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Explaining the “change” in the attitudes of Turkish political actors towards EU membership

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Introduction

This paper discusses the main reasons behind the changing attitudes of main Turkish political parties towards Turkey's EU membership. Accordingly, changing EU stances of the governing party, Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the main opposition, the Republican People's Party (CHP) will be under focus. Coming to power in 2002, the AKP took unprecedented steps pioneering the initiation of accession negotiations with the EU in 3 October 2005. The golden era of Turkey-EU relations however suffered a serious stalemate after the curtailment of negotiations due to the Cyprus issue.

On July 29, 2005, the Turkish government signed the additional protocol extending the association agreement to the new members of the EU, fulfilling the last obligation for initiating the accession negotiations. Cyprus was one of the new EU members and with the signature of the protocol Turkey was supposed to extend the agreement to Cyprus as well. Not officially recognizing Cyprus as representing the entire island, Turkish government issued a unilateral declaration rejecting to extend its commitments arising out of the agreement to Cyprus. However, the EU rejected Turkey's declaration and pressurized the Turkish government to open its airspace and harbours to Cyprus. The protocol crisis led to a significant stalemate in Turkey's EU accession and the EU froze 8 negotiation chapters and concomitantly, France curtailed 5 chapters with the same justification. Constituting a watershed in Turkey-EU relations, this incident drastically changed the EU rhetoric of the AKP. Once deemed as the leading pro-EU party in Turkey, the AKP slowed down the EU reforms and resorted to high volume of criticisms against the EU.

As the oldest political party in Turkey, the CHP has long been a stalwart of Turkey's EU membership perceiving it compatible with the modernization project of Ataturk, the founder

of modern Turkey. However, becoming the main opposition after 2002, the CHP intensively criticized the EU and showed significant reluctance towards Turkey's EU membership.

The paper will discuss how and why such drastic changes occurred in the EU stances of both parties. With this motivation, the paper will first examine the relevant literature and discuss how reluctance towards membership in candidate countries has been depicted. The paper claims that the extant scholarly works only give a limited account on how to explain such a change. Instead the paper aims to introduce a new approach. Second, the empirical part will scrutinize the changing EU stances of both the AKP and the CHP in detail. Finally, the conclusion will offer detailed analysis on the main reasons behind the changing patterns of EU stances in Turkey and make sense of them in accordance with a relevant theoretical framework.

Extant literature on reluctance towards EU membership and the necessity for a new theoretical approach

The existing literature offers a double-edged analysis for the discussion on the reluctance in the candidate countries towards EU membership. Deemed by this paper as bi-dimensional approach; in the extant literature, the reluctance for EU membership has been studied under two dimensions: the extent and the content.

In the extent dimension, the scholars tend to define the phenomenon as euroscepticism and determine its boundaries through a variety of classifications. The relevant literature mainly defines euroscepticism rather as outright opposition to entire European integration or contingent and qualified scepticism based on defending national interests against a major EU policy area such as Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004:4). Classified as *Hard* and *Soft euroscepticisms*; the former means the “outright” and “unqualified” rejection of the European integration both in economic and political terms right from the beginning, while the latter opposes a particular policy associated with the overall integration process, or exert opposition with the motivation of preserving national interests in particular cases (Ibid). Another inquiry concentrates on pessimism towards the future of the EU in order to determine the basic tenets of eurosceptic attitudes (Kopecky and Mudde, 2002). Accordingly, euroscepticism is considered as the combination of the *Europhile* and *pessimist* inclinations (Ibid).

The 'content' dimension on the other hand mainly focuses on the motivations behind public and elite contestations against the EU policies, the EU enlargement as well as the overall integration process. Although giving different names, most of the authors agree on two categories with respect to the motivations for reluctance towards the EU (De Vreese et al., 2008; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2005). The first category focuses on cost-benefit calculations and scrutinises whether the member states will benefit or lose from the EU membership or the European integration. The second category is detached from these efficiency measurements since it focuses on the concerns over the challenges brought by the European integration against national identity, sovereignty and culture. For instance, De Vreese et al. (2008:512-3) claim that there are two main determiners of public support for EU membership. First determiner is the 'hard' predictors namely the *economic* (inflation and unemployment) and the *utilitarian* (how to profit from membership) factors, and second, 'soft' considerations based on national identity and feelings against immigrants (Ibid). According to this dimension of the literature, reluctance towards EU membership is nurtured either by concerns stemming from calculated costs or perceived threat to national identity.

The extant discussions in the literature have become successful in explaining how and why political actors show reluctance for EU membership. However, the emphasized dimensions (extent and content) had a difficulty to explain change and variations in public and elite attitudes towards the EU. For instance, in the Turkish case, the pro-Islamist Welfare Party (RF) in late 1990s tended to see the EU as a Christian club, and was deemed as Hard Eurosceptic; less than a decade later, the successor AKP, retaining its conservative identity and its voting potential turned out to be a diehard pro-EU party. Similarly, deemed as the most important pro-EU party in Turkey, the AKP tended to raise strong criticisms towards the EU after the curtailment of the negotiations. Moreover, the CHP has become one of the leading eurosceptic parties although it was the pioneer of the adoption of Western values. Although Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002:30) underlined the need for analysing 'change' in eurosceptic patterns, they did not specify the ways of doing it.

Scrutinizing the candidate countries and Turkey in particular requires a distinct contextual analysis in order to better explain the change in the EU policies of the major political parties. Accordingly, the paper offers a third dimension to the literature, namely, the *context* whereby it would be more plausible to fathom the reasons behind the change of attitudes in a candidate country towards the EU membership. The contextual analysis argues that the change in the attitudes towards EU membership from eagerness to reluctance occurs as a reaction to the policies and conditions put forward by the EU. In this sense, even though there isn't a long

established scepticism against the EU in the public or political elite, a reactive type of scepticism emerges out of concerns due to the complicated negotiation process with the EU. Accordingly, reluctance towards membership might develop due to the negotiation process whereby the EU basically induces the candidate country to comply with the political and economic Copenhagen criteria. The EU conditionality might spark scepticism in various segments of the candidate country including public, media and political elite. In Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia, for example, as the accession negotiations continued, euro-enthusiasm in the political parties shifted to euroscepticism especially in the form of showing reaction to the EU in certain policy fields such as foreigners' right to landownership.

Reluctance in candidate countries towards membership might also be observed as a reaction to the EU's additional conditions stemming from bi-lateral issues with an EU member state. Therefore, the EU inherits the extant problem and fails to act as an impartial problem solver. In order to prevent the member state from vetoing whole enlargement process, the EU puts extra conditions on the candidate countries to solve the problem. 'Strategically entrapped', the candidate countries might show strong reactions to the EU. For instance, The Exclusive Economic Zone issue between Croatia and Slovenia caused a temporary curtailment of Croatia's EU membership negotiations due to the Slovenian veto. Correspondingly, the public support for the EU in Croatia became the lowest in entire Europe (35% in 2007 and 23% in 2008).

The Republic of Macedonia is also put under pressure by Greece to change its name to Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia due to its historical claims on the name "Macedonia". According to Koneska (2009), the Greek pressure stands as the main factor behind the emerging euroscepticism in a country like Macedonia which previously had 90% public support for the EU membership.

Similarly, the EU's Cyprus conditionality on Turkey having curtailed the negotiations for the last couple of years sparked high levels of euroscepticism in various Turkish political parties (Gülmez & Buhari-Gülmez, 2008).

Finally, reluctance in a candidate country towards membership might emerge as a reaction to the burgeoning opposition in the EU against its membership. The candidate country should not only comply with the membership Criteria, but also work extensively for mitigating the level of opposition developed against its membership within the EU. The political elite might raise strong criticisms that they are not treated fairly by the EU and the EU is reluctant to accept their membership. Therefore, it might be assumed that even the most Europhile actors within the society might turn out to be strong critics of the EU. This article argues that change

in the main political parties of Turkey from euro-supportiveness to euroscepticism emerges out of a strong reaction to the burgeoning Turkey-scepticism in major EU member states and the perceived reluctance of the EU towards Turkey.

Change in the attitudes of main Turkish political parties towards the EU

Government: The Justice and Development Party (AKP)

Soon after becoming government, the AKP worked decisively for the initiation of Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU avoiding confrontation with the EU officials and leaders on Turkey's EU accession. Pioneering the adoption of several harmonization packages in the Parliament, the AKP devoted much energy to comply with the political and economic Copenhagen criteria. The AKP's advances towards steady economic development and improved democratization triggered the golden age of Turkey-EU relations resulting in the initiation of accession negotiations (Öniş, 2008:38).

The AKP also established close contacts with the EU officials. Turkish Prime Minister and the AKP leader, Tayyip Erdoğan developed close friendship with Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian Prime Minister who frequently announced his country's support for Turkey's membership. Erdoğan played an amateur soccer match with the EU leaders in order to increase dialogue with Turkey-sceptic leaders such as the Austrian chancellor, Wolfgang Schüssel (Robinson, 2006). He also worked in close cooperation with Luis Zapatero, the Spanish Prime Minister for the 'alliance of civilizations' project to develop better relations between Europe and the Islamic World. The AKP's cosmopolitan rhetoric nurtured with this project proved successful for the AKP to convince the EU to start accession negotiations with Turkey (İçener and Çağlıyan-İçener, 2011).

On the other hand, the AKP government was blamed by the opposition of acting too enthusiastically for membership to overlook the substance and details of official documents (Gülmez, 2008:426). Erdoğan made a hasty press statement finding the 187 pages long 2004 Progress Report of the European Commission on Turkey 'balanced and positive' just after couple of hours of its release. Moreover, with the motivation to start the membership negotiations without delay, the AKP again made another hasty decision by signing the additional protocol in denial of extending it to Cyprus an EU member.

The curtailment of the negotiations due to the protocol crisis coupled with the AKP's struggles against the opening of a law suit to close it down practically inhibited any progress in Turkey's accession process and constituted a breaking point in the AKP's stance towards the EU.

While refraining from a critical stance over the EU previously, the AKP officials started to adopt a highly critical approach to the EU. The Prime Minister Erdoğan on several occasions criticized the EU's lack of decisiveness towards Turkey. Arguing that the new 10 EU members, both in terms of democratic and economic development, are comparably in a much lower status than Turkey; Erdoğan claims that it is Turkey who deserves membership not them but they became members not Turkey (Euractiv 2010). He asserts that there are political motivations behind such a denial to Turkey such as Turkey's huge population, geographical location and Turkey's great potentials to constitute a strong rival to major EU member states (Ibid). Claiming that the EU has been dragging its feet over Turkey for more than fifty years, Erdoğan demanded the EU officials to clearly announce whether they really want Turkey or not (Hürriyet, 2011a). He stated the fact that they have been patiently working for membership but their patience has its limits (Ibid). Erdoğan argued that no other candidate country faced with such an unfair treatment Turkey has been suffering from and claimed that now there are twenty seven EU member states to mock Turkey (Vatan, 2011a).

Erdoğan also uses the 'Christian club' expression as a negative term to name and shame the EU. He claims "[t]he EU will only be a Christian club without Turkey" (Tisdal 2010). In another press statement, he argues that unless the EU is a Christian Club, it has the obligation to accept Turkey's membership (Euractiv 2010). A recent analysis (Yilmaz 2009: 8) argues that 75% of the electorate who vote for the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) define the EU as Christian Club, in a sense confirming the influence Erdoğan's speeches have on them.

The Turkish Prime Minister has recently reacted to the EU's insistence on issuing visa to Turkish citizens while it lifted visa requirements for the rest of the EU candidate countries. Stating the fact that even the citizens of South American countries such as Bolivia and Paraguay don't need any visa to enter the EU, while Turkey, aspiring to become an EU member for fifty years faces visa restrictions; Erdoğan condemned this situation as unconceivable (Hürriyet, 2011b). He reiterated his perception that the EU is willing to remain

a Christian club only and demanded from the EU to explicitly announce ‘we don’t want Turkey in’ and this way Turkey could go its separate way (Ibid).

In a most recent interview, Erdoğan accused the EU of becoming a unified block against Turkey’s accession (Erdoğan, 2011). Finding this unity as fascist, Erdoğan asserted that religious differences play an important role behind such a strong opposition to Turkey as witnessed in the stances of Merkel and Sarkozy over Turkey (Ibid). Moreover, Erdoğan criticized the volatile and untrustworthy attitudes of Merkel and Erdoğan towards Turkey and blamed them of undermining the *pacta sunt servanda* principle (Ibid). Concerning Merkel, Erdoğan argued that she once condemned the accession of the Republic of Cyprus as wrong but later she started to take side with them against Turkey’s membership (Ibid). Erdoğan also claimed that Sarkozy tries to prevent Turkey from opening all the negotiation chapters although France officially blocks only 5 (Ibid). The Turkish Prime Minister finally argued that Turkey is a very strong country and not dependent on the EU. Stressing the fact that they adopt the EU norms not only for membership but also in order to foster democratic and economic developments in Turkey; Erdoğan stated that even if the EU membership is prevented, they will continue with the Copenhagen criteria only to name them Ankara and Istanbul criteria instead (Ibid).

The statements of Egemen Bağış, the Chief negotiator of Turkey with the EU also reflects a highly reactive stance of the AKP towards the EU. Acting as the spokesman of Turkey in general and the AKP in particular concerning Turkey’s EU accession, Bağış was assigned to this post in January 2009 replacing Ali Babacan. Unlike his predecessor, Bağış frequently issued press statements on Turkey’s EU membership process in which he mostly raised harsh criticisms against the EU blaming them of being reluctant towards Turkey. Bağış claimed that though the European Commission commends Turkey’s progress in numerous fields; the EU still prevents Turkey’s smooth progress towards membership by blocking several negotiation chapters (Hürriyet, 2010a). Opening the chapters does not practically do Turkey any good but this way Turkey will allegedly reach the EU standards, the chief negotiator stated (Hürriyet, 2010b). He asserted that it is meaningless to open and close negotiation chapters, if the EU has no intention to give Turkey membership (Ibid). However, in a commentary right after his assignment to the post, Bağış had a rather optimistic view on Turkey’s accession process. Attaching importance to the accession process itself, Bağış had claimed that the process was more significant for Turkey than membership; since even if Turkey couldn’t become a

member, the process would nevertheless assist Turkey to improve its democratic and economic development (Hürriyet, 2009a).

Bağış later declared that the EU is on the crossroads for Turkey and the EU's 'insincere and inconsistent' policy towards Turkey is increasingly criticized by more and more people in Turkey (Milliyet, 2011a). Seeing the main obstacle for Turkey is political rather technical, the chief negotiator argues that the Turkey-sceptics within the EU raise three main excuses to deny Turkey's membership; namely Turkey's large population, poor economy and Muslim identity (Hürriyet, 2011c). Bağış argued that the EU started the accession negotiations acknowledging Turkey's large population and Muslim identity; therefore these claims are not valid for rejecting Turkey's accession (Ibid). In spite of Turkey's persistent goodwill to remain on board for membership, the EU incessantly inhibited Turkey's membership path. 'In the last fifty years, the EU made constant efforts to dissuade Turkey. However, we will not be the ones to pull the plug. We will let the Europeans do it', the chief negotiator announced (Milliyet, 2011b).

Concerning the EU's ongoing visa restrictions to Turkey, Bağış argued that even countries such as Moldova have been negotiating visa liberalization but Turkey (Yeni Şafak, 2011a). They don't deserve such a double standard, he said (Ibid).

Bağış not only perceives the EU as a unified block against Turkey, but also directs his criticisms on the Turkey-sceptic EU statesmen such as Merkel and Sarkozy. Blaming them of being 'myopic', Bağış claimed Turkey will not give in to this opposition and persevere on its quest for membership (Yeni Şafak, 2009).

Other cabinet members also occasionally raised criticisms against the EU acknowledging the EU's reluctance for Turkey. Sadullah Ergin, the Minister of Justice stressed the possibility for the EU to refrain from granting membership even if Turkey fulfils all the necessary conditions (Vatan, 2010a). Ergin stated they will not tolerate such a move and retaliate by going their own way (Ibid). Cemil Çiçek, the deputy Prime Minister announced the EU membership is not *sine qua non* for them. Çiçek argued, if Turkey is obliged to choose either the EU membership or Northern Cyprus, they will not hesitate to prefer their Cypriot brothers to the EU (Milliyet, 2011c).

Abdullah Gül, the President of Turkey and formerly Foreign Minister in the AKP government is particularly interested in Turkey's EU membership. Gül stresses the fact that the decision

to initiate membership negotiations with Turkey was unanimously taken by the EU member states. Therefore, the EU must be loyal to its vow but it is the EU who puts more and more obstacles against Turkey (Le Figaro, 2011). Gül declared that ‘the world doesn’t end with the EU’ stating Turkey’s willingness to develop significant relations with the rest of the world (Ibid). Concerning the lack of EU public support for Turkey, Gül said that they will respect the decision of the European public if they reject Turkey’s membership in a referendum (Ibid). He also asserted that Turkey might even hold a referendum of its own and Turkish people might say no to the EU before the Europeans say no to Turkey (Ibid). Gül argued that the main perception in the Turkish public is that the EU is playing games with Turkey rather than sincerely negotiating Turkey’s membership (Vatan, 2011b). Sharing this perception, Gül stated that the increasing opposition to Turkey within the EU created a great concern and reaction in Turkey (Ibid).

The AKP’s pro-EU activism ceased after the curtailment of the negotiations and pro-EU stance of the party was replaced with harsh criticisms against the EU. The top AKP officials criticized the reluctance of the EU for Turkey and blamed it of preventing Turkey’s membership. They find it conceivable why the EU started the membership negotiations if Turkey is not wanted in the EU. The AKP officials mainly tended to perceive the EU as a unified block against Turkey’s accession. The Turkey-sceptic statesmen such as Sarkozy and Merkel were also criticized by the AKP. Moreover, after the curtailment of the negotiations, the expression ‘double standard’ was frequently used by the AKP elite to define Turkey’s accession process. The party officials declared that they will go their own separate way if the EU persists on this inconsistent policy towards Turkey. It was even stated that Turkey’s EU membership is not indispensable for the AKP. Nevertheless, the AKP aims to continue its membership quest and let the EU ‘pull the plug’ if necessary.

Opposition: Republican People’s Party (CHP)

The main opposition party in Turkey since 2002 could be identified as a pro-EU party and the CHP’s EU-supportiveness has ideological and historical roots. The top party officials underline the fact that the CHP perceives the EU as a modernization project which is compatible with the principles of Ataturk. Moreover, it is argued that the CHP’s EU-

supportiveness dates back to 1963 when İnönü, the CHP leader and the Prime Minister signed the association agreement. However, especially between December 2002 and October 2005 during which the AKP government took crucial steps to start the accession negotiations, the CHP official adopted a highly critical stance on the EU and the AKP government.

The CHP leader between 1992 and 2010, Deniz Baykal had been signalling a solid pro-EU stance especially after the re-opening of the CHP. As the Foreign Affairs Minister of Turkey for a brief period, Baykal devoted much energy to the realization of customs union with the EU in the early 1990s (Ayata and Güneş-Ayata, 2007: 223). After the 2002 elections however, Baykal's CHP adopted an intensive eurosceptic stance in the form of reaction to the EU's conditionality on Turkey. Witnessing the AKP government's advance towards EU membership with a considerable speed, the CHP under Baykal leadership incessantly criticized the EU and the AKP government.

Questioning the sincerity of the EU to embrace Turkey as a member, Baykal first focused his criticisms on certain expressions placed into the official EU documents. The term 'open-ended process' in the European Commission's progress reports and the negotiating framework document meaning Turkey's accession process does not necessarily guarantee membership is the first expression under criticism. Referring to the mentality of the term, Baykal resembled the membership negotiations to engagement. He asserted that just like engagement does not automatically guarantee marriage; there is no guarantee for a candidate to become an EU member (Baykal, 2004a). He argued, however that if the couple commence the engagement by explicitly stating that they might not be married, then there is already a problem in their affair (Ibid). Therefore, in Baykal's view, the fact that the EU explicitly warns Turkey that negotiations might not end in membership signals the reluctance of the EU towards Turkey (Ibid). Baykal claimed that the open-ended process means the EU considers 'privileged partnership' for Turkey (Hürriyet, 2004a).

Second, Baykal opposed the concept of 'absorption capacity'. According to the negotiating framework document, even if Turkey meets all the membership conditions, the EU can still say no to full membership, if the Union is not in a position to absorb Turkey (European Council, 2005). Baykal argued this term gave the EU the excuse to deny Turkey's membership and proved the EU's willingness to see Turkey as an eternal candidate never to become an EU member (Baykal, 2004b).

Baykal also strongly opposed the expressions regarding the permanent safeguard clauses against Turkey in the areas such as freedom of movement of persons, structural policies or agriculture. He claimed that freedom of movement is one of the founding principles of the EU; therefore, permanently denying Turkey this principle would only mean second-class membership for Turkey (Hürriyet, 2004a). He called everyone who thinks Turkey deserves better, to raise their voice against those expressions (Hürriyet, 2004b).

Claiming that the EU intentionally inflicts insurmountable obstacles upon Turkey, Baykal resembled the EU to a reluctant fiancée who aims to continue the engagement as long as possible (Hürriyet, 2005a). Referring to the ‘open-ended’ nature of the accession negotiations, he argued that the EU kept telling Turkey that it wished to stay engaged at least for fifteen years and even then marriage could not be promised (Ibid). Baykal criticized the fact that Turkey could only start membership negotiations accepting the possibility of facing permanent restrictions pertinent to agriculture and the free movement of its people (Ibid). He claimed that these restrictions were placed into the negotiation documents by the EU in order to relieve the European public (Ibid). Against the disputed expressions in the official documents, Baykal even demanded the Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan to freeze the negotiations arguing such a resolute move would constitute a firm warning to the EU leaders (Hürriyet, 2004c).

Concerning the extension of the additional protocol to Cyprus which led to the curtailment of the negotiations later, Baykal’s stance was firm as he put strong though futile pressure on Erdoğan not to sign the protocol that would lead to such a scandal (Hürriyet, 2005d). He claimed that by signing this protocol Turkey would have officially recognized the Republic of Cyprus (Hürriyet, 2005b). Baykal asserted that Cyprus issue took Turkey-EU relations hostage prohibiting Turkey’s eventual EU membership. He even claimed; ‘If Turkey fails or is prevented from becoming a member, this is not the end of the world’.

During his leadership, Baykal not only questioned the EU’s lack of sincerity towards Turkey, but also targeted the Turkey-sceptic European statesmen particularly French President Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and accused the AKP government of not taking resolute steps against them. Blaming Merkel of using her anti-Turkey stance for electoral success in elections, Baykal admitted the defeat of the German Social Democrats in the elections cost Turkey an important ally for EU membership (Hürriyet, 2005c). Denying

any communications with Merkel after becoming the Chancellor, Baykal also rejected to meet her during her latest visit to Ankara in 2010.

Baykal criticized the French opposition to Turkey's EU accession as well. He condemned the Constitutional amendment in France to hold a referendum on Turkey's EU accession. According to Baykal, it was inconceivable that there would be a possibility for Turkey to be denied membership by a popular decision of a member state after a considerably difficult accession process. Baykal argued; 'Turkey will rescue the princess kept as prisoner in a giant's house, which is on the seventh floor of a cave on the highest mountain and get through all the traps to climb down. However, at that point the EU will say: 'Let's ask what the French people think'' (Radikal, 2004). Baykal also reacted to the statements of French President Sarkozy concerning Turkey's EU accession. Stating the concern that Sarkozy's opposition is a fundamental obstacle against Turkey's EU membership, Baykal claimed that Sarkozy never stepped back although Turkey worked hard to convince him (Baykal, 2009a). Recently, in a joint European parliamentary campaign in Berlin, Merkel and Sarkozy reiterated their co-decisiveness for granting Turkey only a privileged partnership (Financial Times, 2009). Baykal criticized the attitude of both leaders as 'rude, antagonistic and reckless' (Baykal, 2009b). Baykal also condemned the AKP government's inaction and argued that such inaction would give those leaders more courage to stand firm in their opposition against Turkey (Ibid).

Onur Öymen, the retired ambassador and vice chairman of the party was the main figure in the CHP during Baykal era regarding the party's EU stance. Having served as a successful diplomat in Turkish foreign ministry, Öymen joined the CHP after his retirement and was elected the CHP deputy for Istanbul in the 2002 general elections. Appointed by Baykal as the vice-chairman of the party in 2003, Öymen became the face of the party concerning the CHP's EU policy until May 2010 when he was removed from the post by the Kılıçdaroğlu leadership. Although supporting Turkey's EU membership, Öymen persistently criticized the EU for its alleged double standards and reluctance against Turkey. In his speeches, Öymen usually adopted a 'negative rhetoric' towards the EU. Accordingly, he merely asserted that the current process would prevent Turkey's EU membership but refrained from offering a viable solution. Pertinent to the European Commission's 2004 progress report for Turkey, Öymen argued that the permanent safeguard clauses against the free movement of Turkish labour foreseen in the report reflects the fact that the EU is inclined to offer Turkey only an

inferior position within the EU that should not be accepted by the Turkish decision-makers (Öymen, 2004).

In another speech, Öymen claimed that ‘absorption capacity’ and ‘permanent safeguard clauses’ have been forced by the Turkey-sceptic EU member states in order to derail Turkey’s membership process (Öymen, 2005). He explicitly stated that the CHP was not against the EU, but the Turkey-sceptics who pressurize the EU to inflict double standards upon Turkey (Ibid).

During the period under scrutiny, the CHP remained on the defensive against the EU and the AKP accusing them of derailing Turkey from membership. After the negotiations stalled and the pro-EU activism of the AKP slowed down, the party leader seized the opportunity to act more pro-European. He worked for establishing contacts with pro-Turkish European social democrat politicians. He also tried to reinforce dialogue with the EU officials through visits to Brussels, Berlin and London. Finally, in 2008, the CHP became the first Turkish political party ever to open an office in Brussels.

However, those steps proved ineffective as the CHP failed to offer a solid strategy to revitalize Turkey-EU relations. Besides, the CHP’s image in the eyes of EU had already become considerably negative. He was accused of inhibiting Turkey’s progress for EU membership by opposing the adoption of the EU reforms (The Economist, 2009). Baykal was even criticized for destroying the ‘social democrat’ identity of the CHP leading it to become a nationalist party especially due to his critical stance against the EU (The Economist, 2008). German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier condemned Baykal for turning his party into a eurosceptic one over the last years (Today’s Zaman, 2009). Steinmeier stated that it was difficult to fathom whether the CHP actually supported Turkey’s EU membership (Ibid). Joost Lagendijk, the joint chairman of the Turkey-EU Parliamentarians delegation claimed that the CHP’s image in the EU was very negative due to its hard-line stance over the EU (Hürriyet, 2007).

During the Baykal era, the CHP adopted a highly reactive stance questioning the EU’s willingness for Turkey’s accession. Kılıçdaroğlu’s unexpected rise to power in May 2010 changed this picture remarkably.

Having become a popular figure within the party to raise corruption allegations against the AKP top officials, Kılıçdaroğlu’s rise to the CHP’s leadership was hastened by Baykal’s resignation due to sex-tape scandal. As the new CHP leader, Kılıçdaroğlu made two

important changes within the party. First, he changed the elitist rhetoric of the party which was stuck on the protection of secularism against political Islam. He adopted the fight against poverty and corruption as his top priority. 'The CHP for everyone' became the motto of the party. Second, Kılıçdaroğlu changed the composition of the party's ruling structure. Baykal's cadre in the executive board was replaced with new faces. Liberating the party from Baykal's grip, Kılıçdaroğlu also enabled the return of many former CHP officials who had left the party due to their disagreements with Baykal.

The Kılıçdaroğlu leadership raised hopes in the EU pertinent to the prospects for the CHP's capability to abandon its eurosceptic stance and become an influential actor for Turkey's EU accession. In a meeting with the ambassadors of the EU member states, Kılıçdaroğlu, unlike his predecessor Baykal, charmed the European diplomats with his humbleness and enthusiasm to listen (Yetkin, 2010).

Kılıçdaroğlu also received support from the social democrat politicians in the EU. Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, the leader of the Party of European Socialists gave his full backing to Kılıçdaroğlu. Rasmussen stated that Kılıçdaroğlu will significantly contribute to the EU membership of Turkey and they will work together for the construction of a 'strong and fair Europe' (Milliyet, 2010). Martin Schulz, the leader of the European Parliament Socialist Group, after meeting Kılıçdaroğlu in Brussels, stated that he would prefer Turkey to become an EU member under the premiership of Kılıçdaroğlu (Vatan, 2010b).

Kılıçdaroğlu frequently reiterates the CHP's support for Turkey's EU membership and promises to make a fresh start in their relations with the EU (BBC Turkish, 2010). Stating the fact that the CHP is perceived to be eurosceptic by the EU officials, Kılıçdaroğlu acknowledged the failure of the CHP to better explain its EU policy to the Europeans (Ibid). He argued that they became much more aware of their image in Europe as a hard-line party after their visit to Brussels and Berlin (Kılıçdaroğlu, 2010b). Kılıçdaroğlu announced that they will better explain the CHP's stance to the Europeans via frequently updated reports and reinforced correspondence (Ibid).

Kılıçdaroğlu promised that Turkey's EU accession will be their top priority after the CHP becomes the governing party (BBC Turkish, 2010). The CHP leader also argued that there is unfairness in the perceptions of Europeans towards his party. He asserted that the CHP supported all the EU-backed reforms in the Turkish Parliament and urged the critics to take this into account while judging the party's EU stance (Ibid).

On the other hand, Kılıçdaroğlu doesn't refrain from expressing his concerns about the EU's mistakes towards Turkey. He considers the EU's decision to enforce the solution of the Cyprus problem as membership conditionality for Turkey without issuing such conditions for Cyprus as the gravest mistake to shatter Turkey's membership process (Kılıçdaroğlu, 2010a: 25). Kılıçdaroğlu also argues that the outright opposition of an increasing number of European politicians Turkey reflects the failure of the EU to constitute a unified and competent body to decide on Turkey's fate (Ibid). Nevertheless, he calls the EU 'mistaken' not 'reluctant'. He also fuels optimism by urging both sides to focus on the future and 'not [to] be bogged down by mistakes made by either side in the past' (Ibid). Endorsing Baykal's EU rhetoric, Kılıçdaroğlu also stresses the CHP's resolute stance against the double standards concerning Turkey's membership (Kılıçdaroğlu, 2010b). Therefore, maintaining the red-lines of Baykal, Kılıçdaroğlu adopts a cautious but positive EU rhetoric.

Conclusion

This article examined the changing attitudes of the main political parties in Turkey towards the EU. Accordingly, a transformation from eagerness to reluctance towards Turkey's EU membership has been observed in the rhetoric of both governing AKP and the main opposition CHP. The extant literature offers limited explanation to this shift of EU stance. Concerning the extent dimension, it is difficult to apply classifications formulated by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004) and Kopecky and Mudde (2002) to the Turkish case. Neither AKP nor CHP could be deemed as Hard Eurosceptic but also not necessarily Soft Eurosceptic, since they don't oppose a certain policy field but react to the EU's unwillingness towards Turkey. Similarly, neither party could be deemed as europessimist in the sense that they are pessimistic about the current and future direction of the European enlargement. Instead they are pessimistic about Turkey's eventual membership. It is also challenging to directly explain this phenomenon via the content dimension of the literature, since the concerns over the membership prospects due to Turkey-scepticism do not necessarily reflect cost-benefit calculations or identity considerations towards membership.

The article argues that contextual analysis might be instrumental to explain such a change. Accordingly, both the reluctance and criticisms of the AKP and CHP towards EU membership developed as a firm reaction to Turkey-scepticism in the EU. Both parties could be considered as eurosceptic since they questioned the sincerity of the EU to accept Turkey's

accession. The officials of both parties used a similar language towards the EU condemning its 'double standards' and calling for the EU to respect the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*. Moreover, the party leader tended to see the EU as a unified block against Turkey's accession. Besides, Turkey-sceptic European leaders such as Merkel and Sarkozy were intensively criticized by both the AKP and the CHP officials.

The main opposition party started its critical stance as early as 2002 but lowered down the tone of its criticisms after the curtailment of the negotiations. Conversely, the AKP had no visible critical stance over the EU before the negotiations stalled. The drastic change in the AKP's EU policy stance has been triggered by the swift curtailment of the negotiations and the EU's reluctant attitude towards Turkey afterwards. Actually, the curtailment of the negotiations was not a surprise since it was obvious that the Republic of Cyprus would become an EU member before Turkey and put the Cyprus problem as an obstacle for Turkey's membership. Aware of this imminent possibility, the EU nevertheless consented to the initiation of Turkey's accession negotiation process right after Cyprus became an EU member. Therefore, it would not be fair to argue that Turkey's denial to recognize the Republic of Cyprus is the only factor behind the current stalemate in Turkey-EU relations. The EU's insistence on blocking the negotiation chapters due to the Cyprus stalemate coupled with the French blockade over 5 chapters reflects the EU's reluctance towards Turkey.

On the other hand, the AKP was also aware of the fact that the Cyprus problem would be utilized sooner or later to block Turkey's EU membership process. The CHP leader Baykal as early as 2002 warned the AKP government about the perils for Turkey of the imminent membership of Cyprus. However, the AKP government turned a blind eye to the warnings of the opposition and concentrated its energy to initiate the accession negotiations. However, the negotiations were soon blocked. It could be argued that the AKP knew this would come but preferred to win a small victory by opening negotiations rather than devoting much exhausting energy to take precautions against the imminent Cyprus obstacle for Turkey's accession. Refraining from any criticisms against the EU previously, the AKP government made a *volte face* exacerbating its criticisms against the EU as the Turkey-EU relations found itself in a serious stalemate.

Duverger (1964: 457) argues that opposition parties who remain too much in the opposition are inclined to act more violently and extravagantly. Leading the party for almost two

decades as opposition, Baykal and his cadre transformed a pro-EU Social Democrat party into an elitist and eurosceptic one without incentives of winning elections. The CHP under Baykal leadership persistently believed and opposed the possible perils about Turkey's membership perpetrated by the EU. However, the CHP failed to formulate constructive policies to inhibit those perils. The magnitude of the CHP's criticisms remained contingent upon the position of the AKP government vis-à-vis the EU. When the AKP government actively took part in the EU membership process and increased its popularity among the Europeans, the CHP resorted to high volume of criticisms. As the AKP's pro-EU-activism mitigated, so did the CHP's strong criticisms of the EU. Aiming to replace the AKP in terms of pro-EU activism, the CHP alleviated the tone of its criticisms and tended to establish closer contacts with the EU officials. However, the lack of a solution-based EU strategy and the already shattered image of the party in the EU prohibited Baykal from making the desired impact in Europe.

Although sharing Baykal's concerns, Kılıçdaroğlu nevertheless reflects a more pro-EU image since he always embraces Turkey's EU membership and keeps his criticisms against the EU at minimum. There are four main reasons behind such difference in the EU stances of the two leaders. First, Kılıçdaroğlu became the CHP leader when the accession negotiations were frozen and the AKP government slowed down the EU reforms. This gave Kılıçdaroğlu the opportunity to further decrease his party's criticisms and concentrate on domestic issues. Comparably, during the Baykal era, the AKP government accelerated Turkey's pace for membership and commenced the accession negotiations. Correspondingly, Baykal concentrated his energy on revealing the pitfalls of Turkey's EU membership process by raising arguments about the EU's reluctance towards Turkey and the drawbacks of AKP's pro-EU activism. Second, the image of the CHP in Europe was significantly negative during the Baykal leadership. Kılıçdaroğlu was thus welcomed by Europeans as a fresh breathe for the party. Third, unlike Baykal, Kılıçdaroğlu started with a remarkable resoluteness to bring the CHP to government changing the party structure and the policies considerably. This decisive leap forward also had an effect on the CHP to embrace a 'positive rhetoric' towards the EU. Fourth, the fact that Kılıçdaroğlu dismissed Öymen as the spokesman of the CHP pertinent to Turkey-EU relations played an important role for normalizing the CHP's stance towards the EU. However, Kılıçdaroğlu's pro-EU credentials might be better tested when the dormant Turkey-EU relations regain momentum.

In conclusion, the paper argues that a contextual analysis might be instrumental to better understand the changing patterns of EU stances of the key political parties in Turkey. The common perception of both the AKP and the CHP over the reluctance of the EU towards Turkey and the increasing activism of Turkey-sceptic politicians in Europe significantly contributed to this reactive stance. The mitigation of this reactive euroscepticism is not only contingent on the realization of Turkey's EU membership but also the alleviation of the perception towards the EU's reluctance over Turkey.

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