

THE DYNAMICS OF FRANCE - TURKEY RELATIONS FROM 1995 TO 2007

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Abstract

This paper offers a comprehensive examination of France-Turkey relations during the 1990s, with a particular focus on the critical period from 1995 to 2007. The study identifies this era as a phase of continuous and stable development, which both consolidated the achievements of prior historical phases and laid a solid foundation for subsequent dynamic interactions. The analysis situates bilateral relations within the broader context of Turkey's evolving political and economic relationship with the European Union, emphasizing the significant and influential role played by France. The paper highlights how France acted as a key interlocutor and strategic partner, fostering political dialogue and reinforcing a complex web of legal and institutional frameworks governing mutual obligations and responsibilities. Although the relationship faced notable obstacles and challenges, it demonstrated resilience and a shared commitment to advancing common interests and strategic goals, reflecting an increasing degree of interdependence between the two countries.

To explore these dynamics, the study employs a multidisciplinary methodological framework centered on strategic analysis. This approach is supported by event analysis, which enables the identification and examination of key turning points and critical developments influencing bilateral relations. Additionally, content analysis is utilized to systematically evaluate diplomatic communications, policy documents, official statements, and media coverage, providing insight into the narratives and discourses shaping Franco-Turkish interactions. This combined methodological approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the political, diplomatic, and legal factors that drove the evolution of relations between France and Turkey over the examined period.

Keywords: France-Turkey Relations, foreign policy, European Union, security system, perceptions, economic cooperation, cultural and political identity, bilateral strategic dialogue, Turkish secularism, European foreign policy.

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Introduction

A new phase in France–Turkey relations began in the second half of the 1990s, prompted by the imperatives of the time and historical necessity. During this period, the two countries engaged in increasingly frequent interactions, primarily as a result of evolving mutual perceptions and their subsequent reinterpretation and redefinition. This process, in turn, led—over time—to a period of dynamic and active cooperation. Although these relations have been continually shaped and modified by both internal and external influences since their inception, they have nonetheless retained their core elements and distinctive characteristics. These enduring features have served as key guarantors of the continuity of bilateral ties and as driving forces behind the further strengthening of the relations.

Jacques Chirac’s Presidency and the Foundation of France’s Foreign Policy

On May 17, 1995, former Prime Minister Jacques Chirac¹ won the presidential elections in the French Republic, succeeding former President François Mitterrand². His twelve-year presidency laid a solid foundation - through its tangible achievements - for the subsequent successful and effective implementation of both domestic and foreign policy by the French government.

It is important to note that, toward the end of the 20th century, one of the central priorities of France’s foreign policy - among other pressing issues - was European integration³. France viewed the solution to these challenges in the establishment and deepening of multilateral cooperation among European states. Accordingly, it initiated scientific and technological collaboration with West Germany and supported Spain and Portugal in their accession to the European Union⁴. Within the framework of cooperation with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl⁵, the French government succeeded in steering the European Union toward the final stage of conceptual preparation and institutional consolidation. This effort laid a stable foundation for the organization’s future active operations—an agenda to which France remains firmly committed today.

¹ Les mandats de Jacques Chirac, <https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/jacques-chirac/3-les-mandats-de-jacques-chirac/>.

² François Mitterrand, <https://www.elysee.fr/en/francois-mitterrand>.

³ Jacques Chirac, une carrière politique exceptionnelle. *Le Monde*, September 26, 2019. https://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2019/09/26/jacques-chirac-est-mort_6013138_3382.html (accessed January 16, 2025).

⁴ The accession of Portugal and Spain to the European Union. *European Council, Council of the European Union*, December 23, 2015.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/library/library-blog/posts/the-accession-of-portugal-and-spain-to-the-european-union/>.

⁵ The unbreakable link between France and Germany. *Financial Times*, December 17, 2008. <https://www.ft.com/content/69327bc4-cbab-11dd-ba02-000077b07658>.

In line with the provisions and principles of the Maastricht Treaty signed by his predecessors⁶, President Jacques Chirac continued to support the establishment of stable security systems in Europe and the expansion of the European Community. In doing so, he contributed to the consolidation and maintenance of European security, especially in light of the growing internal and external threats and challenges it faced daily. Accordingly, appropriate measures had to be taken to effectively counter these risks. (It is worth noting that during Chirac's presidency, France transitioned to a new currency, the euro, which replaced the franc in 1999)⁷.

As a result of Chirac's policies, France succeeded in improving its relations with several countries - including the United Kingdom⁸ (although tensions resurfaced following the joint Franco-British-American military operation "Desert Fox"⁹), the People's Republic of China¹⁰, Japan¹¹, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia¹², the Syrian Arab Republic¹³, the United Arab Emirates¹⁴, among others - thereby placing its foreign policy on a stable, multi-layered, and comprehensive trajectory extending from Europe to the Middle and Far East.

France-Turkey Relations under Presidents Demirel and Özal: Turkey's Strategic Priority: European Integration

As in the past, the French Republic continued to regard the Republic of Turkey with significant interest. At the time, Turkey was led by President Süleyman Demirel¹⁵, who had served as Prime Minister on seven occasions from 1965 to 1993 and as President from 1993 to 2000, succeeding former President Turgut Özal.¹⁶ During Özal's presidency, France-Turkey relations had already begun to

⁶ Moltke, Konrad. The Maastricht Treaty and the Winnipeg Principles on Trade and Sustainable Development, Manitoba, 1995, p. 18, <https://www.iisd.org/system/files/publications/maastricht.pdf?q=sites/default/files/publications/maastricht.pdf>.

⁷ French Franc, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in_depth/business/2001/euro_cash/spent_currencies/f_franc.stm.

⁸ France and Britain: Neighbours, Friends, Allies. *Rusi*, July 14, 2020.

⁹ Operation Desert Fox, https://archive.defense.gov/specials/desert_fox/.

¹⁰ Establishment of Sino-French Diplomatic Relations, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18003.shtml.

¹¹ France-Japan relations, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/tag/france-japan-relations/> (accessed January 20, 2025).

¹² A history of Saudi-French relations. *Arab News*, July 13, 2020. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1704046/saudi-arabia>.

¹³ The saga of France and Syria relations. *Gulf News*, May 26, 2006. <https://gulfnews.com/opinion/oped-the-saga-of-france-and-syria-relations-1.238423>.

¹⁴ Bilateral relations between France and the UAE, <https://ae.ambafrance.org/Bilateral-relations-between-France-and-the-UAE>.

¹⁵ Sarı, Eren. Çoban Sülü, İstanbul, 2015, p. 8., https://books.google.am/books?id=FN3JDQAAQBAJ&pg=PA8&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false.

¹⁶ Özal Kürt'üm diyemedi. *Hurriyet*, April 20, 2013. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/ozal-kurt-um-diyemedi-23081075>.

intensify. Bilateral official visits resulted in the signing of educational and cultural agreements - complementing the existing legal framework¹⁷ - which were further developed throughout Demirel's term in office. These efforts culminated in the signing of several major bilateral accords, including the Maritime Cooperation Agreement signed in September 1996¹⁸, which set the groundwork for expanding relations and fostering collaboration in the maritime sector with a view to sustained cooperation and the strengthening of bilateral trade and economic ties, the Environmental Protection Cooperation Agreement, signed in March 1997 and entering into force in September of the same year¹⁹, and the Agreement on the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy, concluded in 1999²⁰. These agreements laid the foundation for a broad-based partnership and demonstrated both countries' commitment to further enhancing and enriching their multifaceted cooperation—especially in recognition of the mutual benefits involved.

Within the context of Turkish foreign policy, since the early 1980s, integration into various European institutions and organizations had become a key strategic priority, among other national imperatives²¹. At that time, Turkey's potential accession to the European Union had evolved into a critical socio-political, economic, and even existential and ideological issue²². However, as will become evident through the factual analysis of this topic, the urgency and intensity of this issue gradually diminished in the ensuing years.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that from the second half of the 1990s onward, the evolution and dynamics of France-Turkey relations were increasingly framed within the broader context of Turkey-EU relations. France's policy stance and political positioning were of paramount importance in this regard. After all, this issue emerged as one of post-Cold War Europe's most contentious questions, directly linked to the security and stability of the European system. In this light, France has consistently held a vital and enduring role as a key regional actor.

During this period, official France-Turkey diplomatic exchanges also intensified. Numerous high-level visits took place between representatives of both

¹⁷ Traités et accords de la France, <https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/cadcgp.php?>

¹⁸ Accord maritime entre le gouvernement de la République française et le gouvernement de la république de Turquie, https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/util/documents/accede_document.php?1616593086576.

¹⁹ Accord de coopération entre le gouvernement de la République française et le gouvernement de la république de Turquie dans le domaine de l'environnement, <https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/cadcgp.php?>

²⁰ Accord de coopération entre le gouvernement de la République française et le gouvernement de la République turque pour le développement des utilisations pacifiques de l'énergie nucléaire, <https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/cadcgp.php?>

²¹ Özlem, Terzi. Europeanisation of foreign policy and candidate countries: a comparative study of greek and turkish cases, *Politique européenne*, 2005 (3), N°17, p. 115, <https://www.cairn.info/journal-politique-europeenne-2005-3-page-113.htm>.

²² Рустэмовна, Алсу. Внутривостановительная борьба в Турции по вопросу о вступлении страны в ЕС (80-е гг. XX - начало XXI вв.), Казань, 2005, с. 26, <http://www.lib.ua-ru.net/diss/cont/196638.html>.

states. Particularly noteworthy were the visit of French politician and prominent diplomat François Dopffer²³ to Turkey in 1995; the visits to France by Turkish State Ministers Gürcan Dağdaş²⁴ (1996) and Edip Safder Gaydalı²⁵ (1999); and the official visit in 2000 by General Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu, Commander of the Turkish Armed Forces. These visits coincided with the signing of the aforementioned bilateral agreements, through which Franco-Turkish cooperation evolved into an increasingly multifaceted and institutionalized partnership that deepened with each passing year.

France-Turkey Relations within the Turkey-EU Context

In 2000, President Süleyman Demirel was succeeded by Ahmet Necdet Sezer²⁶, who had previously served as President of Turkey's Constitutional Court. Sezer was a staunch advocate of secularism²⁷ and strongly supported the consolidation of Turkey's secular regime.²⁸ This position often placed him at odds with the Justice and Development Party (AKP)²⁹, which was founded in 2001 and declared itself a center-right conservative party, going on to win the parliamentary elections in 2002.³⁰ On numerous occasions, Sezer openly stated that secularism in Turkey was under threat and that it was imperative to take all necessary measures to protect it, thereby ensuring the country's development proceeded along a stable trajectory and safeguarding the unimpeded and secure future of its citizens.³¹

During President Sezer's tenure, Turkey's domestic political life was marked by persistent tension. A notable episode was the dispute that erupted between President Sezer and Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit³² during the National Security

²³ François Dopffer, <https://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/fr/histoire-archives/galeries-d-images/les-directeurs-de-l-ofpra/francois-dopffer>.

²⁴ Gürcan Dağdaş,

https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/milletvekillerimiz_sd.bilgi?p_donem=23&p_sicil=5469.

²⁵ Edip Safder Gaydalı,

https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/milletvekillerimiz_sd.bilgi?p_donem=22&p_sicil=4509.

²⁶ Ahmet Necdet Sezer, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/ahmet-necdet-sezer>.

²⁷ Turkey's turmoil. *The Economist*, May 01, 2007.

<https://www.economist.com/europe/2007/05/01/turkeys-turmoil>.

²⁸ Cornell, Svante. The Rise of Diyanet: the Politicization of Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs. *The Turkey ANALYST*, October 09, 2015.

<http://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/463-the-rise-of-diyamet-the-politicization-of-turkey%E2%80%99s-directorate-of-religious-affairs.html>.

²⁹ 'Hangisi doğru., AK Parti mi, AKP mi?'. *Hurriyet*, February 08, 2008.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160611104010/http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/hangisi-dogru-ak-parti-mi-akp-mi-8186392>.

³⁰ Cagaptay, Soner. The November 2002 Elections and Turkey's New Political Era. *The Washington Institute*, December 01, 2002, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/november-2002-elections-and-turkeys-new-political-era>.

³¹ Sezer'den çok karar! Oy vermedi!. *Haber 7*, August 10, 2014. <https://www.haber7.com/ic-politika/haber/1189530-sezerden-sok-karar-oy-vermedi>.

³² Turkey suffers as leaders fight on. *The Guardian*, February 21, 2001.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/feb/21/3>.

Council meeting on February 21, 2001. The clash was immediately followed by a severe economic crisis, later dubbed “Black Wednesday”.³³ Among the contributing factors to this crisis were the fast-paced and wide-ranging reforms undertaken in the context of EU accession negotiations³⁴, as well as complications surrounding Turkey’s dealings with the International Monetary Fund.³⁵ Nonetheless, during this period, Turkey’s integration into and accession to European institutions and organizations remained a top priority on the country’s foreign policy agenda. This commitment was particularly evident in official policy documents issued in 1997³⁶, 2000³⁷, and later in 2007³⁸, which articulated the key principles and features of the Turkey–EU dialogue at the time. These developments triggered a process now commonly referred to as Turkey’s EU accession question - a process that encompassed the emergence and evolution of several new dynamics in both Turkey-EU and France-Turkey relations, within the broader context of a new phase in France-Turkey engagement.

A critical factor shaping the dynamics of France-Turkey relations - especially in the context of the Turkey-EU dialogue - was the issue of mutual perception: how each country perceived, interpreted, and articulated its view of the other. As will be seen, this factor continues to exert significant influence over the trajectory of bilateral relations. Debates around Turkey’s EU membership gradually brought forth a deeper question: What constitutes a European identity?³⁹ Thus, the characterization of Turkey’s potential membership became closely tied to the perceived degree of its “Europeanness.” At the heart of this debate lies the issue of how Turkey’s Ottoman and Islamic heritage affects its contemporary political and cultural identity. In the French public imagination, the Ottoman Empire is largely associated with notions of an Islamic state and imperial conquest. Historically, Europeans have often criticized the Ottoman Empire for its expansionist ambitions, especially as it targeted the European continent itself, posing a direct threat to European powers. This historical perception has fueled a form of skepticism—often referred to as “Turkish-skepticism” or pessimistic doubt - viewing Turkey’s

³³ Başbakan: Ahmet Necdet Sezer’den çok çektim. *Haber Populer*, April 17, 2014.

<http://www.haberpoller.com/siyaset/basbakan-ahmet-necdet-sezerden-cok-cektim-h1616.html>.

³⁴ Turkey’s New European Union Strategy, Determination in the Political Reform Process, Continuity in Socio-Economic Transformation, Effectiveness in Communication, https://ab.gov.tr/files/ardb/evt/3_ab_bakanligi_yayinlari/turkeys_new_eu_strategy.pdf.

³⁵ IMF stopped Central bank from giving liquidity in 2001, said Erçel. *Referans*, August 16, 2007. https://web.archive.org/web/20070929010840/http://www.referansgazetesi.com/haber.aspx?HBR_KOD=76143&ForArsiv=1.

³⁶ Defence and Security Policy of the Turkish Republic, [file:///D:/D0%97%D0%B0%D0%B3%D1%80%D1%83%D0%B7%D0%BA%D0%B8/241248_A_NEXO_POLITICA+DEFENSA+DE+TURQUIA_ANG%20\(5\).pdf](file:///D:/D0%97%D0%B0%D0%B3%D1%80%D1%83%D0%B7%D0%BA%D0%B8/241248_A_NEXO_POLITICA+DEFENSA+DE+TURQUIA_ANG%20(5).pdf) (accessed February 2, 2025).

³⁷ Turkey: Defence White Paper 2000, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/154907/Turkey_2000eng.pdf.

³⁸ Turkey: Defence White Paper 2007, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/154908/Turkey_makale%204.pdf.

³⁹ Europe and the identity challenge: who are “we”?, <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0466-europe-and-the-identity-challenge-who-are-we>.

EU accession as a modern version of a centuries-old expansionist strategy, and as a renewed expression of Turkish imperialism.

The institutional framework for relations between the European Union and Turkey was formally established as early as 1963 with the signing of the Ankara Agreement.⁴⁰ Following the entry into force of the Customs Union agreement between Turkey and the EU in 1996, a customs union was officially formed between the two parties.⁴¹ In April 1987, Turkey submitted its application for EU membership⁴², but it took nearly twelve years for the country to receive official candidate status. This milestone was only announced in 1999 at the historic Helsinki Summit⁴³, where Turkish Foreign Minister Bülent Ecevit delivered a hopeful and forward-looking address, describing the event as a highly significant turning point in the relationship between the two sides.⁴⁴ France, under the leadership of President Jacques Chirac, supported and facilitated the adoption of this decision, with Chirac remarking: “Turkey possesses European potential—ancient and historical. Turkey’s capabilities justify the establishment of a stable, democratic, and modern state, which since 1923 has opted for secularism.”⁴⁵ A Turkey integrated into the European Union also aligns with our political, European, and economic interests.” However, in the wake of subsequent geopolitical developments and internal French political dynamics, France gradually emerged as one of the most vocal and active opponents of Turkey’s EU membership, ushering in a period of renewed tension in bilateral relations.

Strengthening Military and Economic Ties

It was during this same period, in January 2000, that the two countries signed a Framework Agreement on Military and Defense Cooperation⁴⁶, considered a key

⁴⁰ EU-Turkey Association Agreement (the "Ankara Agreement"), <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/d-tr/documents/eu-texts>.

⁴¹ Turkey: Customs Unions and preferential arrangements, https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/business/calculation-customs-duties/rules-origin/customs-unions/turkey-customs-unions-preferential-arrangements_en.

⁴² Analysis - EU-Turkey relations: One step forward, two steps back. *Anadolu Ajansi*, March 26, 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-eu-turkey-relations-one-step-forward-two-steps-back/2189335>.

⁴³ Helsinki European Council 10 and 11 December 1999 Presidency Conclusions, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1_en.htm.

⁴⁴ Statement of Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit in Helsinki on Turkey’s Candidacy to the EU December 11, 1999, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-of-prime-minister-bulent-ecevit-in-helsinki-on-turkey_s-candidacy-to-the-eu_br_december-11_-1999-.en.mfa.

⁴⁵ Eylemer, Sedef. Taş, İlkey. Pro-EU and Eurosceptic Circles in Turkey. *Taylor & Francis Online*, December 05, 2007. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523270701674657>.

⁴⁶ Accord-cadre entre le gouvernement de la République française et le gouvernement de la République de Turquie relatif à la coopération militaire et de défense, <https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/cadcgp.php?>

component of the strategic vision for deepening bilateral relations. This agreement complemented a series of prior accords in the defense sector and aimed to further solidify collaboration in defense industry development, military training, national security, and related trade and economic areas. It should be noted that during this period, following the establishment of the EU-Turkey Customs Union in 1996 and the rapid expansion of bilateral cooperation, trade between France and Turkey more than doubled over the next five years, reaching \$5.8 billion in 2000.⁴⁷ As a result, Turkey became France's third-largest trading partner outside the EU, while France ranked as Turkey's third-largest partner overall.⁴⁸ Despite the economic disruptions experienced in Turkey at the end of 2000 and the beginning of 2001, the loss in trade momentum was largely offset by 2002, initiating a steady upward trend.⁴⁹ By 2003, according to data from the Turkish Treasury, there were 270 enterprises operating in Turkey with French capital investment. These firms held significant market shares in sectors such as automotive, construction (notably electricity generation), cement, insurance, distribution, and pharmaceuticals.⁵⁰

Chirac's Second Term and Evolving EU Negotiations

In 2002, presidential elections were held in France, in which the incumbent, Jacques Chirac, secured a second term by winning 82.1% of the vote in the second round against the far-right candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen.⁵¹ Nevertheless, during his second term, Chirac experienced notably low approval ratings and came to be regarded as one of the least popular presidents in modern French political history.⁵²

On December 12 of that same year, the European Union, during the Copenhagen Summit, decided to begin accession negotiations with Turkey.⁵³ Subsequently, following the major EU enlargement in 2004-bringing in ten new member states⁵⁴ - the European Council declared during the Brussels Summit on

⁴⁷ Turkey Trade Summary 2000,

<https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2000/Summarytext>.

⁴⁸ Turkey trade balance, exports and imports by country and region 2000,

<https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2000/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/all>.

⁴⁹ Turkey's Foreign Trade Policy, <https://ms.hmb.gov.tr/uploads/2018/12/Ticaret-Politikasi-Asya-%C3%96rnegi.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Histoire des relations entre la Turquie et la France: Quelques dates et repères symboliques, <https://tr.ambafrance.org/Histoire-des-relations-entre-la>.

⁵¹ Réélection de Jacques Chirac à la présidence de la République française. *Perspective Monde*, May 05, 2002.

<https://perspective.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/servlet/BMEve/375>.

⁵² Jacques Chirac, ancien Président de la République de 1995 à 2007,

<https://www.franceculture.fr/personne-jacques-chirac.html>.

⁵³ The Copenhagen Summit: The Lithmus Test for Turkish Candidacy. *Turkish Policy*, September 20, 2002.

<http://turkishpolicy.com/dosyalar/files/TPQ-2002-3-Vural.pdf>.

⁵⁴ EU Leaders Brace for Crucial Summit on Constitution. *Voice of America*, October 29, 2009.

<https://www.voanews.com/archive/eu-leaders-brace-crucial-summit-constitution-2004-06-16>.

December 17, 2004⁵⁵, that official accession talks with Turkey would commence on October 3, 2005.⁵⁶ The screening process of Turkish legislation began shortly thereafter, on October 20, 2005⁵⁷, and concluded on October 18, 2006.⁵⁸ Given that December 17, 2004, was designated as the date to finalize the conditions for initiating negotiations with Turkey, the French National Assembly convened on October 14, 2004, to deliberate Turkey's eligibility for EU membership. The debate featured both proponents - such as Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, Foreign Minister Michel Barnier, Communist Party leader Alain Bocquet, and MP Jean-Marie Le Guen⁵⁹ - and opponents, including François Bayrou⁶⁰, president of the Union for French Democracy. The discussions once again highlighted the presence of divergent and often opposing views within French political circles regarding Turkey's accession and the broader policy France should adopt toward the country. Indeed, these developments and the preceding events—such as former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's consistent opposition to Turkey's membership—further crystallized France's position as one of the most outspoken and radical opponents of Turkey's integration into the EU. D'Estaing had expressed concern that Turkey's accession could result in uncontrolled enlargement of the Union, potentially prompting interest in EU membership from countries in the Middle East and North Africa, with Morocco⁶¹ often cited as a likely candidate. President Chirac asserted that Turkey would only possess the potential for EU membership if it met the conditions stipulated in official European documents.⁶² He maintained that Turkey could reach the necessary standards only

⁵⁵ EU Enlargement: challenges and opportunities, Keynote speech by Jean-Claude Trichet, President of the ECB held at the conference 'Europe's frontiers: EU enlargement - its implications and consequences', organised by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon. *European Central Bank*, October 27, 2004.

<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/key/date/2004/html/sp041027.en.html>.

⁵⁶ EU freezes talks on Turkey membership. *Independent*, December 12, 2006.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-freezes-talks-on-turkey-membership-428085.html>.

⁵⁷ Interview with European Commission President José Manuel Barroso on BBC, London. *Europa*, October 15,

2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20070412110934/http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/pdf/interview_20061015_en.pdf.

⁵⁸ Commission Staff Working Document, Turkey 2006 Progress Report, Brussels *Delegation of the European Union to Türkiye*, November 08, 2006, p. 4.

https://www.avrupa.info.tr/sites/default/files/2016-11/Turkey_progress_report%202006.pdf.

⁵⁹ Assemblée Nationale, Michel Barnier, Alain Bocquet, Jean-Marie Le Guen, https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/cra/2004-2005/016.asp#P32_329.

⁶⁰ Assemblée Nationale, François Bayrou, https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/cra/2004-2005/016.asp#P32_329.

⁶¹ Турция хочет развалить Европу, Предупреждает Валери Жискар д'Эстен. *Коммерсантъ*, 11 ноября, 2002. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/350241>.

⁶² Conférence de presse de M. Jacques Chirac, Président de la République, sur la perspective de l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne, à Bruxelles le 17 décembre 2004,

over time. In the French public consciousness, EU membership was perceived not merely as a matter of geography but of identity - being European in the cultural and historical sense. As Chirac stated in a 2002 speech: "I know it can be discussed from a geographical point of view, but I do not believe it can be discussed from a historical and civilizational standpoint".⁶³

The Armenian Genocide and Its Role in France-Turkey and EU-Turkey Relations

Despite Turkey's participation in various European political, economic, and military organizations, Chirac contended that while Turkey could be viewed as a component of the European system, it was not, in essence, a European country. As of 2003, he emphasized that rather than debating Turkey's European identity, it was more important to acknowledge and value the fact that Turkey had pursued EU membership for over 30 years⁶⁴, striving to maintain a balanced policy - thereby avoiding further escalation in an already complex and tension-laden Franco-Turkish relationship. At the time, the Armenian question, with all its components, played a particularly significant role in shaping these relations. The Armenian factor in France-Turkey relations has always had its influence on the political relations and dialogue between the two countries, leading to sharp conflicts and crises, which, in addition to the political sphere, directly affected other spheres of bilateral relations and directions of cooperation, continuous changes registering in them.⁶⁵

In 2004, French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier stated that Turkey must recognize the systematic and organized massacres of Armenians in 1915 as genocide.⁶⁶ While he clarified that France had not set this recognition as a formal precondition for EU accession, he emphasized that the issue would be raised during the negotiation process. Later, European Parliament President Martin Schulz declared that recognition of the Armenian Genocide should indeed become a prerequisite for Turkey's accession to the European Union. It is important to note that the Turkish government has consistently rejected this condition and does not consider it part of the EU's membership criteria.⁶⁷ In 2006, the European

<https://www.elysee.fr/jacques-chirac/2004/12/17/conference-de-presse-de-m-jacques-chirac-president-de-la-republique-sur-la-perspective-de-ladhesion-de-la-turquie-a-lunion-europeenne-a-bruxelles-le-17-decembre-2004>.

⁶³ Lakhdari, Sadi. Qu'est-ce qu'une barrière culturelle?, *Outre-Terre*, Paris, 2004 (2), N° 7, p. 338, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-outre-terre1-2004-2-page-387.htm>.

⁶⁴ Chirac: If Criteria Are Fulfilled, Turkey Can Enter EU. *Hurriyet*, September 23, 2003. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/chirac-if-criteria-are-fulfilled-turkey-can-enter-eu-172911>.

⁶⁵ Topakyan, Mariam. The Issue of the Armenian Genocide in France-Turkey Relations, *Region and the World scientific-analytical journal* volume XVI, № 1 (56), 2025, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁶ Turkey 'must admit Armenia dead'. *BBC News*, December 13, 2004. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4092933.stm>.

⁶⁷ Genocide Recognition Precondition to Turkey's EU Bid, Says Euro-Parliament President. *Asbarez*, September 18, 2012, <http://asbarez.com/105486/>.

Parliament voted against officially including such recognition as a formal benchmark for Turkey's EU accession.⁶⁸

Article 301 and Freedom of Expression Concerns

The development of France-Turkey relations was notably influenced by Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code⁶⁹, which essentially criminalizes the denigration of Turkey, the Turkish nation, or Turkish governmental institutions. This article came into force on July 1, 2005⁷⁰, and was adopted as part of a package of reforms aimed at improving criminal legislation prior to the commencement of Turkey's accession negotiations with the European Union. Since its enactment, Article 301 has been the subject of extensive controversy, primarily due to its restriction of freedom of speech rights.⁷¹ It is therefore not surprising that in September 2006, the European Parliament called for the repeal of laws such as Article 301, deeming them a threat to European standards of free expression.⁷²

Chirac's Constitutional Amendment on EU Enlargement Referenda: Continued Franco-Turkish Cooperation Despite Challenges

On March 1, 2005, then-French President Jacques Chirac amended the Constitution of the Fifth Republic⁷³ to require that any future EU enlargement be ratified by a national referendum. This amendment reflected Chirac's declared intention that France would hold a referendum on Turkey's accession to the European Union when the matter arose, and that any subsequent EU expansions would similarly be subject to popular vote.⁷⁴

It is reasonable to infer that two primary considerations underpinned this presidential decision. Firstly, Chirac may have sought to preserve his political credibility and legacy by acknowledging public concerns on the issue rather than

⁶⁸ European Parliament critical of slowdown in Turkey's reform process. *Europa*, September 27, 2006.

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=IMPRESS&reference=20060922IPR10896&language=EN>.

⁶⁹ Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi: Türk Ceza Kanununda Değişiklik Yapilmasına Dair Kanun N° 5759,

<https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/kanunlar/k5759.html>.

⁷⁰ Turkey's new penal code touches raw nerves. *Euractiv*, June 02, 2005.

<https://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/turkey-new-penal-code-touches-raw-nerves/article-140266>.

⁷¹ Turkey: Nationalism and the Press. *Committee to Protect Journalists*, March 15, 2006.

<https://cpj.org/reports/2006/03/turkey-3-06/>.

⁷² New EU warning on Turkey reforms. *BBC News*, September 27, 2006.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5385954.stm>.

⁷³ Loi constitutionnelle N° 2005-204 du 1 mars 2005 modifiant le titre XV de la Constitution (1),

<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000000238079/>.

⁷⁴ Turkey's EU Prospects and Europe's Domestic Politics. *Wilson Center*, June 15, 2004.

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/turkeys-eu-prospects-and-europes-domestic-politics>.

dismissing them.⁷⁵ Secondly, the amendment likely aimed to preempt the potential rejection of the European Constitution - a highly politicized topic closely linked to debates about Turkey's EU membership. Notably, the timeline of this change is significant: following the amendment to Article 88-5, Chirac scheduled the referendum for March 4, 2005.⁷⁶

The French referendum on the Constitutional Treaty was subsequently held on May 29, 2005, with a turnout of 69.37%. The European Constitution was rejected by 54.67% of voters, underscoring the polarized nature of French society: one segment favoring European cosmopolitanism, the other prioritizing national sovereignty.⁷⁷ This outcome also highlighted that French public concern centered predominantly on socio-economic issues rather than Turkey's accession per se. Moreover, a later constitutional amendment empowered the French Parliament - provided a majority agrees - to block the organization of such referenda.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, bilateral France-Turkey relations and mutually beneficial cooperation continued to develop steadily at the governmental level. A prominent example was the June 2006⁷⁹ signing of an agreement on mutual encouragement and protection of investments, which fostered the further deepening and consolidation of trade and economic ties between the two countries.

Transition of Power: Nicolas Sarkozy's Presidency Begins

In May 2007, France held its presidential elections⁸⁰, resulting in Jacques Chirac being succeeded by Nicolas Sarkozy⁸¹, leader of the Union for a Popular Movement since 2004⁸² and, prior to the presidency, minister of the General Council of Hauts-de-Seine and a veteran public official. Sarkozy's presidency is distinguished by its outcomes, including the overall stability and dynamic

⁷⁵ The European Convention,

https://web.archive.org/web/20120125041723if_/http://europeanconvention.eu.int/Static.asp?lang=E N&Content=Composition.

⁷⁶ Jacques Chirac et son referendum. *Le Monde*, March 11, 2005.

https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2005/03/11/jacques-chirac-et-son-referendum_401233_3232.html.

⁷⁷ Cole, Alistair. *Governing and Governance in France*, New York, 2008, p. 109,

<https://www.haugenbok.no/governing-and-governance-france/cole-alistair/9780521608312>.

⁷⁸ Turkey, with eye on EU, says determined to reform. *EUbusiness*, April 15, 2009.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20090417223231/http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/1239805023.06>.

⁷⁹ Accord entre le gouvernement de la République française et le gouvernement de la république de Turquie sur l'encouragement et la protection réciproques des investissements (API) entre la France et la Turquie, <https://basedoc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/exl-php/cadcgp.php?>.

⁸⁰ Sarkozy nod for presidential run. *BBC News*, January 14, 2007.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6260275.stm>.

⁸¹ Ambition and Honesty on the French Campaign Trail. *Spiegel International*, April 09, 2007.

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/sarkozy-closes-in-on-his-goal-ambition-and-honesty-on-the-french-campaign-trail-a-476255.html>.

⁸² The New French President's Roots Are Worth Remembering. *New York Times*, March 15, 2007.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/15/opinion/15tue4.html>.

progression of relations with Turkey during his tenure. August 2007 witnessed Turkey's own presidential elections⁸³, culminating in the election of former Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül⁸⁴, representing the Justice and Development Party. His presidency marked the beginning of certain notable shifts in Turkish foreign policy, which were essentially responses to ongoing geopolitical developments.

Conclusion

From the 1990s onward - and particularly since 1995 - France-Turkey relations have entered a distinct phase characterized by both consolidation and transformation. This period has been marked by the stabilization of earlier diplomatic achievements and the development of more structured, multifaceted, and interdependent forms of cooperation. The bilateral relationship evolved not in isolation, but as part of broader geopolitical and institutional processes, most notably Turkey's protracted and complex engagement with the European Union, in which France has historically played a pivotal role.

Throughout the period under review, the evolution of Franco-Turkish relations has been mediated through an increasingly formalized legal and political framework, underpinned by a growing corpus of bilateral agreements, joint initiatives, and multilateral commitments. These institutional arrangements have enabled both continuity and flexibility, allowing the two states to manage ideological divergences and political tensions - particularly in areas such as human rights, migration, regional security, and identity politics.

Despite recurring crises - some of which have stemmed from sensitive historical issues, such as the Armenian Genocide, or from divergent perspectives on EU enlargement - the bilateral relationship has demonstrated a notable degree of resilience. Strategic imperatives, including defense cooperation, economic interdependence, energy transit, and the pursuit of regional stability in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, have continued to anchor the relationship within a framework of pragmatic engagement.

Ultimately, while France-Turkey relations remain shaped by shifting political narratives and contentious historical legacies, they have nonetheless preserved a forward-looking orientation grounded in institutional mechanisms and shared strategic interests. Despite recurring challenges and periods of tension, this framework has allowed both countries to sustain a constructive dialogue and pursue shared objectives, thereby preserving the potential for deeper cooperation and integration in the future - a subject warranting separate research.

⁸³ Gül adaylıktan çekildi. *Hurriyet*, May 06, 2007. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/gul-adayliktan-cekildi-6466839>.

⁸⁴ Sayın Gül, bu yemini hiçbir zaman unutmayın. *Radikal*, August 29, 2007. <https://web.archive.org/web/20070930220642/http://www.radikal.com.tr/index.php?tarih=29%2F08%2F2007>.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.