 2012



KFG Working Paper Series

Edited by the *Kolleg-Forscherguppe* "The Transformative Power of Europe"

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Editorial assistance and production: André Berberich and Dominik Maier

Börzel, Tanja A./Soyaltin, Digidem 2012: Europeanization in Turkey. Stretching a Concept to its Limits? KFG Working Paper Series, No. 36, February 2012, Kolleg-Forscherguppe (KFG) "The Transformative Power of Europe" Freie Universität Berlin.

ISSN 1868-6834 (Print)

ISSN 1868-7601 (Internet)

This publication has been funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

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EUROPEANIZATION IN TURKEY

STRETCHING A CONCEPT TO ITS LIMITS?

Tanja A. Börzel and Digidem Soyaltin

Abstract

Research on Europeanization and domestic change has moved south-eastwards and was provided with another real-world experiment when it has meet with Turkey. This paper explores to what extent Europeanization approaches travel to Turkey, which does have a membership perspective that looks, however, ever less credible. The first part outlines the main findings of research on 'External Europeanization' focusing on factors that have limited or at least qualified the domestic impact of the EU in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) and Western Balkan (WB) accession countries. The paper, then, discusses to what extent Europeanization approaches need further qualification when applied to Turkey, which squares on democracy with the Western Balkans (with the exception of Croatia), but whose statehood is less limited. We argue that existing Europeanization approaches, largely, account for the overall moderate degree of Europeanization in Turkey. Yet, selective and differential domestic changes are mostly related to the extent to which EU conditionality helps domestic actors gain or hold political power and push their own political agenda. The paper concludes by summarizing the major implications Turkey's accession to the EU has for Europeanization approaches and discussing why Turkey is not a case *sui generis*.

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1. Introduction¹

Research on Europeanization and domestic change is thriving. With the borders of the European Union (EU) having moved south-eastwards, we have been awarded yet another real world experiment on the domestic impact of the EU. Together with the Western Balkan countries, Turkey obtained an accession perspective. Whether the ‘golden carrot’ is big enough, however, to draw Turkey closer to Europe, is still an open question. Not only is the misfit with EU demands for political and economic reforms greater than in case of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, yet, the EU also has exerted much less pressure for adaptation on the Turkish government and the accession perspective granted in 1999 is losing credibility. Moreover, like in case of the Western Balkans, both the willingness and the capacity of the Turkish government to implement the *acquis communautaire* are more limited.

Since Turkey obtained an accession perspective in December 1999, studies dealing with EU-Turkey relations have stretched the concept of Europeanization to cover a wide range of empirical observations (see Radaelli 2000). Most of them focus on broader domestic changes in response to the Copenhagen criteria, regarding the democratic quality of the political regime (Aydın/Keyman 2004; Baç 2005; Faucompret/Konings 2008; Keyman/Öniş 2007; Ulusoy 2005), the role of the military (Gürsoy 2011; Heper 2005), the national identity of Turkey as a strong secular state (Bardakçı 2008; Grigoriadis 2009), and the state-society relations (Diez et al. 2005; İçduygu 2008). By linking Europeanization with democratization, Europeanization has been largely conceptualized within a normative or legalistic framework (Bölükbaşı et al. 2010), while empirical studies on the domestic impact of EU accession on specific policies, political institutions, and political processes in Turkey are still rare (but see Kirişçi 2011; Nas/Özer 2012).

Embarking on substantial reforms to comply with the EU’s political conditionality, Turkey seems to be “a textbook example” (Kirişçi 2011) of the external incentive model developed by Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005: 10-18). Yet, since 2005, the credibility of the EU accession perspective has dropped dramatically (Saatçioğlu 2010). While the reform process stalled in some areas such as the resolution of the Cyprus conflict, the recognition of the Armenian genocide,² or the work on the new Constitution, domestic change has continued with regard to minority rights or asylum policy (Kirişçi 2011; Noutcheva/Düzgüt 2012; Yılmaz 2011). Why is there still Europeanization despite these unfavorable conditions and why has the domestic impact of the EU been differential, i.e., varies across policies and institutions?

Can Europeanization approaches account for the differential impact of the EU on Turkey? The paper explores whether the Europeanization literature travels southeast. We will start by summarizing the main findings of research on ‘External Europeanization’ focusing on factors that have limited or at least qualified the domestic impact of the EU in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) and Western Balkan (WB) accession countries. The second part of the paper will discuss to what extent Europeanization approaches need further qualification when applied to Turkey, which squares even on democracy with the WB (with the exception of Croatia), but whose statehood is less limited. As a result, Turkey has greater capacities to

1 We thank Ioannis Grigoriadis, Kemal Kirişçi, Beken Saatçioğlu, and Gözde Yılmaz for the helpful comments on previous versions of this paper.

2 The Armenian genocide addresses the recognition of the mass deportations and killings of the Armenian population of Ottoman Empire in 1914/15. While still denying the occurrence of genocide, recent governments of Turkey have taken several important steps to improve relations with Armenia.

introduce domestic reforms required by the EU than most of the Western Balkans candidate countries. With regard to its willingness, the size and credibility of EU incentives have become insufficient to reward Turkey for its progress. We will argue that selective and differential domestic changes are largely related to the extent to which EU conditionality helps domestic actors gain or hold political power. The Europeanization literature has identified differential empowerment as a key scope condition for the EU to induce domestic change (Börzel/Risse 2003; Cowles et al. 2001; Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier 2005; Vachudova 2005). The case of Turkey shows that not only pro-Western, liberal reform coalitions can use the EU to advance and legitimize their political agenda. The paper will conclude by summarizing the major implications Turkey has for Europeanization approaches and discussing why Turkey is not a case *sui generis*.

2. Reaching out? From Membership to Accession Europeanization

Membership Europeanization works to a large extent through legal coercion. EU member states are subject to policies and institutions diffused by the case law of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) or European directives harmonizing national legislations (Börzel/Risse 2012a). Yet, the shadow of hierarchy cast by the supremacy and direct effect of EU law also provides incentives, e.g. in form of legal sanctions (Börzel 2003) and arenas for socialization and persuasion (Panke 2007). For the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe, EU infringement proceedings and the Control and Verification Mechanism substitute accession conditionality as major incentives for post-accession compliance (Sedelmeier 2012; Spendzharova/Vachudova 2012). During the accession process, the EU casts at best a weak shadow of hierarchy and largely relies on positive and negative incentives for making candidate countries adopt and implement the *acquis communautaire*. The current candidate countries are even more subject to such accession conditionality than their Central and Eastern European predecessors (Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier 2004). However, its credibility is declining given the EU's enlargement fatigue and the enormous changes many of the Western Balkans and Turkey still have to undergo in order to qualify for the next steps in the accession process. So far, Croatia is the only candidate that will join the EU in the near future (Elbasani 2012a; Noutcheva/Düzgit 2012). While Turkey's capacities to implement domestic reforms is less limited than in most of the Western Balkan candidates, its perspective as well as its own enthusiasm for membership has been fading.

The literature on Accession Europeanization has identified misfit and membership conditionality as two factors that decisively shape the effectiveness of the EU's transformative power in the Central and Eastern European accession countries (Kelley 2006; Lavenex 2004; Schimmelfennig/Trauner 2010). If low and non-credible conditionality combines with high policy or institutional misfit, EU-induced domestic change is unlikely to occur because costs are high and the EU offers little to pay them off (Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier 2004). Yet, despite high misfit, substantial costs, and few incentives, we do find evidence for the EU's influence on both institutional and policy change (Ertugal 2011; Kirişçi 2011; Nas/Özer 2012; Noutcheva/Düzgit 2012; Yılmaz 2012). The domestic impact of the EU on Turkey may be patchy, often shallow, but certainly not spurious. While the EU is usually not the only game in town and Turkey is not merely downloading EU policies and institutions, the EU has influenced domestic change even where its shadow of hierarchy and conditionality is weak or non-existent. At the same time, there is significant variation. To what extent can existing approaches of Europeanization and domestic change account for the differential impact of the EU on Turkey?

3. Beyond Misfit and EU Pressure for Adaptation: Factors Mediating Accession Europeanization

The misfit between European and domestic policies, institutions, and political processes is a necessary condition for domestic change. To what extent such misfit translates into change depends on domestic institutions which mediate or filter the domestic impact of Europe.³

Rational choice institutionalism argues that the EU facilitates domestic change through changing opportunity structures for domestic actors. In a first step, misfit between the EU and domestic norms creates demands for domestic adaptation. However, it takes agency to translate misfit into domestic change. In a second step, the downloading of EU policies and institutions by the member states is shaped by cost/benefit calculations of strategic actors, whose interests are at stake. Institutions constrain or enable certain actions of rational actors by rendering some options more costly than others. From this perspective, Europeanization is largely conceived as an emerging political opportunity structure which offers some actors additional resources to exert influence, while severely constraining the ability of others to pursue their goals. Domestic change is facilitated, if EU incentives discourage domestic actors to veto adaptation to EU requirements (*veto players*) or if, on the contrary, they empower domestic reform coalitions by providing them with additional resources to exploit the opportunities offered by Europeanization (*formal supporting institutions*).

Sociological institutionalism draws on a normative logic of appropriateness to argue that actors are guided by collectively shared understandings of what constitutes proper, socially accepted behavior. Such collective understandings and intersubjective meaning structures strongly influence the way actors define their goals and what they perceive as rational behavior. Rather than maximizing their egoistic self-interest, actors seek to meet social expectations in a given situation. From this perspective, Europeanization is understood as the emergence of new rules, norms, practices, and structures of meaning to which member states are exposed and which they have to incorporate into their domestic rule structures. If there is such a misfit, it also takes agency to bring about domestic change. However, the ways in which domestic actors engage with reforms are different. Norm entrepreneurs such as epistemic communities or advocacy networks socialize domestic actors into new norms and rules of appropriateness through persuasion and learning, a process through which they redefine their interests and identities accordingly. The more active norm entrepreneurs and EU allies are and the more they succeed in making EU policies resonate with domestic norms and beliefs, the more successful they will be in bringing about domestic change. Moreover, collective understandings of appropriate behavior strongly influence the ways in which domestic actors download EU requirements. For example, a consensus oriented or cooperative decision-making culture helps to overcome multiple veto points by rendering their use for actors inappropriate. Such consensus oriented political culture allows for a sharing of adaptational costs which facilitates the accommodation of pressure for adaptation.

How do these two approaches fare in accounting for the differential impact of the EU on accession countries? In the accession process, misfit combines with conditional incentives in the *pressure for adaptation* the EU

³ On the following see Börzel/Risse 2003; Börzel/Risse 2007.

exerts. For the CEE countries, “reinforcement by reward” (Schimmelfennig et al. 2005; cf. Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier 2005) was strong enough to overcome the resistance of veto players against the substantial costs entailed in compliance with the Copenhagen criteria and the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* (Andonova 2003; Grabbe 2006; Jacoby 2006; Pridham 2005; Vachudova 2005). Europeanization has empowered CEE reformists and moderates over nationalist forces to push through domestic reforms. If domestic veto players have mattered, they delayed rather than forestalled compliance with EU requirements (Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier 2006; Vachudova 2005). At the same time, formal veto players helped lock-in institutional changes induced by the EU in case these changes no longer fit government preferences (Sedelmeier 2012). Hence, the mediating effect of both informal institutions and veto players is more ambivalent since they may facilitate as well as impair Europeanization.

While the rationalist mechanisms of ‘differential empowerment through conditionality’ have dominated Accession Europeanization, socialization and social learning have played a role, too (Kelley 2004; Kubicek 2003; Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier 2005). Next to financial and technical assistance and the substantial reward of membership, the EU provides elites in accession countries with the necessary legitimacy to enact domestic change. The strong domestic consensus in favor of EU membership in their ‘return to Europe’ allowed CEE decision-makers to silence domestic veto players inside and outside government, despite the considerable costs incurred by EU policies. Moreover, the Copenhagen criteria strongly resonated with the ongoing reform agendas and large parts of the societies in the CEE countries supporting political and economic transition started with the ‘velvet revolution’ of 1989. The legitimacy of the EU generated sufficient diffuse support through the identification with Europe that often trumped cost/benefit calculations in the adoption of and adaptation to the package of enlargement conditionality. It also facilitated access and influence of (trans-) national norm entrepreneurs who had little difficulties in invoking the resonance of EU requirements with domestic norms and values as to increase their acceptance and promote their internalization. While it did not forge completely new identities and beliefs, EU accession reinforced the identification with Europe (Risse 2010).

Existing Europeanization approaches did a fairly good job in accounting for the differential impact of accession on the Central and Eastern Europe. They require some serious adjustments when applied to the Western Balkans. While the CEE countries had made steady progress towards becoming consolidated democracies with functioning market economies, the Western Balkans remain “borderline case” of transition (Elbasani 2012b). Albania, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo are still only partly free and their statehood is either weak or contested. Secessionist movements, unsettled borders, ethnic tensions, deficient state capacity, and/or strong clientelistic networks have severely mitigated the transformative power of the EU (Börzel 2011b).

The EU certainly empowered domestic reform coalitions vis-à-vis nationalist and post-communist parties. By late 1990s, the EU willingness to withdraw support and shun the Tudjman regime has emboldened democratic opposition in Croatia. The leverage of the EU was also crucial for the democratization of the nationalist Hrvatska demokratska zajednica (HDZ), who made EU membership the primary goal after 2003 and ousted hardliners from top positions in the party leadership (Boduszynski 2012). Similarly, the EU’s strong stance against the Milosevic regime as much as the use of coercive instruments strengthened support for the opposition forces and facilitated their electoral victory in the 2000 elections (Stojanovic 2012).

At the same time, however, liberal reform coalitions have been too weak vis-à-vis nationalist or post-socialist forces to get empowered by the EU in the first place (Spendzharova/Vachudova 2012; Vachudova 2005). Moreover, informal institutions and practices of rent-seeking and clientelism provide domestic actors with viable possibilities to block domestic institutional change (Noutcheva/Düzgit 2012). Finally, empowering domestic reformists is not enough if actors lack the necessary resources to introduce domestic change. The limited administrative capacities of the CEE candidate countries already mitigated the domestic impact of EU accession in CEE (Börzel 2009b; Noutcheva/Bechev 2008). In the Western Balkans, the lack of state capacities is even more pronounced and exacerbated by the contentedness of borders and political authority (Elbasani 2012a).

Public support for EU norms and values and, more broadly speaking, EU membership is more fragile in the Western Balkan candidate countries, too. While Europeanization and democratization are clearly linked, there is public resentment whenever EU demands for compliance with the Copenhagen criteria clash with nationalist beliefs, e.g., regarding the role of minorities and the extradition of war criminals to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) (Boduszynski 2012; Stojanovic 2012). The legacies of the past resonate less with the EU's reform agenda and undermine its legitimacy (Elbasani 2012b).

While socialization takes time, the dominance of the “external incentive model” and “differential empowerment through conditionality” has given rise to “shallow Europeanization” (Goetz 2005: 262) or “Potemkin harmonization” (Jacoby 1999) as we have found in the Central and Eastern Europe. The CEE countries formally adopted a massive amount of EU legislation, which, however, is still often not properly applied and enforced and, thus, has not changed actors' behavior (Börzel 2009a; Falkner et al. 2008) or fostered internalization and long-term rule consistent practices. In the Western Balkans, history seems to repeat itself. EU accession results in rhetorical and often also formal rule adoption, but scarcely in rule-consistent behavior (Elbasani 2012a).

In order to explore such problems of ‘decoupling’, which also appear to abound in Turkey, Europeanization research has started to go beyond formal adaptation and systematically study the practical implementation of and behavioral compliance with domestic reforms identifying additional scope conditions mitigating the transformative power of Europe.

4. It's the Domestic Structures, Stupid! Scope Conditions for Domestic Change

The mediating factors identified by the early Europeanization literature are less relevant (norm entrepreneurs, formal supporting institutions) or more ambivalent in their impact (veto players, informal institutions) in Southeast Europe than in Central and Eastern Europe. Studies on the Europeanization of current candidate states and neighborhood countries have therefore identified further scope conditions for EU-induced domestic institutional change focusing on *power (a)symmetries*, *regime type* (democracy vs. autocracy), *domestic incentives* for change, and *degrees of statehood* (consolidated vs. limited).⁴

⁴ The following draws on Börzel and Risse 2012a; Börzel and Risse 2012b; see also Ademmer and Börzel 2012.

Power (a)symmetries

The distribution of material and ideational resources between the EU, on the one hand, and accession or neighborhood countries, on the other, is likely to matter in explaining the variation in domestic change. The degree of interdependence crucially shapes the pressure for adaptation the EU is able to exert and the power of the target country to resist such pressures. The economic and political power of the EU renders its external relations with accession and neighboring countries rather asymmetrical. In principle, they have much to gain by closer relations with the EU which then increases the EU's ability to exert pressure. However, some states possess resources (gas, oil) the EU is interested in, are of strategic importance and/or have the potential to create substantial negative externalities for the EU (illegal immigration, cross-border crime). Strategic or economic goals can seriously undermine the consistency of the EU in pushing for domestic change in its neighborhood (Börzel/Pamuk 2012; van Hüllen 2012).

Turkey's size, economic strength, and self-understanding as a regional power render its relations with the EU far less asymmetrical than in case of the Western Balkan accession candidates and the European Neighbourhood Countries. With the membership perspective ever losing credibility, its economic and political power makes Turkey a least likely case for Europeanization among the current candidate countries.

Regime Type

The democratic quality of a regime influences the willingness of state actors to promote domestic change in response to EU influence (Schimmelfennig et al. 2005). The costs of adaptation to EU demands for domestic change are lower for incumbent governments of democratic states with market economies than for authoritarian regimes, which have a firm grip on economy and society as a result of which compliance with EU requirements threatens their hold on power. At the same time, the latter are less likely to face pressure from below since domestic actors lack the political autonomy to mobilize in favor of compliance with EU demands for reform. Thus, we should expect the EU to be less likely to influence domestic change in authoritarian regimes. This scope condition applies particularly to EU demands for domestic reforms with regard to human rights, the rule of law, democracy, or market economy. These EU demands directly threaten the survival of authoritarian regimes and may challenge dominant identity constructions, as a result of which they are unlikely to lead to institutional reforms, unless other conditions are met (e.g. mobilization of domestic opposition with regard to human rights; see Risse et al. 1999).

The early Europeanization literature could not deal with regime type, since the EU 15 are all consolidated democracies, whereas Accession Europeanization still deals with mostly democratizing countries, including Turkey (Morlino/Sadurski 2010; Pridham 2005). Yet, Europeanization should meet greater resistance in areas such as minority rights or freedom of expression, where democratic institutions are less consolidated or change is still wanting.

Domestic Incentives

The Europeanization literature argues that the misfit between EU and domestic institutions, policies, and political processes affects the domestic balance of power among different actors. Misfit may lead to the

differential empowerment of societal as well as political actors. Those who profit from or are normatively aligned with the policies and rules emanating from Brussels will promote domestic institutional change. Yet, the literature on member state and CEE Europeanization has overlooked that, first, the EU can empower not only liberal, but also non-liberal forces and, second, that EU empowerment hinges on certain domestic conditions. In order to have an impact, EU incentives or socialization and persuasion efforts have to align with domestic incentives, political preferences, or survival strategies of ruling elites, so that the latter can use EU policies and institutions to push their own political agenda, please their constituencies, and regain or consolidate their power (Ademmer 2011; Ademmer/Börzel 2012; Börzel/Pamuk 2012; Spendzharova/Vachudova 2012; Woll/Jacqout 2010).

If these findings hold, we should expect parties, such as the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, AKP), which do not necessarily fall into the pro-Western, liberal camp, to be empowered by the EU, too – even if the EU’s liberal policies and institutions impose significant costs and are not necessarily compatible with their overall political orientation. EU demands for domestic change are likely to have an impact in Turkey, even if they are costly and even if the membership perspective is no longer credible, if EU policies align with the political preferences and survival strategies of political elites.

“Turkey should be accepted into the European Union. If not, we’ll change the name of the Copenhagen criteria to the Ankara criteria and continue with the reforms. (...) There’s no turning back on the road that Turkey’s been taking to integrate with Europe, and there are no other alternatives” (Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan during an address to the Azerbaijani Parliament in 2005).⁵

Degrees of (Limited) Statehood

States vary considerably in the degree to which they are able to adopt, implement, and enforce decisions. While failed, failing, and fragile states are rather rare in the international system, “areas of limited statehood” are ubiquitous (Risse 2011). Many countries lack the capacity to implement and enforce the law in large parts of their territory or with regard to some policy areas. Yet, state capacity is a decisive pre-condition for governments to adopt and adapt to EU demands for domestic institutional change. First, the legal adoption and implementation of EU norms and rules requires significant state capacity. The Copenhagen criteria, therefore, require accession countries not only to transpose EU law into national legislation, which is less resource-intensive since staff, expertise, and money can be concentrated at the central level. They also need to have the administrative infrastructure in place to put EU laws into practice (cf. Elbasani 2012a). Likewise, non-state actors (civil society and business) require the capacity to push the reform agenda at the domestic level by exerting pressure on state actors, talking them into domestic change, and/or providing them with additional resources (Börzel 2009a; Sissenich 2007). Finally, the EU might be less inclined to push for domestic change in states whose institutions are already fragile (Börzel 2011a; Youngs 2001). Thus, the institutional and administrative capacity of states and degrees of statehood in general play a crucial role in mitigating the transformative power of the EU.

⁵ Recep Tayyip Erdogan: “Copenhagen criteria would become Ankara criteria.” *Journal of Turkish Weekly*, Friday, 1 July 2005, online <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/14088/erdogan-copenhagen-criteria-would-become-ankara-criteria.html> (last access November 23, 2011).

Turkey suffers less from problems of limited statehood than most of the Western Balkan candidate countries. At the same time, the lack of resources, particularly at the local level, and the political and administrative structures and challenges to Turkish statehood by Kurdish nationalist terrorism⁶ may seriously impair EU induced reforms, particularly with regard to the rule of law (Noutcheva/Düzgit 2012), the fight against corruption (Baran 2000; Soyaltın 2012), regional policy (Çelenk/Güney 2010; Dulupçu 2005; Ertugal 2010), external border controls (Özçürümez/Şenses 2011), and environmental governance (Unalan/Cowell 2009). Thus, Europeanization should be more likely in areas in which Turkish statehood is the least limited, i.e., necessary resources are available and national sovereignty is not challenged.

5. Turkey – A Case Sui Generis?

Approaches to (pre-CEE) Accession Europeanization give rise to a series of hypotheses with regard to the domestic impact on accession countries, which appear to largely hold for Turkey, too.

EU accession created pressure for the adaptation for deep-seated reforms between 1999 and 2004 when the credibility of EU conditionality towards Turkey was still high (Saatçioğlu 2010; Yılmaz 2011). Sizeable and credible EU incentives empowered pro-reformist coalitions vis-à-vis nationalist forces to push for domestic change (Aydın/Keyman 2004; Baç 2005; Börzel 2012; Grigoriadis 2009; Narbone/Tocci 2009; Noutcheva/Düzgit 2012; Öniş 2007; Tocci 2005). Whether the “prospect of starting accession negotiations worked wonders for Turkey’s transformation” (Kirişci 2011) or reinforced domestic reforms that started long before it received a membership perspective did so (Kalaycıoğlu 2011; Tocci 2005; Uğur 1999; Ulusoy 2005), is an open question. Especially after 2005, the EU certainly has provided not only new opportunities, but also legitimacy for the AKP government to overcome the resistance of veto players in the state structure (such as the military and large parts of the judiciary and bureaucracy) and to introduce domestic reforms which are to a large extent in line with its own political agenda.

Like in the Western Balkan, the formal adoption of the *acquis communautaire* is selective and often decoupled from behavioral practices. At the same time, we also find instances of ‘reversed decoupling’, where Turkish behavioral practices were changed in line with EU requirements, but preceded the formal adoption of EU policies. This could be cases of ‘spurious Europeanization’, in which either external actors other than the EU, such as the UN High Commission for Refugees, the European Convention of Human Rights, the Council of Europe, the US, or transnational actors in Europe induce the Turkish government to initiate domestic change, e.g., in area of migration and asylum (Kirişci 2011) and in broadcasting (Ayata 2012). Or Turkish policy-makers introduce domestic reforms that conform to EU demands, but are driven by their own political agenda as in case of the constitutional reforms in 2010 (Noutcheva/Düzgit 2012).

6 Since the 1980s, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has been using terrorist tactics against the Turkish state to advance their demands for an autonomous Kurdish state and greater cultural and political rights for the Kurds in Turkey.

Rather than spurious, however, Europeanization in Turkey appears to be often “bottom-up” (Jacquot/Woll 2003) or “indirect” (Börzel/Risse 2012a). Domestic actors are not merely downloading EU policies nor do they simply ignore them. Rather, they (ab)use the EU as a “legitimization device” (Tsarouhas 2012) to push their own political interests (Ademmer 2011; Ademmer/Börzel 2012; Börzel/Pamuk 2012). Between 1999 and 2002, the tripartite coalition government formed by the Democratic Left Party (DSP), the Motherland Party (ANAP), and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) had initiated political reforms, but still resisted Europeanization pressures in sensitive areas related to the Copenhagen political criteria, such as minority rights, judicial reform, asylum policies, or the fight against corruption, where EU policies challenged the foundations of the Turkish polity, and the political agenda of the ruling elites (Baç 2005; Glyptis 2005; Külahcı 2005; Öniş 2006; Soyaltın 2012). The Justice and Development Party (AKP) government with a more reformist stance appeared to be more forthcoming to the EU’s demands for domestic change. It instrumentalized the promotion of EU accession to widen its support base towards the center and to anchor its political reforms aimed at rolling back the influence of Kemalist forces and the military (Saatçioğlu 2010), while leaving areas untouched that have been key to its political agenda, e.g., the resolution of the Cyprus and the Armenian conflict, the promotion of freedom of expression, or the reform of the Law on Political Parties (Avcı 2011b; Göksel 2011; Öniş 2010; Uğur/Yankaya 2008; Waal 2011). Since the AKP has gained electoral support and the membership perspective became less credible in the post-2005 period, the EU has lost relevance for domestic institutional change. The fading support for EU membership in the Turkish public has further undermined the potential for using EU accession as a legitimization device. At the end of 2001, the support level exceeded 70 percent; by 2009 it had dropped to just below 50 percent (Çarkoğlu/Kentmen 2011: 375).

The declining importance of the EU has also revealed itself in the foreign policy domain which has considerably changed in recent years. The EU used to be the main reference point for Turkish foreign policy for a long time, e.g., in legitimizing the policy change regarding the settlement of the Cyprus conflict (Diez 2002; Kaliber 2012; Oğuzlu 2004; Rumelili 2005; Ulusoy 2008). Recently, however, the AKP government has started to shift the axis of Turkish foreign policy away from the EU (Öniş 2009; Terzi 2012), moving towards a multi-dimensional and cooperative approach aimed at improving relations particularly with the non-EU neighbors, notably Armenia, and strengthening its role as a regional power in the Middle East (Baç 2011; Baç/Gürsoy 2010; Öniş/Yılmaz 2009; Terzi 2010). It remains to be seen whether this commitment to a new approach results in some substantial policy changes.

The ‘external incentive model’ certainly accounts for the selective and overall moderate degree of Europeanization in Turkey. Since the credibility of accession conditionality declines over time, however, it cannot explain why we do find instances of domestic change that conforms to EU demands in some areas and not in others. In the time of writing, the EU and Turkey opened 13 chapters in the accession negotiations, while 17 are frozen because the EU suspended negotiations or refused to open them in the first place. Nevertheless, the adoption and implementation of domestic reforms continued in some areas, including minority rights (Çarkoğlu/Bilgili 2011; Yılmaz 2011), reforms of the military (Gürsoy 2011; Heper 2005), the rule of law (Aydın/Çarkoğlu 2009; Noutcheva/Düzgüt 2012), social security (Göksel 2011), and regional and employment policies (Ertugal 2011; Bölükbaşı/Ertugal 2012).

The external incentive model and top-down approaches of Europeanization more broadly, have a hard time explaining domestic change in the absence of Europeanization pressures. The fading credibility of the membership perspective has not only undermined EU conditionality, but also limited the possibilities for social learning among Turkish elites. The recent change in Turkish foreign policy towards her neighboring countries (Cyprus, Armenia, Black Sea region) in adopting a soft power based and dialogue oriented approach may be regarded as a learning process and a change in decision-making procedures in foreign policy-making (Aydın/Açıkmeşe 2007; Baç/Gürsoy 2010; Canan 2009; Özcan 2008; Terzi 2010; Üstün 2010). Likewise, the reconfiguration of civil-military relations and minority rights in more liberal and democratic terms may present instances of social learning among Turkish ruling elites (Griogriadis 2008; Gürsoy 2011; Heper 2005; Keyman/Öniş 2007). Yet, these processes have not given rise to the emergence of new identities and beliefs, but to a redefinition of national interest which is challenged by novel perceptions of citizenship, national identity, and sovereignty (Akşit et al. 2011; Somer 2005; Tzimitras 2008) as well as by the wavering credibility of EU contractual obligations (Tocci 2008; Uğur 2001).

When it comes to domestic mediating factors, the role of formal and informal institutions appears to be marginal in driving domestic change. Civil society has been empowered in Turkey, not least through legal, financial, and technical support by the EU (Diez et al. 2005; İçduygu 2011). Yet, their role has been limited in policy making (Civicus 2010). Due to weak organizational capacities and in the absence of a strong culture of civic engagement, civil society has not been able to exert much pressure on state actors from below or persuade them into introducing reforms (Bardakçı 2008; Diez et al. 2005; Ergun 2010; Grigoriadis 2009; İçduygu 2008). Moreover, the decreasing public support for EU membership makes it more difficult to mobilize in favor of implementing EU demands for reform (Çarkoğlu/Kentmen 2011; Öniş 2010; Tanıyıcı 2010).

Euro-scepticism has also hardened among the opposition parties (Republican People's Party (CHP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), mostly due to strategic electoral considerations and domestic power struggles rather than ideology. The main opposition party, CHP, has been broadly supportive of the EU membership process and supported initial reforms. Yet, the party has been critical of the efforts made to meet the EU membership criteria which challenge the national unity, Kemalist political traditions, and the secular character of the Turkish state (Kubicek 2009; Öniş 2010). In recent years, especially from 2005 onwards, CHP has started to sound more resentful towards the EU membership process and has accused the AKP government of using the EU membership perspective to undermine secularism and promote its own agenda (Celep 2011). The MHP has traditionally been more critical towards European integration, but has fluctuated between soft and hard Euroscepticism. Its controversial stance in the last decade is largely explained by its position in the political spectrum, i.e., being in government, in opposition, or without seats in the parliament (Avcı 2011a; Bardakçı 2010). Finally, business maintains an interest in Europeanization mostly due to its pragmatic interests in EU capacity-building (İçduygu 2011; Öniş 2007; Uğur/Yankaya 2008). Next to the EU's financial and technical assistance, Turkish companies lobby for the adoption of EU standards and visa-facilitations to improve their trade relations with the EU. With accession negotiations being stalled, Turkish business associations have been supporting what the EU calls a "renewed positive agenda" to continue pro-EU reform talks outside the formal accession process.⁷

⁷ <http://www.theparliament.com/press-review-article/newsarticle/commissioners-discuss-renewed-positive-agenda-with-turkey/> (last access November 19, 2011).

Overall, domestic change in Turkey is less driven by the EU and its fading conditionality, but by the political agenda of the Turkish ruling elites and their preference for consolidating their political power. Europeanization appears to be most effective where domestic policy choices, e.g., to roll back the Kemalist legacy, align with EU demands for change (Noutcheva/Düzgit 2012; Saatçioğlu 2010) or the dissatisfaction with previous policy failures drives domestic policy makers to search for new policies the EU can provide, as in case of minority rights or the fight against corruption (Grigoriadis 2009; Kirişci 2011; Soyaltın 2012; Yılmaz 2012). Should the policy makers be dissatisfied with the domestic status quo, they attempt to draw lessons from previous policy failures and to learn new rules from elsewhere (Rose 1991; Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier 2005). In both policy areas, AKP governments have been dissatisfied with the policy failures of the previous governments, i.e., restrictive policies in minority rights and ineffective governing structures in the fight against corruption. The ruling elites have focused on these problems and adopted relevant institutional and legal changes to please their constituencies and increase their voting shares.

These findings show that there is nothing special about Europeanization in Turkey. Its relations with the EU are more symmetrical than in case of the Western Balkan countries as its membership perspective is less credible and it has more political and economic power. This significantly weakens the EU's transformative power in Turkey. At the same time, Turkey's statehood is less limited than in some of the Western Balkan countries. Where public institutions still lack staff, expertise, and money to adopt and implement EU policies, Turkey has benefitted from EU capacity-building in form of fiscal and technical transfers and twinning projects (Aydın/Çarkoğlu 2009; Baç 2005; Noutcheva/Düzgit 2012). Where Turkey may differ from the other candidate countries, is the impact of accession on its statehood.

While the EU has strengthened rather than weakened the state capacity of member states, candidates, and neighborhood countries (Börzel 2011a; Börzel/van Hüllen 2011), introducing and fortifying minority and civil rights, restricting the power of the military, or changing the status of Cyprus might arguably challenge or even undermine Turkish statehood, weakening both its willingness and capacity to comply with EU reform requirements. Together with the fading support for EU membership in Turkey, this may seriously constrain the potential of differential empowerment, curbing the EU's transformative power even more than the waning credibility of Turkey's accession perspective. If the EU is merely seen as a "spent force in world affairs" which "no longer provide[s] comfort, prosperity and wealth to its citizens",⁸ the EU may soon even lose its "passive leverage" (Vachudova 2005). Similar to the European Neighbourhood Countries, we are likely to see at best a "Europeanization à la carte", where Turkish incumbent elites will pick and choose EU policies to satisfy their constituencies and consolidate their political power (Ademmer 2011; Ademmer/Börzel 2012; Börzel/Pamuk 2012).

⁸ Former Turkish ambassador to the EU, Volkan Bozkir, online <http://euobserver.com/15/114324> (last access November 19, 2011).

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