



# **Turkey's accession to the EU: interests, ideas and path dependence**

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### INTRODUCTION

The 1999 Helsinki European Council recognised Turkey as a candidate to become a member of the EU<sup>1</sup> and, two years later, in Copenhagen, the EU confirmed Turkey's candidacy by offering it a conditional timeframe for starting accession negotiations<sup>2</sup>. More specifically, in December 2002 the EU concluded that the EU would open accession negotiations with Turkey without delay if by December 2004 the candidate met the political criteria — institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities — on the basis of a report and a recommendation from the Commission.

During the negotiations surrounding the Helsinki summit, some national governments expressed objections to the formalising of Turkey's candidacy. However, such an issue barely led to any political disagreement. By contrast, when three years later the EU agenda included the adoption of a decision on a date and the conditions for starting accession negotiations with Turkey, a sharp controversy on the appropriateness of enlargement to this candidate surrounded the negotiations and threatened to overshadow the process. At this point, the change in perceptions by the European élite of Turkey's ability to present democratic credentials in the medium term made for the first time the accession of this candidate a real option. The abandonment of lack of confidence of Turkey's chances of improving its democratic records led to objections among certain European partners and contributed to defining an extra-institutional agenda questioning the sufficiency of liberal democratic values as a condition for accession and proposing the elevation of cultural and religious identity to the status of a membership condition. Even though the controversy over Turkey's accession went directly to the core of EU polity norms, liberal democratic rules prevailed in Copenhagen and Turkey's candidacy took a step forward in the accession process.

This article argues that the formalisation of Turkey's candidacy in 1999, which was agreed upon at a critical juncture, generated incentives for the candidate to meet the

Copenhagen criteria. In addition, it restricted the range of possible options in December 2002 to those arising from Helsinki and, in general, to the accession norms established in the Treaties and agreed upon in Copenhagen in 1993. The paper is divided into four sections. The first offers a critical assessment of explanations of both rationalist and constructivist approaches currently dominating European studies and assesses the notion of path dependence. The second and third sections analyse the role of both material interests and polity ideas in EU enlargement to Turkey, and conclude that explanations exclusively based on either strategic calculations or values and identities have significant shortcomings. The fourth section examines the institutional path of Turkey's candidacy to show how the course of action begun at Helsinki restricted the range of possible and legitimate options three years later in Copenhagen. Finally, the article ends with some concluding remarks.

## I. INTERESTS, IDEAS AND PATH DEPENDENCE

In recent years, European studies, and research on enlargement in particular, has been dominated by the so called rationalist-constructivist divide<sup>3</sup>. In general terms, rationalist theorising is based on individual action guided by utility-maximising calculations. When applied to the study of enlargement, rationalists assume that national governments calculate the individual gains and losses of accepting a new member and act strategically in order to optimise their institutional, economic and geopolitical benefits (Moravcsik, 1998). From this perspective, EU decisions to accept new members are explained by self-interested national governments following strategic calculations. By contrast, constructivism emphasises ideational factors and claims that EU decisions to expand to new members are highly influenced by collective identities defining a group and distinguishing it from other groups (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2002: 513; Fierke and Wiener, 1999; Risse and Wiener, 1999: 779). From this perspective, EU decisions to accept a new member are not the result of strategic calculations but depend on powerful normative reasons encompassing the EU moral and historical duty to welcome European countries sharing its values and beliefs.

The rationalist-constructivist divide reproduces one of the theoretical debates that have recently caused the most interest in Political Science. It assesses the role of material interests and polity ideas as alternative explanations of political outcome<sup>4</sup>. When applied to the study of EU enlargement, material interests refer to the institutional, economic and geopolitical motivations of the member States facing the candidate's accession. Such motivations are shaped as a result of national governments' assessment of the gains and losses in enlargement. Conversely, polity ideas are the normative guidelines concerning what constitutes a legitimate political order and refer to shared fundamental values and collective identities (Jachtenfuchs *et al.*, 1998: 410) that govern EU decisions to open the doors to new members. This article maintains the idea that both material interests and polity ideas matter when the EU commitment with Turkey's candidacy is analysed. However, either of them considered in isolation accounts for such an outcome, for two main reasons. First, if national governments were able to anticipate that the institutional, economic and geopolitical costs of enlargement to Turkey would be certain, immediate and high, in contrast to uncertain and long-term benefits, there would have to be reasons other than instrumental rationality accounting

for the Helsinki and the Copenhagen outcome. And second, if polity ideas were the driving force behind the EU commitment to Turkey, there would be at least two questions that remain unanswered, such as why in 2002 some European leaders questioned the appropriateness of Turkey's accession that had crystallised in Helsinki and why the EU adopted one specific outcome among the range of possible options in Copenhagen.

In order to answer these questions, this article introduces the notion of path dependence<sup>5</sup>. Both Pierson (2000) and Thelen and Steinmo (1992) emphasise how institutional change is largely influenced by past decisions that conform cumulative and non-reversible processes following certain 'paths' and shaping actors' preferences and strategies. Pierson (2000: 251) points out that the notion of path dependence is narrowly connected with increasing returns dynamics, an idea which is captured in two ways. Firstly, certain events may become critical junctures that mark divergent paths and can have major future consequences. Secondly, the costs of changing from one alternative to another increase over time. In the case of EU-Turkey relations, the Helsinki European Council became a critical juncture that established a non-reversible institutional path progressively restricting the menu of future options. The immediate legacy of Helsinki was the adoption of a European strategy to prepare Turkey for membership. Within this framework, the adoption of national constitutional, legislative and policy reforms, together with the recognition of such progress by the EU, contributed to consolidating the institutional path begun in 1999. Progress along this institutional path progressively reduced the chances of reconsidering Turkey's candidacy, however much Turkey's accession divided the European élite three years later. Consequently, even though a parallel agenda tried to obscure the institutional agenda in 2002, national governments' power to defend their own material interests was locked in by the institutional legacy of Helsinki and the menu of possible outcomes was limited to an arrangement on the conditions for starting accession negotiations.

## II. MATERIAL INTERESTS: CERTAIN, HIGH AND IMMEDIATE COSTS

Turkey's accession to the EU would generate considerable institutional, economic and geopolitical costs for the majority of member States and, in general, for the EU. Regarding institutional costs, Turkey's membership would alter member States' power

share in EU institutions and have implications in the reaching of the qualified majority vote (QMV) in the Council. The reason for this is that by 2020 Turkey would become the most populated member of the EU, ahead of Germany. Consequently, all member States would undergo a decrease of their individual power in the Council and, in particular, of their individual chances to build potential blocking minorities. Large countries —Germany, France, United Kingdom and Italy — would have to share their privileged status with a newcomer; semi-large States — Spain and Poland — could see their expectations of becoming EU ‘heavyweights’ frustrated unless they have already acquired that status; and small States could feel minimised. Considering that the decision to be analysed is dated in 2002, the calculations made by individual member States must take into account both the Nice Treaty and the rules informally drafted or suggested at the European Convention at that time. The former applies to an EU of 27 member States and introduces a triple majority system: a threshold of 74.78%, a majority of the member States and a majority encompassing the 62% of the total population of EU countries. The first rules informally drafted by the Convention stipulated that the QMV shall consist of the majority of member States, representing at least three fifths of the population of the Union. Under both rules, the distribution of institutional power among member States would be significantly altered with the entry of Turkey, which by 2020, would have a population representing 15% of the total EU-28 population. Germany would follow it with a population representing 14% of the EU, and France, the United Kingdom and Italy would have a population of about 10-11% each. With such a population distribution, coalitions to reach a blocking minority on a demographic basis under any of the two QMV rules considered would necessarily have to be larger and more difficult to build in an EU of 28 than in an EU with 27 member States.

Table 1 includes six potential blocking coalitions and their minimum requirements for reaching the demographic veto threshold in an EU of 28 members, according to the QMV rules of both the Nice Treaty and the preliminary draft of the Constitution Project<sup>7</sup>. Of the six, the reinforced Mediterranean coalition would be the only one to reach the demographic blocking minority with no difficulty. However, this coalition would probably not be too stable, as France has traditionally prioritised leading the construction of Europe with Germany over defending the interests of the Mediterranean region. A Southern coalition without France would need the support of a semi-large

State in order to reach the demographic minority but, in any case, it would be too large and heterogeneous to succeed. The same would apply to the coalition formed by the ten CEEC plus the three candidates. By contrast, an EU-15 Atlantist coalition would be more stable as it would only need the support of a large or a semi-large State. Finally, it seems unlikely that France and Germany would have to build a blocking minority in order to veto a decision that they explicitly reject.

Table 1  
Potential blocking coalitions for reaching the demographic clause in both the Nice Treaty and the Drafted Constitution Project (projected population for 2020<sup>6</sup>).

Potential blocking coalitions	% of population	Nice Treaty		Early Constitution Draft	
		Extra support needed to reach 38% of EU population	Number of States of the coalition + States needed	Extra support needed to reach 40% of EU population	Number of States of the coalition + States needed
Reinforced Mediterranean <sup>a</sup>	46.44	-	8	-	8
Mediterranean <sup>b</sup>	35.51	1 semilarge	7+1	1 semilarge	7 + 1
CEEC + 3 candidates <sup>c</sup>	33.14	1 large / semilarge	13 + 1	1 large / semilarge	13 + 1
Atlantist (EU-15) <sup>d</sup>	33.08	1 large / semilarge	6 + 1	1 large / semilarge	6 + 1
Nordic-Baltic-German <sup>e</sup>	26.15	1 large + 1 not too small	8 + 2	1 large + 2 not too small	8 + 3
French-German <sup>f</sup>	25.32	1 large + 1 not too small	2 + 2	1 large + 2 not too small	2 + 3

<sup>a</sup> France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey.

<sup>b</sup> Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey.

<sup>c</sup> Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Cyprus, Malta, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey.

<sup>d</sup> United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Denmark and The Netherlands.

<sup>e</sup> Germany, Poland, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia.

<sup>f</sup> France and Germany.

Source: own elaboration

Within this context of multiple potential coalitions, Ankara would probably prefer to participate in crossed games without being conditioned by territorial or substantial loyalties. This candidate's material interests would be highly heterogeneous: it is a poor



country, both Mediterranean and Atlantist country, and may at some point seek to become a first-class player in EU politics. Ankara could side the least prosperous members of the EU when negotiating the Community financial packages, but at the same time it could redefine its alliances when negotiating the distribution of economic resources among net recipient countries of the Union. Similarly, Turkey's membership could reinforce the Southern dimension of the EU. However, this would not necessarily strengthen the Mediterranean coalition, as its members would often defend opposing material interests, for instance regarding the CAP. At a geopolitical level, Turkey is a founder member of NATO and an ally of the United States. However, it might come closer to the German-French coalition in certain strategic issues if it wishes to receive generous treatment by EU policies and become a key member in EU politics.

The economic costs of Turkey's accession to the EU are likely to be immediate and high for EU in general and the member States in particular. If Turkey's population and economic trends are taken together and compared with those of the ten CEEC, it is reasonable to expect that the economic cost of EU expansion to Turkey would be no lower than enlargement to the CEEC, which will cost an estimated 40 billion euro for the period 2004-2006. Regarding demographic trends, Turkey will have a population of around 80 million inhabitants in 2015, while the current population of the ten CEEC is 75 million. Reasonably, EU enlargement to Turkey would probably exceed the economic costs of CEEC accession. Table 2 shows that current inflation and per capita income for the ten CEEC, but not unemployment, are much closer to the EU average than the Turkish figures. Even if the Turkish economy evolves positively in the short term, considerable efforts to integrate it would be needed. According to the 2002 Regular Report from the Commission on Turkey's Progress Towards Accession, Turkey still is undergoing the consequences of two deep financial crises and needs to continue making reforms in order to achieve macroeconomic stability. In assessing the progress made by the Turkish economy since 1997, the Commission highlights its volatility, a decrease in *per capita* income, a rise in inflation, a widening of social and regional differences, an increase in labour market imbalances and a rise in unemployment (European Commission, 2002b). In brief, Turkish political economy has failed to cope with the public reforms needed to cope with liberalisation and has made little to abandon its short-term patronage approach (Eder, 2003: 329). In addition, the accession negotiations between the EU and Turkey would face significant challenges: the

integration of ten economies whose individual per capita GDP is 50% of the EU-15 average; the preparation for enlargement to Romania and Bulgaria, whose current per capita GDP is about a quarter of the EU-15 average; and the recovery of the German economy.

**Table 2**  
Basic economic data for EU-15, CEEC-10 and Turkey (2001)

	Inflation	Unemployment	GDP per capita (% UE-15)
EU-15	2.3	7.6	100
CEEC-10	5.2	10.9	51.3
Turkey	57.6	8.5	22

Source: Commission of the European Communities, 2002a.

The short-term economic costs of enlargement to Turkey would be counter-balanced by the expected economic benefits in the mid-term. Having Turkey as a new member would provide European companies with new investment opportunities, provide millions of new consumers and ultimately improve European competitiveness in the world economy. This calculation partly accounts for Greek government and élite's move from its traditional veto approach to Turkey's accession to a rapprochement strategy<sup>8</sup>. The perspective on having mid-term economic benefits must be taken into account. As in previous enlargement processes, the EU and the member States consider that the expected long-term economic benefits would exceed the immediate economic costs. In fact, despite the fears that some national governments had on the economic cost of both Southern and CEEC accession, the financial aspect has never strangled any EU decision on enlargement. In this respect, Torreblanca (2001: 5) shows how the EU went through enlargement to the CEEC in spite of the high economic impact of such a decision on national economies. There must therefore be more powerful reasons than economic interests behind the EU decisions to admit States with much less prosperous economies.

If both the institutional and economic consequences of Turkey's accession for member States are known, high and immediate, the geopolitical gains and losses would be more

uncertain. Some authors, for instance Sjursen (2002: 502), point out that arguments in favour of Turkey's membership are mainly strategic. Particularly, since September 11 terrorist attacks, international security has become a priority and the EU has stressed the arguments in favour of improving EU relations with neighbouring States. The international security map after 9-11 has increased Turkey's strategic importance to the EU. However, Turkey's increasing geopolitical importance does not necessarily mean that its full membership is in the interest of the EU and the member States. There are at least three critical issues to believe so: Islam and democracy; relationships with Turkey's neighbours; and migratory pressures. Firstly, Turkey's joining the EU would imply the geographical extension of democracy and fundamental human rights and, consequently, it would demonstrate that Islam and democracy can come together. Moreover, the democratic package would probably include a united Cyprus and an acceptable solution for the Kurdish minority<sup>9</sup>. However, not all at the EU are convinced that Turkey's accession would contribute to removing the fears of Islamic radicalisation. Some European leaders, particularly Christian Democrats, fear that Turkey's accession to the EU would bring the 'clash of civilisations' into the EU. Secondly, some voices at the EU, particularly the Commission, feel that Turkey's membership would improve the security of the EU borders, especially with regard to the fight against organised crime and illegal immigration. Finally, some European actors fear that Turkey's accession would provoke strong migration flows towards the more prosperous members of the EU, namely Germany, where 2.5 million Turks currently live. German Christian Democrats perceive Turkish mass migration to Germany as a threat to wages and employment, to the future conservative electoral options, and to the social and cultural cohesion within the EU.

The institutional, economic and less clearly geopolitical costs of Turkey's accession to the EU are to a great extent known, high and immediate for the member States. National governments would lose institutional power and make considerable economic efforts and review their border policy. By contrast, the benefits seem uncertain, would come in the long term and would probably be unevenly distributed. Considering this balance, if self-interested member States' preferences and intergovernmental bargaining were indeed the driving force behind EU decisions on Turkey, the most likely outcome would probably have been different at both Helsinki and Copenhagen. It seems, then, that

explanations exclusively based on strategic calculations are insufficient to account for the decisions on Turkey taken by the EU in 1999 and 2002.

### III. POLITY IDEAS: AGREEMENTS AND DISAGREEMENTS

Constructivism assumes that collective rules, values and identities are crucial in order to account for EU decisions to open the doors to new members. From this perspective, Risse and Wiener (1999: 779) argue that collective principles and identities, by defining social groups and distinguishing them from one another, are the driving forces behind the selection of candidates for joining the EU. Using a similar interpretation, Checkel (1999: 86) suggests that the EU selection of countries qualifying to become member States depends on the degree of 'cultural match' between EU and applicants' norms. Similarly, Schimmelfennig (2001: 48) tries to explain EU enlargement to the CEEC by suggesting that 'rhetorical action' based on the strategic use of norm-based arguments such as the 'moral duty' of Europe were a trump card in the hands of the supporters of enlargement.

The study of EU enlargement to Turkey cannot avoid considering collective values and identities for two main reasons. First, the politics of EU enlargement to Turkey confronts two identity concepts competing with each other, the one based on liberal political values and the other one based on Christian culture. For the former, European identity is based on secular State institutions and respect for freedom of religion. According to this view, Turkey's accession would be legitimate as far as this candidate satisfied membership conditions. For the latter, European values have their roots in a religious heritage, and membership of States not sharing them is thus unacceptable. From this perspective, EU-Turkish relations should be articulated on the basis of a special partnership. Second, while Christian culture was not a new topic on the eve of the 2002 decision, it was of much greater importance compared with 1999. The changing perceptions on Turkish options to enter the EU between 1999 and 2002 cannot be neglected in the analysis. As Turkey's accession unexpectedly and for the first time appeared as a real option along 2002, an intense normative debate on whether religious culture should be a membership criterion in addition to liberal democratic norms moved up EU political agenda.

Constructivism devotes attention to both the institutionalisation of identities and the processes of argument and discourse on the rules defining the boundaries of the community. Regarding the former, liberal values possess treaty-based legitimacy. In brief, the Preamble of the Treaty of Rome claims to preserve and strengthen peace and liberty; the preamble of the Single European Act stresses the promotion of democracy and human rights; the Maastricht Treaty refers to democracy (former article F); the Amsterdam Treaty introduces the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law (article 6, former F); and the Nice Treaty strengthens the protection of human rights. By contrast, Christian culture has not reached such institutional status.

Regarding argument and discourse, along 2002, most EU institutional representatives, including President of the Commission, Romano Prodi, and the Secretary General of the Council, Javier Solana, maintained positions that were consistent with EU institutional rules. By contrast, the President of the European Convention, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, declared to *Le Monde* on 8 November 2002 that Turkey was not part of Europe and its membership would represent the end of the EU. His statement, however, made explicit an intense controversy on whether a State with a Muslim culture should or should not be allowed to join the EU. Not surprisingly, a few days later, the European People's Party and European Democrats (EPP-ED) presented a draft for a European Constitution with a preamble that included references to the European Christian heritage. Not surprisingly, the EPP-ED Group at the European Parliament tabled an amendment motion suggesting that the EU should assess how EU-Turkish relationships could be built on a basis of a special partnership instead of full membership<sup>10</sup>. In the plenary vote of the Report on Enlargement, on 20 November 2002, the amendment was rejected by the Socialist, the Liberal and the Green groups, as well as by one fifth of the EPP-ED's own members<sup>11</sup>. At a national level, the religious cultural objection against Turkey entered some national agendas, especially in Germany and France. Significantly, in Turkey, the political élite accuses many European leaders of interpreting the EU as a 'Christian club' (McLaren, 2000: 127).

The controversy raised by EU enlargement to Turkey confronted two concepts of European identity, the one based on treaty-based liberal values and another one based on religious culture. However, stressing the importance of identities in the politics of

EU enlargement to Turkey does not automatically confirm the validity of constructivist assumptions, for at least four reasons. Firstly, constructivism does not fully explain why the commitment to Turkey reached at Helsinki, which confirmed liberal democratic norms, was much more controversial at Copenhagen. Secondly, constructivism can hardly demonstrate that individual material interests are not hidden by arguments over collective identities. Thirdly, constructivism fails to account for why the EU adopted a specific outcome out of a range of possible options in Copenhagen. Finally, accepting that polity ideas are embodied in the Copenhagen outcome does not necessarily imply that they account for it, although constructivists would probably reach this conclusion.

#### IV. PATH DEPENDENCE DYNAMICS

Considering both material interests and polity ideas in the light of path dependence dynamics may help to account for the EU decision to confirm Turkey's candidacy in 2002. One of the core assumptions of path dependence is that certain events conform critical junctures that open a divergent and non reversal institutional path, and progress along this path increases the cost of reversal. In order to identify critical junctures in EU-Turkey relations, an in-depth examination of the institutional process from Luxembourg to Copenhagen is needed. In a relatively short period of time, from 1997 to 1999, the EU moved from an exclusive strategy towards an inclusive one regarding Turkey's bid for accession (Müftuler-Bac and McLaren, 2003). This move was favoured by at least four external events that led to a unique moment in EU-Turkey relations. Firstly, the 1999 Kosovo crisis put international security higher on the EU agenda and increased EU preferences for establishing closer co-operation with candidate countries. Secondly, as Öniş (2000: 472) suggests, the social democratic wave affecting all major countries in Europe at the end of the nineties favoured the emergence of a conception of Europe closer to the idea of multicultural citizenship, compared with the more homogeneous vision exhibited by previous conservative governments. Thirdly, the Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis initiating improved relationships with his country's Turkish neighbour in 1999 led to Athens abandoning its traditional veto of the accession of Turkey. And fourthly, the Turkish economic élite, particularly the business organisation TÜSIAD, as well as the emerging Turkish business groups in Germany, intensified their lobbying strategy in Berlin and Brussels in favour of the Turkish candidacy (Öniş, 2000: 472).

The change of circumstances favoured the heads of government at Helsinki being sensitive to Turkey's bid for accession and resolving to acknowledge its candidate status. This decision indeed represented, using Fierke and Wiener's point (1999), a promise to Turkey. However, at that point national governments and EU institutions were not at all confident of Turkey's abilities to substantially improve its democratic record in the medium term. In this respect, the 1999 Regular Report by the Commission was particularly critical in its assessment of Turkey's progress towards accession. It highlighted anomalies in the functioning of the public authorities, persistent human rights violations, major shortcomings in the treatment of minorities, torture, extra-judicial executions and the major role played by the army in political life (European Commission, 1999). In addition, the arrest and the passing of the death sentence against the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 provoked extensive condemnation and increased sentiments of distrust regarding Turkey's ability to meet democratic values. Within this context, the EU institutional commitment to Turkey seemed to represent nothing but a symbolic gesture. It is illustrative that the 2000 Nice Treaty included Bulgaria and Romania but excluded Turkey in the distribution of institutional power sharing.

Path dependence dynamics look into critical junctures in order to account for major institutional changes. When analysing EU-Turkish relations, the Helsinki arrangement became one of such a critical junctures having major institutional consequences. It led to the implementation of a pre-accession strategy with Turkey in order to carry out the necessary reforms, particularly those related to the protection of human rights. The 2000 Nice European Council adopted the Accession Partnership Document for Turkey. In response, the Turkish Parliament adopted a constitutional reform, three reform packages and a National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis. The most outstanding aspects included the abolition of the death penalty in peacetime, the use of minority languages in education and broadcasting, and a series of reforms that limit restrictions on freedom of speech, association and religion<sup>12</sup>. The Commission and the EU in general reminded Turkey that such reforms were not enough to end practices such as torture or child labour, which violate Western democratic values (European Commission, 2002b). However, the EU recognised the progress made and encouraged Ankara to keep working towards reaching an effective implementation of the reforms. Indeed, the 2001 Laeken European Council welcomed the constitutional reforms

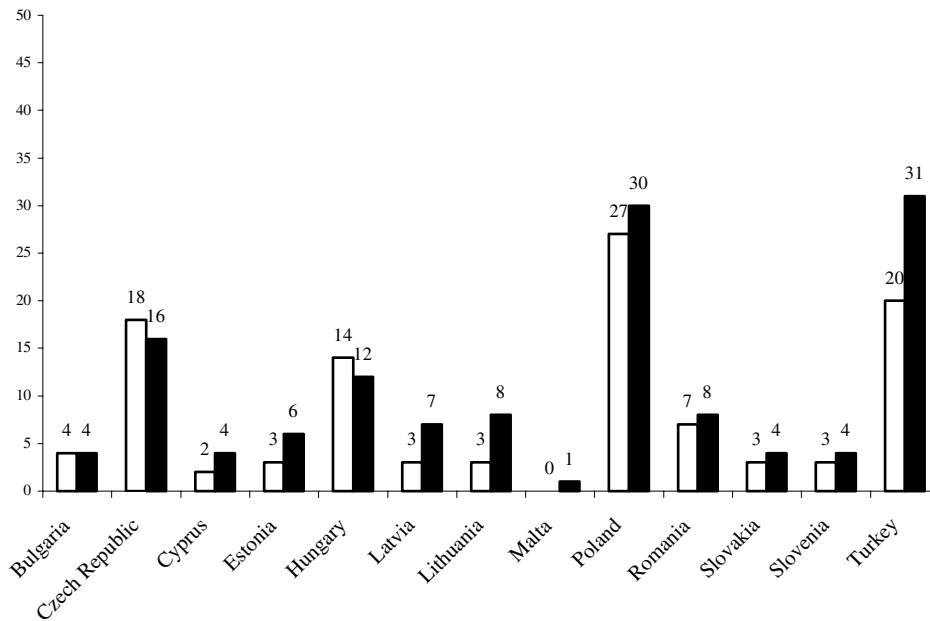
undertaken in Turkey and brought the initiation of accession negotiations closer<sup>13</sup>. In June 2002, the heads of government meeting in Seville reached an agreement that the European Council could take new decisions on the following step in the Turkish candidacy at the end of the year<sup>14</sup>.

In addition to the adoption of constitutional, legislative and policy reforms following the Helsinki path, the strategic importance of Turkey for the EU changed after September 11. Turkey's immediate condemnation of the attacks made it an extremely important geopolitical ally for the EU. Being aware of this, Ankara intensified its lobbying strategy in the EU, especially during the weeks prior to the Copenhagen summit. Indeed, Turkey's membership became the main priority of the moderate Islamic AKP government formed after the elections of 3 November 2002. Soon after the elections, the Turkish governing party leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, led an intense lobbying campaign in some European capitals for the initiation of accession talks in 2003 while, at the same time, he knocked on Washington's door.

The combination of a proactive Ankara strategy as well as a European agenda prioritising international security contributed to the consolidation of the Helsinki path and to transforming the feelings of mistrust which had historically dominated European views on Turkey. Sentiments of disbelief regarding Turkey's chances of joining the EU in the medium term started to become diluted and were gradually replaced by less pessimistic outlooks. Changing perceptions, in turn, generated a political climate favouring the emergence of reservations concerning Turkey's membership, especially after the November elections. As a result, the institutional agenda following Helsinki cohabited with an extra-institutional one touching upon fundamental EU norms. This parallel agenda questioned the sufficiency of liberal democratic values as a membership condition and proposed the need to give religious culture the status of an accession requirement. In addition, the resulting controversy probably contributed to increasing the percentage of European citizens' recognition of Turkey's candidacy within just a few weeks. In November 2002, Turkey became the best known candidate among Europeans, ahead of Poland and the Czech Republic (see graphic 1).



Graphic 1  
The best known candidates among Europeans  
September 2002 and November 2002 (%)



Source: EOS Gallup, 2002.

Along the last months of 2002, the non-institutional agenda tried to shadow the institutional one. The analysis of the micro-mechanisms of path dependence helps reach a better understanding of why the EU confirmed Turkey's candidacy in spite of the emergence of a parallel agenda. One of the conditions of path dependence is that progress in an institutional path increases the costs of reversal. Past decisions making a divergent institutional course of political action generate expectations and incentives and shape actors' strategies. As successive decisions have cumulative effects, changing from one alternative to another over time may generate frustration, remove incentives and break institutional consensus. The 1999 Helsinki commitment increased Turkish European expectations and, as a response, Turkish authorities renewed their incentives to keep working in the fulfilment of the political and economic conditions (Önis, 2003). The adoption of the constitutional reforms and the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis evidence such changing strategies. The EU, in turn, enhanced a strategy to stimulate democracy in Turkey, both an end in itself and a factor of regional stability, through the adoption of a pre-accession strategy. As far as both the EU and the candidate reshaped their expectations and strategies under the post-Helsinki scenario,

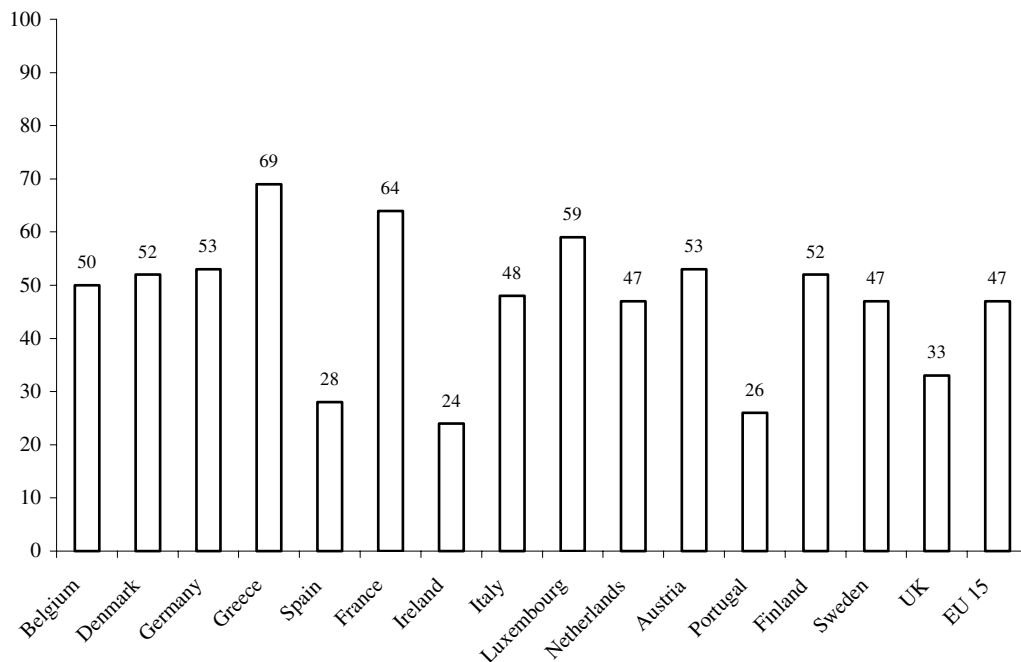
the reconsideration of Turkey's candidacy in 2002 would probably have frustrated both Turkey's and EU expectations and reduced the candidate's incentives to conduct political and economic reforms. In addition, the abandonment of the course of institutional development might have resulted in the breaking of polity consensus. The Helsinki outcome, that was embedded of fundamental polity norms, was ratified by the European Councils of Laeken and Seville, so that in Copenhagen the decision became in practice locked-in such an institutional direction. Reversing the institutional path in 2002, meaning the reconsideration of Turkey's European aspirations, could have had the additional effect of breaking a treaty-based consensus and erase EU legitimacy among European citizens.

The notion of path dependence helps explaining how past decisions have intended or unintended future effects by narrowing the range of possible outcomes. However, it does not account for why a decision is taken among a range of alternatives. At this point, Pierson (2000) argues that a path dependence approach is not divorced with rationality. Individual actors following material motivations act strategically within the borders set by path dependence dynamics. When looking at the 2002 Copenhagen outcome, there is evidence that national governments conducted intergovernmental bargaining. Negotiations, however, dealt with the topics included in the institutional agenda, that is, with the issue of how and when accession negotiations with Turkey would start.

The position of national governments regarding Turkey's candidacy became clearer during the weeks prior to the Copenhagen summit. The Atlantist coalition, led by the British government and supported by the Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Greek executives, proposed the opening of accession negotiations in January 2004. Two reasons account for this preference. Firstly, the British government, which has historically been a bridge between United States and the EU, considered that the non-conditional starting of the accession talks could be a pay-off to Ankara in exchange for permission to fly over Turkish air space during the military intervention in Iraq that the Anglo-American coalition had already planned for the immediate future. Secondly, a quick and non-conditional start to accession negotiations would prevent the EU from postponing the decision on the start of talks until a point at which the CEEC were already full members of the EU.

The position of the British led coalition radically diverged from the one of the Scandinavian countries, Austria and The Netherlands, that seemed to have certain reservations to Turkey's entry. Finally, the French and German governments agreed upon a middle ground formula. Throughout 2002, both executives maintained ambiguous and barely enthusiastic positions regarding Turkey's candidacy, perhaps because neither was blind to domestic public opinion. As graphic 2 indicates, in France 64% of public opinion was against Turkey's membership and in Germany 53% of public opinion opposed this candidate (European Commission, 2002c). The Paris-Berlin agreement, that was apparently reached at a bilateral meeting in early December 2002, rejected giving Turkey a firm date for opening negotiations and proposed starting them in July 2005 as long as the candidate fulfilled the political criteria. In this way, the decision would be taken by the EU-25 and, in addition, the Turkish issue would be prevented from interfering in the European Parliament elections in June 2004.

Graphic 2  
Europeans against enlargement to Turkey (%)



Source: Commission of the European Communities, 2002c.

The final decision of the Copenhagen European Council incorporated French and German interests, but made a small concession to the British government and its allies by bringing forward the decision on the start of accession talks by six months, that is to December 2004. It seems that national governments defending geopolitical interests in some cases, and electoral interests in other cases, were behind the decision. However, this does not mean that they had enough power to maximise their individual benefits, fully control the agenda and extensively influence the final outcome. To this respect, Recep Tayyip Erdogan complained soon after the end of the summit that Jacques Chirac attempted to postpone the start of negotiations to 2008. However it was, the controversy on Turkey's membership among EU elite and domestic public opinion seems to indicate that the constraints of the 1999 'promise' matter in accounting for the 2002 outcome. National governments' preferences, the agenda and the possible range of outcomes were strongly conditioned by both European fundamental norms and the Helsinki institutional legacy. Polity norms and feedback dynamics made the choice for freezing Turkish candidacy by invoking religious arguments appear illegitimate.

#### FINAL REMARKS

When trying to account for the 1999 and 2002 EU commitment to Turkey, approaches exclusively based either on material interests or on polity ideas present certain shortcomings. On the one hand, the 1999 decision to formalise Turkey's candidacy and its 2002 confirmation can hardly be explained as the result of strategic calculation by national governments. The institutional, economic and less clearly geopolitical costs of EU enlargement to Turkey would be certain, high and immediate for the member States, whereas the benefits would be uncertain and come in the long term. If the national governments trying to maximise their benefits were those shaping EU-Turkey relations, the expected outcome would have probably been less generous with Turkey's wishes. On the other hand, polity ideas play an important role in EU decisions to admit a new member. However, polity ideas fail to account for why negotiations on Turkey's entry were relatively uncontroversial in Helsinki and difficult in Copenhagen and why in 2002 national governments agreed upon a particular outcome out of a range of possible options.

However, asserting that explanations exclusively based either on material interests or on polity ideas are not sufficient does not mean that they are unimportant. This article neither neglects material interests nor polity ideas but introduces a more dynamic approach by looking into path dependence dynamics. It has emphasised how a range of circumstances in 1999 formed a critical juncture leading to the formalisation of Turkey's candidacy and how the cumulative processes initiated then opened a divergent and irreversible institutional sequence that progressively narrowed actors' control over the future agenda. At Helsinki, national governments, being sensitive to Turkey's wishes but also aware of the country's deficient democratic record, reached a political arrangement that had unanticipated future consequences. The pre-accession strategy was the first outcome of Helsinki and contributed to the improvement of Turkey's democratic performance on the applicant's side and the intermediate progress made at Laeken and Seville on the EU side. The notion of path dependence helps in understanding how the Helsinki outcome and the subsequent institutional arrangements were constraining features of national governments' interests, why changes in the political climate occurred between Helsinki and Copenhagen, and why the institutional progress made since 1999 was hardly reversal. The post-1999 institutional sequence, that was built on liberal values, progressively put the reconsideration of Turkey's candidacy aside and it restricted the range of possible outcomes in Copenhagen to those concerned with how and when the accession talks would start. Even though in 2002 some political leaders displayed little interest in Turkey's joining the EU, and although a parallel agenda touching on hard core of European fundamental norms tried to cloud negotiations, the institutional agenda overcame attempts to make cultural and religious identity a condition of membership.

## POSTSCRIPT

On October 6th 2004 the European Commission issued a recommendation on Turkey's progress towards accession. The Commission recommended accession negotiations with Turkey to be opened. However, as significant efforts were still needed to fulfil the implementation of the political criterion, particularly a 'zero tolerance' approach to eradicate torture, the Commission recommended the suspension of negotiations in the case of persistent breach of the political criteria (Commission, 2004). By giving Turkey a 'qualified yes', the Commission adopted a middle ground solution by introducing for

the first time an accession rule that reflected the open-ended nature of negotiations with a candidate country. To this respect, the Commission's recommendation once again gave Turkey a different treatment than the one given by the EU to the rest of candidates. However, the recommendation was fully consistent with EU institutional and polity norms.

## NOTES

1. Helsinki European Council, 10-11 December 1999. Presidency conclusions.
2. Copenhagen European Council, 12-13 December 2002. Presidency conclusions.
3. For an overview of the rationalism-constructivism debate, see Aspinwall and Schneider (2000); and Christiansen *et al.* (2001).
4. See for instance Hall (1999) for an excellent analysis on the role of interests, institutions and ideas in comparative political economy.
5. For analysis on path dependence applied to the EU see Sverdrup (2002), Pierson (1998) and Kay (2003).
6. Not too small States include those having a population between 1% and 4% of the EU total: Romania, the Netherlands, Greece, the Czech Republic, Belgium Hungary, Portugal, Sweden, Bulgaria and Austria. Semilarge States include Spain and Poland. Large States include Turkey, Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy.
7. In the calculation, the UN World Population Prospects (2002) data have been used, [www.un.org/esa/population](http://www.un.org/esa/population). Calculations on blocking minorities by virtue of the Nice Treaty have been made considering the second and third QMV rules.
8. For an analysis of the role of Greece in EU-Turkey relations, see Arikan (2003).
9. An agreement on Cyprus is not a pre-condition for Turkey's accession. However, the EU has repeatedly expressed a preference for a united island.
10. <http://www.epp-ed.org>
11. EP 325.101, [http://www.europarl.eu.int/home/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.eu.int/home/default_en.htm)
12. See Hale (2003).
13. Laeken European Council, 14-15 December 2001. Presidency conclusions.
14. Seville European Council, 21-22 June 2002. Presidency conclusions.

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