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# **TURKEY-EU RELATIONS: SCRUTINISING THE INSTABILITY\***

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**Abstract:**

Turkey-EU relations have been object of various studies due to their complexity and instability. Beginning in 1959, Turkey is the country with the longest path towards the European Union, and these decades have been full of ups and downs. This article aims to explore the instability behind these relations, through the understanding of its causes and consequences, as well as providing some thoughts regarding a possible roadmap to overcome the stalled situation Turkey-EU relations are found nowadays – the 3 C's solution.

**Key-words:** accession process; European Union; identity; instability; Turkey.

**Resumo:**

As relações UE-Turquia têm sido objeto de vários estudos devido à sua complexidade e instabilidade. Remontando a 1959, o percurso da Turquia em direção à União Europeia é já o mais longo e conta com inúmeros altos e baixos. Este artigo pretende explorar a instabilidade destas relações através da compreensão das suas causas e dos seus efeitos, propondo ainda algumas reflexões sobre formas de ultrapassar a inércia da situação atual – a solução dos três C's.

**Palavras-chave:** identidade; instabilidade; processo de adesão; União Europeia; Turquia.

### **Turkey-EU unstable relations**

Although the relationship with Europe could be traced back to the Ottoman Empire period, due to the influence received from the West and to the Ottoman involvement in the European concert, this agitated process started in 1959 when Turkey asked for Association with the EEC. It came to happen four years later, since when the ups and downs have always been present in this link with the West. A critical point was reached in the 1970's with the Turkish invasion of Cyprus (Faucompret & Konings, 2008: 24-29). In spite of this situation, the proposals for integration were as recurrent as the European Community's refusals. The organisation justified its position with the political and economic instability of the country.

Still, in 1996 an agreement on the customs union entered into force and in 1999, in the Helsinki Summit, Turkey was given the candidate status, for having been considered that the country already fulfilled the majority of the Copenhagen criteria. As a matter of fact, other two factors are suspected to be involved in this positive movement: firstly, because of the CEEC's acceptance in NATO, being Turkey one of its members; secondly, the Greek allowed that status to Turkey, once granted that Cyprus would join the Community (Idem, 28; Fernandes, 2005: 131).

In March 2001 an Accession Partnership is signed and in the next year the Turkish government creates the "National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis", followed by a considerable reforming effort: 34 constitutional amendments in 2001 and a new Civil Code promoted considerable changes in sensitive areas, like the Human Rights and some freedoms - "These reforms were the first crucial responses to EU conditionality." (Düzgüt & Keyman, 2007: 73). As an incentive, the EU raises the financial pre-accession assistance during the following years, also thanks to the impetus provided by the AKP, the opposition and the civil society, all of them committed to this project, despite the internal obstacles some tried to lift (Idem: 76-79). Yet, the Turkish efforts were rewarded by the positive judgment of the 2004 Progress Report that allowed the European Council of that same year to give green light to the opening of the accession negotiations (Faucompret & Konings, 2008: 45).

Atila Eralp (2009), in a study devoted to “The role of temporality and interaction in the Turkey-EU relationship”, considers that these two variables (temporality and interaction) “are significant for explaining the (...) cyclical nature of the long relationship” (Idem: 150). Therefore, the author proposes a four-period division to study these relations.

The first period, the “harmony in the relationship”, is represented by the positive environment prompted by Cold War, during which Turkey played an essential role as an USA’s ally. Turkey’s application for associate membership in 1959 was well received by EEC politicians and there was a perspective for full membership in the long run. Domestically, this approach was seen as a path to modernisation and gathered general support (Idem: 151-52).

However, between 1970 and 1999 surfaced a period of “emergent discord”: the European Community began to diverge from the USA, it was an unstable international period and Turkey’s European vocation started to be questioned. Cyprus’ invasion, the military interventions and the reinforcement of pro-Islamic parties led to an internal climate of redefinition of Turkey’s identity and to a perception that the European insistence on democracy and Human Rights was an intrusion in internal affairs. Nevertheless, Prime-Minister Turgut Özal applied for full membership in 1987 and the Community’s unwillingness to accept it (after two and a half years to release the report) created a generalised feeling of resentment. Besides, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the new international system that emerged were not favourable to Turkey, given the fact that the country lost part of its importance as a Western hub in a key area and the European Commission was pointed out as starting to focus on the accession process of the Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC), putting Turkey’s application aside (Idem: 153-157).

1999 began the “positive turn” that lasted until 2004: the change in the Greek government, the capture of Öcalan (the founding member of the PKK), problems in Kosovo, 9/11 and Cyprus accession were part of a new international context that led to a change in the European approach towards Turkey, now concerned to include Turkey in the geopolitics of the Balkans, as well as to challenge the discourse of the “clash of civilisations”. Domestically, the need for the IMF intervention and the election of AKP were two situations that also promoted change, converging with the European willingness to increase the cooperation and interaction with Turkey, which ended up becoming a candidate country with a pre-accession strategy and a set of major reforms that followed it (Idem: 157-160).

Nevertheless, the volatility of these relations surfaced again since 2004 in what Eralp called the “negative turn”. After the start of negotiations, the international context became less friendly: Turkey became an easy target after the non-ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, some chapters were frozen because of the conflicts with Cyprus, the American invasion of Iraq promoted negative feelings in Turkey towards the Western world and the Turkish perceptions of

fewer incentives together with double standards and other unfair situations in the context of the accession process created this unfavourable environment. Turks became more sceptical regarding the approach to Europe, the government was aware of the political costs of supporting the accession bid in such a context, the opposition strengthen its nationalistic side, some sections of the economic elites began to worry about integration and possible negative impacts, the military were afraid of territorial issues, civil society felt excluded from the process and, therefore, the domestic environment was not also conducive to a new momentum in Turkey-EU relations in what comes to the commitment towards the changes needed to achieve full membership (Idem: 160-65).

As it can be perceived after the presentation of Atila Eralp's four periods, there is a clear movement of ups and downs in these relations, proving the thesis of the volatility of Turkey-EU relationship. Thus, it is important to analyse what is behind this situation, what it creates in terms of the accession process, as well as possible solutions to overcome it.

### Causes

Each one of the situations mentioned above is responsible, at a certain extent, for the instability of Turkey-EU relations. As a matter of fact, Cyprus, the Kurdish issue, Human Rights, democracy, Turkey's neighbourhood, socio-cultural profile, history, economy, population, etc. are among the reasons that, according to the readings of different authors and academics, hamper the good practices between the two actors. Politicians use them to promote their vision on the accession process, whether to support it or to impede its conclusion. However, more than the actual differences, a key aspect behind this instability is identity and perceptions. Not identity *per se* as an obstacle, but as a framework or mindset within which each side perceives (or misperceives) the other's behaviour, interpreting in his own way and giving origin to a response that will be interpreted by the other in turn.

Identity is a construct that comes from interaction. As long as groups are formed, positive or negative identification with other groups (or states in International Relations, for example) makes the group more or less willingly to engage with others (Zehfuss, 2004: 40). This resembles Wendt's theory that "Anarchy is what states make of it", given the fact that, although it is not easy, identities can change and subsequently the interests that are based on them change too. And it is through repeated interaction that identities and interests are created and maintained, giving origin to certain social structures that constrain choices and guide actors' behaviour. These structures become objective social facts and are only capable of changing through social learning and with conscious efforts to change it (Idem: 43-46).

Thus, identity constitutes a fundamental variable to be taken into consideration, as it is part of a broader socio-cultural framework that is able to provide a wider and deeper understanding of international affairs, contributing

to a more comprehensive knowledge of reality that should be combined with other approaches and perspectives, in order to better understand international phenomena and to strengthen IR as an academic field.

The examples of meaningful events that undermine the Turks' trust in the European Union proliferate. I chose to bring four symptomatic examples of how events, more than their material or physical tangibility, may originate, for what they mean, an alteration in a society's perceptions and interests.

The first example is brought by Tacar (2007: 130), according to whom, Turks (possibly due to their religious mindset) perceive treaties as forever binding documents that are never altered. However, if conditions change, they can be amended under the principle of *rebus sic stantibus*. Thus, when the Additional Protocol stated that the free flow of labour was to be implemented in November 1st 1986, Turks would not imagine that more than twenty years afterwards, the EU would have not complied with that condition, justifying its position with the changes in the labour market. From this perceptions conflict, that derives from each one's identity, some serious consequences can occur, such as the lack of identification with the other or even a lack of trust in the word of the partner, undermining their mutual confidence and generally worsening their relations.

This event, certainly not the only one in the long history of Turkey-EU relations is symptomatic of two further related issues: cultural arrogance and lack of coherence. The first idea relates to the question of the still present historical legacy of the ancient Europe-Ottoman Empire relations. Europe, being the model to be imitated and followed, at least gives the feeling that its cultural superiority entitles it to, to a certain extent, disregard some rules Europe itself determined, creating an unbalance with the partner, who, in order to achieve full membership, is not able to skip some of the conditions that were previously set. Conditionality process is specially criticised for the unequal conditions it creates and the lack of opportunity for the candidate to take part in the process of determining the changes and conditions that are expected from it. It is not this socio-political-cultural distance that is able to bring both sides together, diminishing their differences and promoting their cooperation; on the contrary, they can widen that gap and make it harder for both to communicate.

Concerning EU's lack of coherence, a second and concrete example can be provided in order to prove this point: when Erdogan visited Europe in February 2011 and met with, among others, Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Nicolas Sarkozy, a diplomatic conundrum arose, because during the Turkish Prime-Minister's visit, both European leaders clearly reinforced their opposition to Turkey's accession. Sarkozy argued that Turkey would destabilise the EU if it joined and that therefore a privileged partnership was a better solution (Rettman, 2011) as Angela Merkel has defended for quite a long time. Erdogan, during the same official travel, mentioned before a Turks' audience that xenophobia and Islamophobia was being felt in some European countries and added that "Obviously, developments in the accession process up till now give the im-

pression of discrimination" (Rettman, 2011). On the other hand, however, some months before, the then recently elected Prime-Minister David Cameron went to Ankara and declared his total support for Turkish membership, stating that the opponents of Turkey's membership were either protectionists or prejudiced (Público, 2010). Similarly, Italy considered that a "partnership" was not enough for Turkey (Reuters, 2010) and EU Enlargement Commissioner, Stefan Füle, said the EU was committed to allow Turkey to become a member: "There should be a zero doubt policy about our commitment. We have a very clear mandate from member states" (Füle cited in EurActive with Reuters, 2010). These contradictory opinions and statements coming from diverse parts and institutions of Europe are a clear sign of EU's lack of coherence, maybe a reflection of its own indecision regarding this issue or, more likely, the overlapping of some individual states' interests over the policies of the European Union.

The third example is provided by the EU's approach to the CEECs. For many authors, it was a clear example of positive discrimination with conditions that Turkey does not have. As Onis (1999: 108) asserts, the countries that ended up joining the EU in 2004 were relatively easily included in the Union, highlighting "the view that the EU is essentially a civilizational project" that created further obstacles to the pursue of the accession process for Turkey, concluding that "the comparative evidence suggests that the incentives available to Southern and Eastern European countries exceeded by a significant margin the transitional costs for implementing the necessary measures of adjustment [whilst] in Turkey (...) the reverse has been the case" (Idem: 131).

Tacar (2007: 134) agrees with this position and adds the fact that, although many current member states did not fully complied with all the conditions in order to enter the Union, even small details in the Turkish process are used to delay it, leading the country to a feeling of frustration that results from this unfair double standards' policy.

Finally, there is the 2007 enlargement to Bulgaria and Romania. These countries were not perceived by Turks as ready to full membership and, hence, their inclusion in the Union was regarded as unfair. Nicholas Sarokhanian and Yannis Stivachtis led a study exclusively based on a comparative approach regarding the European Commission Annual Progress Reports of Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania:

"In an effort to emphasize that Turkey has, so far, been unjustly left outside the European Union, many have argued that when compared to Bulgaria and Romania, Turkey scores better in its fulfilment of the Copenhagen political criteria than the other two, which jointed the EU on 1 January 2007." (Sarokhanian and Stivachtis, 2008: 279)



The authors compare the different chapters of the Reports individually and recognise, for example, that in relation to both countries, Turkey needs some improvement in the fighting against corruption and transparency (Idem: 283) – two important features of the rule of law. However, it is noticed that the executive branch of the Turkish public administration is better than the one of Romania (Idem: 284). The critics regarding the implementation of the *acquis* in terms of the judicial system were similar to Romania's and that, in this field, "At the time of accession of Bulgaria and Romania, Turkey was at least at the same level of meeting the criteria or even further along" (Idem: 286). In what comes to anti-corruption measures, the authors understood from the reports that, although there are some concerns with this area in Turkey, it is not comparable to the "major structural threat" that corruption represents in Bulgaria and Romania (Idem: 287).

Many other fields are scrutinised by the authors: on the one hand, for instance, human rights are the Achilles' heel for Turkey (Idem: 288); on the other hand, in terms of civil and political rights, "Turkey shows greater advancements in most areas when compared to Romania and it is also farther advanced than Bulgaria in some realms" (Idem: 292), as it also happens in the domain of economic, social and cultural rights.

After having analysed the various chapters, the researchers recognised that, despite the need for some further changes in the Turkish society, this country fulfils the political Copenhagen criteria, concluding that "The progress shown is comparable to the relative statutes of Bulgaria and Romania when they acceded." (Idem: 299)

The "Bartelsmann Stiftung", a German-based institute, enables the creation of tools to compare the democratic performance between different countries and the conclusions are similar. In relation to Bulgaria, for example, most indicators have been better performed in this already EU-member: the socioeconomic level, the stability of the democratic institutions, the rule of law, political participation and stateness are the ones where the hiatus is more visible (and the ones more important in terms of democracy). Still, the difference is almost always about one point out of ten. However, in all the other indicators both countries are quite even: notice that except the political and social integration, the others relate directly to the economic performances – so many times highlighted as an obstacle to the Turkish integration.

Regarding Romania, we find a similar situation, but the difference between the two neighbours is not as remarkable as in the previous case. Overall in the economic domain, Turkey performs as good as or better than Romania. In socio-political terms, except for the socioeconomic level, Turkey is very closed or even sometimes at the same stage (political and social integration, stability of democratic institutions and the rule of law are good examples).

These four examples aimed to illustrate both the instability of Turkey-EU

relations, as well as the causes behind it. Next section will focus on the possible consequences of these situations.

### Effects

In what comes to the 2007 enlargement, the study above mentioned (Matos, 2012) sought to assess Turkey's democratic commitment, comparing it before and after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania. Following the conceptual analysis of "democracy" and the explanation of the used operationalisation – pretty much based on the work of Morlino, and Bühlmann, Merkel and Wessels – various sources were gathered to provide a set of quantitative data, whose aim was to evaluate the evolution of Turkish democracy. Five major democratic dimensions were the more abstract levels (rule of law, accountability, responsiveness, equality and freedom), completed by different indicators.

The results, presented below in Figure 1, allowed some interesting findings just from their reading: first, the volatility of the different dimensions in time, second, there is not a clear pattern of growth or retrocession but, third, just an overall tendency to decrease the quality of almost all dimensions since 2006, (with the exception of responsiveness), a convergence in 2008 with smaller values and distinctive behaviours in 2009.

Besides, as it is possible to confirm with Figure 2, when comparing the two periods under analysis (2004-2006 and 2007-2009), the general tendency is a retrocession in the evaluation of most dimensions.

Only equality and freedom do not confirm this negative predisposition.

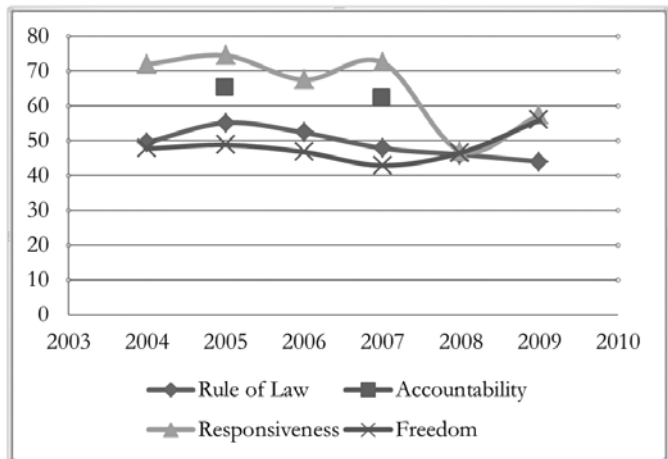


Figure 1: Annual evolution per dimension.  
Source: Matos, 2012: 162

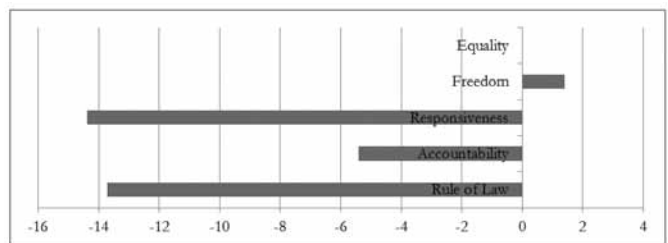


Figure 2: Variation rate per dimension.  
Source: Matos, 2012: 158

Therefore, the conclusion of the study stated that

“there is, in fact, a negative progress of the Turkish effort on its own process of democratic consolidation, naturally very tightly linked to the accession to the EU, reflected by the results of those changes that were less visible during the period from 2007 to 2009” (Matos, 2012: 162-163).

Besides this enlargement, sending Turkey contradictory signs regarding the final outcome of its reforms towards Europeanisation can encompass heavy costs for the entire process. Turkish public opinion “about membership gives form, intensity and legitimacy to the direction of the relations” (Çarkoglu, 2004: 21) and, therefore, constitutes a key element to consider in terms of political decision-making. Regarding its position in relation to EU membership, the instability of the process is reflected on the evolution of the population’s support. From one of the most enthusiastic supporters of accession, Turks became progressively less interested in the process.

How Turks perceive and interpret the signals sent by the European Union has much to do with their support or lack of it. And public opinion is fundamental for a successful process of accession and of democratisation, since their enthusiasm can give impetus to the reforms needed to be made by the political leaders, whereas if they are not keen on entering the Union, there will be high political costs and politicians begin to avoid the subject and, subsequently, the reforms and changes demanded by the EU.

Thus, historical alterity, socio-cultural constraints, EU’s cultural arrogance and lack of coherence – all of them based on the differences concerning identities and perceptions – result in an agitated process marked by discrimination and double standards (just as many claim regarding the CEEC’s accession), Turkey’s jeopardised pride and its lack of trust in the EU, as well as of motivation for further reforms. These effects should be tackled and fought against, in order to improve the quality of the process, European’s image in the world and Turkey’s self-esteem and development.

The feeling of frustration for not being considered an equal provokes on the Turkish side a sense of “isolation, rejection, disappointment, geopolitical exclusion [and a] constant sense of threat to national unity” (Onis, 1999: 134) that damages Turks’ pride, making unpredictable their reaction in the long run, possibly endangering all Turkey and EU’s efforts to democratise the country and to improve its social, cultural and economic performance during the last decades.

Turkish lack of motivation is one of the possible and very likely outcomes of this complex process. Although the Prime-Minister has already admitted that Turkey is undergoing these changes for its own sake and independently from EU’s demands, meaning that even if the Union definitely closes the door, the country would pursue those improvements in any case, EU’s pressure accelerates the pace of reforms and consolidates the process. Düzgit (2009: 57) believes that

the credibility of EU conditionality and a real prospect of full membership would be two of the strongest incentives for Turkey to pursue with the needed reforms. On the contrary, insisting on the idea that negotiations are open-ended and the existence of possible outcomes other than full membership “will remain hanging over Turkey like a ‘sword of Damocles’ (...) [and] will have serious psychosociological consequences creating an atmosphere of insecurity in Turkey and beyond during a period when Turkey has a great need of stability” (Tacar, 2007: 128).

Figure 3 schematises what I believe to be the chain that is originated by the instability of Turkey-EU relations.



Figure 3: Chain of the consequences of instability  
Source: Author's elaboration

First, instability in Turkey-EU relations is the result of a set of advances and retreats in negotiations, caused by particular events that originate enthusiasm or resentment, respectively, between the two parts. Frequently caused by problems in communication or in understanding and accepting the other's differences, this instability changes the perceptions of Turks. At a first moment material conditions really matter (political decisions, military interventions, speeches, etc.), but then they are interpreted by both political elites and the public opinion and it is precisely how the actors read and perceive the material facts that shapes their answers. That is the reason why there are more or less enthusiastic phases.

Thus, Turks, depending on the moment of the relationship, perceive the European Union either as an ally that helps the country following the modernisation process triggered by Mustafa Kemal or as an external actor that, besides interfering in internal affairs, does not have serious intentions to keep what it has initially promised.

In that sense, and if the latter reading of reality dominates the general public, there is a widespread lack of motivation to pursue with the changes<sup>1</sup>, given the fact that the desired benefit of the efforts is not achievable. As a matter of fact, and borrowing again concepts from Psychology, if there is an obstacle to reach something that is wanted, the individual develops a feeling of frustration and will consequently use mechanisms to avoid the pain or unhappiness of not getting what he desired. Moreover, if the public opinion does not show interest in the process, it becomes a politically costly subject that should be avoided not

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, during the conference this paper was presented at, the Undersecretary for European Union Affairs Ministry of the Republic of Turkey, Mr. Ambassador M. Haluk Ilicak, commented that this lack of motivation exists and is also perceptible among the workers of the Ministry, as they realise their hard work will not be compensated.

to lose votes for more nationalist parties, for example and, hence, their efforts to promote Europeanisation start to fade.

A reinterpretation of reality leads to a change in behaviour, which is adapted to the “new (perceived) reality”, redefining the priorities of the country, for example. The attitudes towards the European Union become less positive and other values and principles are highlighted and took up again, such as the Muslim origins or national traditions. And in the case that the democratic culture is not strongly rooted in the society, there may be risks of a democratic breakdown or the erosion of the quality of democracy<sup>2</sup>.

As a consequence, all this chain ends up with different outcomes: the above mentioned weakening of democracy, a slower pace of reforms, the redefinition of the country’s foreign policy, a separation from Europe, etc. Ultimately, it can redefine the politics of an entire region, for example.

Thus, the consequences of the instability of Turkey-EU relations imply negative outcomes for both parts and, for the sake of both as well, the process of accession should be led differently, so that Turkey and the European Union could benefit from this possible win-win situation.

### **Solutions**

Solutions is probably not the best name for this section. I would rather prefer roadmap or suggestions, but what really matters in this section is to provide some thoughts and develop some reflections upon this subject, in order to improve the quality of the process of accession – for Turkey and for any other country that may apply in the future.

Several authors make diverse suggestions for improving Turkey-EU relations and they should be taken into consideration, as most of them know the process very deeply and are aware of the constraints that weaken it. First, Mattli & Plümper (2002) consider EU’s enlargement as a process that aims to diminish the gap between insiders and outsiders; therefore, the accession process targets the needed reforms to achieve the compatibility required to gain full membership. On the other hand, if a country wants to join the EU and fights for so many years to reach the final goal of accession, there must be a relatively high degree of identification with the organisation, but sometimes it seems that the side of the applicant is forgotten. Subotic (2011) suggests mechanisms of identity convergence to create dynamics that emphasise the common features of both actors in order to approach them, in line with what Kuran-Burçoglu (2007) claims when the author refers that the European Union and Turkey need to be aware of mutual socio-cultural constraints and overcome preconceived ideas and clichés so that both can really know and respect each other. However, as Tacar (2007) warns, it is necessary more than mere formal bureaucratic reforms to change their mutual images and, according to Robins (1996) Europe, as well,

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<sup>2</sup> For more details about the subject of democratic consolidation, please see Schedler, 1998.

has to be open to “cultural interruption”, i.e., the EU has to be ready to accept and integrate a society that is not so alike as all the previous ones that entered the Union – culturally speaking. Finally, to quote just a few, Cenker (2008) argues that the success of the implementation of the reforms lies on the credibility of the organisation and on a pro-reform attitude in the applicant country.

The roadmap that I want to propose in this article is based on what I called the 3C’s approach: Turkey and the European Union, in their relationship and, more specifically, in the context of the accession process, should be *clear, coherent and credible*.<sup>3</sup> If those features are applied, it is more likely that the two parts achieve, and benefit from, a good understanding and cooperation. It is worth saying that these 3 C’s have to be applied by both and that the answers to the questions raised for each one are reflected upon by the two together, so that a serious commitment and the involvement of all the parts are guaranteed.

*Clearness.* What are the aims of Turkey’s accession process? What are the advantages for the European Union to accept this candidate and what is the interest for Turkey to enter? The objectives of each part should be clearly formulated, so that the process and its outcome do not fall short of their expectations. It should be clearly defined at the beginning what the possible outcomes are – that would avoid feelings of frustration or the introduction of new conditions in the middle of the process. Besides, the European Union should also clearly declare what it expects from Turkey in each of the domains. The vagueness of some official documents is neither encouraging nor clarifying for an applicant that really wants to converge with European practices. On the Turkish side, it should be revealed how far the country will go to meet the criteria and if it is really willing to take the necessary measure to comply with the criteria.

*Coherence.* Which strategy will be pursued to achieve those aims? In other words, the path towards the objectives previously defined needs to be settled in accordance with the expectations of both actors. And if the path defined by the European Union includes, among others, conditionality, it means that this mechanism has to be applied coherently, that is, as long as the conditions are met or the measures are taken by the applicant, the promised rewards have to come along (obviously the opposite is also true). The accession process is, by definition, a technical one and, therefore its objective is merely to ensure that all the laws and general criteria that are applicable to member-states are already internalised in the country that is applying. However, when it becomes a political game that sets back guarantees already promised, it jeopardises the efforts and creates a lack of motivation on the side of the candidate. In that sense, not only should the

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<sup>3</sup> As a matter of fact, during the conference this paper was presented at, one of the comments from the audience suggested to add a fourth C to the list: “commitment”. Despite the pertinence of the commentary, I decided to remain with the initial 3 C’s to consider that commitment should be a transversal principle to all the other Cs and without which none of them would function.

progress reports and other official documents be objective, clear and coherent, but also the strategy adopted ought not to be change in the course of the process - as rules cannot be changed during a game.

*Credibility.* How will that strategy be applied so that it achieves the aimed results? The European Union plays a credible role if the promises made are kept and again, in the game of conditionality, rewards are given in due time. Furthermore, and although the variety of institutions and member states make it harder to achieve, the European Union should speak in unison. When different leaders foresee different prospects of integration and different institutions of the same organisation propose a different result for the same process, not only the candidate becomes confused, but also the external image of the Union is harmed by this lack of credibility.

These three principles, together with the indispensable commitment from both sides for the whole process to occur successfully, constitute, from my perspective, a core set of guidelines that should lead any accession process under the risk of, when they are not present, creating unwanted and reversed effects. On the contrary, when applied, these 3 C's will help strengthen the relationship and give it a solidity that is likely to protect the general course of the relations from possible sporadic situations that would, otherwise, harm the whole dynamic.

If we come back to Figure 4 and replace the first step, it is possible to realise that the application of the 3 C's would change the general framework of Turkey-EU relations and, subsequently, Turks' perception, in the sense that they would envision EU's commitment as a serious effort to improve and modernise their country, not disrespecting its efforts, and creating a reverse movement in the chain: Turks would be very likely to reinterpret this reality in the opposite way and would change their behaviour, becoming again more supportive and enthusiastic.

It is of much relevance to clarify, however, that, although it may seem that these suggestions are mostly directed towards the European Union, it is not necessarily the case. I believe that all of these policies or approaches should be adopted by Turkey and European Union alike. What I recognise, nevertheless, is that the EU, as a role model and a normative power that is determining the shape of the entire process, should give the example, be rigorous and serious when dealing with such a vital process and a sovereign state. Moreover, since the Union deals with the issue in a responsible and committed way, it is my conviction that the Turkish responses would be more positive. If, on the contrary, they would not, it would allow the European Union to adopt a different position and to reformulate or rethink the process, since the rules were not followed by the other player.

## Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to scrutinise the instability of Turkey-EU relations. The pursuit of that aim was made through the brief analysis of the events behind that volatility and its causes. It was mentioned that some events influenced both parts' enthusiasm regarding the accession and four symptoms of that feature were selected to illustrate the state of the affairs between Turkey and the European Union: the perception of the forever binding character of treaties, the discrimination of the Central and Eastern European countries' accession, the 2007 enlargement to Bulgaria and Romania, and the 2011 visit of the Turkish Prime-Minister Erdogan to Europe and the different reactions he took back to Ankara.

As it was also explored, this context brought (and still brings) negative consequences to the process of accession and, more precisely, to the democratisation of the country, given the fact that the interpretation of the events by Turks and the Europeans leads them not to encourage further reforms, which causes a redefinition of the priorities of both actors.

Finally, there was some reflection upon the possibilities to revert this negative situation, improving and strengthening Turkey-EU relations through the application of the 3 C's approach that combined the development of the relationship based on clarity, coherence and credibility. Their application was intended to give impetus to a new dynamic, a game-changer in Turks' perceptions that would again start looking at the EU as an important promoter of democracy and of other principles that allow the modernisation of the country. Therefore, they would recover their enthusiasm for membership and support the needed reforms.

In fact, the 3 C's proposal did not pretend to be the solution for the stalled status of this interaction, but just another contribution to the ongoing discussion on this subject, seeking not only to improve Turkey-EU relations, but any other future accession process.

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