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THE INFLUENCE OF THE 1993 COPENHAGEN AND 1999 HELSINKI SUMMITS ON TURKEY-EU RELATIONS

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The new geopolitical situation that has arisen following the end of the bipolar world system led to significant changes in Turkey's external policy. On the one hand, the collapse of the USSR diminished Turkey's importance as the West's primary partner on the Soviet Union's southern borders; on the other hand, the new geopolitical landscape and the regional power vacuum resulting from the disappearance of the second pole created new opportunities for Turkey. It is no coincidence that in the last two decades of the 20th century, Turkey experienced unprecedented activity aimed at radically revising and implementing its domestic and foreign policies. Regarding Turkey-EU relations, it is worth noting that in parallel with these new foreign policy directions, Turkey continued to maintain active relations with the Union throughout the 1990s, seeking to complete the long accession process.

Keywords: Turkey, European Union, summit, international relations, geopolitics, history

The new geopolitical situation that has arisen following the end of the bipolar world system led to significant changes in Turkey's external policy. On the one hand, the collapse of the USSR diminished Turkey's importance as the West's primary partner on the Soviet Union's southern borders; on the other hand, the new geopolitical landscape as well as instability and power gap in the region, created by the disappearance of the second pole, offered new opportunities for Turkey. It is no coincidence that by the end of the 20th century, Turkey experienced unprecedented activity

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in radically re-evaluating and seeking to implement its domestic and foreign policies. Serving as Prime Minister of Turkey from 1983 to 1989 and assuming the presidency in 1989, T. Özal initiated radical novelties in Turkey's statecraft. Unlike the policy of the Kemalists—who envisioned Turkey exclusively as a secular westernized country which had very limited connections to the Muslim world—Özal's policy advocated for active relations in the countries and regions that were once part of the Ottoman Empire².

The political line adopted by T. Özal is often described in academic circles as the beginning of “Neo-Ottomanism,” a doctrine later more elaborately presented by Ahmet Davutoğlu in his work “*Strategic Depth*.”³ As for Turkey- EU ties, we should mention that alongside these new foreign policy directions, Turkey continued to actively develop its relations with European countries in the 1990s, seeking to complete the long-standing accession process. However, the new geopolitical situation also influenced Turkey's European political course. Before the fall of the USSR, the “West” was perceived as a unified alliance of Europe and the United States, based on shared ideological and political objectives. Turkey, as a country with a clear pro-Western stance, was perceived by the West as an effective instrument to counter the rise of Soviet and communist influence in the broader region. To be more precise, the 1979 Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, as well as the Iranian Revolution, made Turkey much more strategically important for the West⁴.

However, in the 1990s, the situation changed. Turkey's relations with the West, especially with Europe, faced new uncertainties. From that point on, Europeans themselves took complete responsibility for their security and political path⁵. The end of Cold war eliminated the communist threat to the West, thereby calling into question Turkey's strategic utility to EU security. The focus shifted from strategic security issues to the socio-

² Bal (2004), 366.

³ Laçiner (2003-2004), 172.

⁴ Öniş (2003), 16.

⁵ Buhari (2009), 92.

political, economic, and cultural considerations. Democracy-building and matters of human rights started to play increasingly important role in the interactions between Ankara and EU⁶.

In the 1990s, the new cultural-political concept proposed by Samuel Huntington in his seminal work *The Clash of Civilizations*, became widespread among political scientists and scholars. According to Huntington, the struggle between ideological and social orders had been replaced by cultural conflicts. Since the differences between civilizations have deeper and more ancient roots than discrepancies in the both policy and economics, these conflicts are consequently more profound. Huntington posited that in the 21st century, Western civilization would face challenges from non-Western entities, in particular, Islamic and Sinic (Confucian) civilizations⁷. Following Huntington's thesis, the dynamics of Turkey- EU relations can be analyzed through the prism of the civilizational factors. The end of the Cold War Era posed significant challenges for Turkey; specifically, although Turkey's geographical position remained unchanged, its role in world politics was completely transformed. Turkey started to position itself as a connector between Eastern and Western civilizations. In this respect, Turkey acquired strategic importance in geopolitics to the extent that it could promote reconciliation between divergent civilizational cultures, the friction between which is often cited as a root cause of international issues, such as terrorism⁸.

The Treaty on European Union, commonly referred to as the Maastricht Treaty, was formally signed on 7 February 1992, legally establishing the European Union. The Maastricht Treaty came into effect on November 1, 1993⁹. According to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), "any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union."¹⁰ Article 2 of the same Treaty lists the

⁶ Hale (2002).

⁷ Huntington (1996).

⁸ Buhari (2009), 95

⁹ Treaty on European Union, Council of the European Communities, Luxembourg (1992)

¹⁰ Consolidated Versions of the Treaty on European Union (2010), 17.

aforementioned values, which include human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities¹¹. Thus, the TEU states that any European country committed to the Union's core values can apply for membership. To attain membership, a country must first meet the foundational criteria. These criteria were established by the European Council at the Copenhagen summit (June 21–22, 1993)¹². In order to meet these “Copenhagen criteria,” candidate countries must implement a wide spectrum of reforms in various areas to align their political, economic, and legal systems with European standards. Furthermore, during the 1993 Copenhagen meeting, the European Commission was tasked with publishing annual “Progress Reports” on candidate countries and presenting them to the Council and the European Parliament¹³.

As mentioned above, the 1993 Copenhagen Summit established mandatory criteria for all countries seeking to join the EU, which were summarized as follows: 1. Political: implying the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, and the respect for and protection of human rights and national minorities; 2. Economic: implying the existence of a functioning market economy capable of coping with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union; 3. Legal: requiring the ability to assume the obligations of membership, including adherence to the objectives of political, economic, and monetary union¹⁴.

The creation of the EU fundamentally changed the substance of relations with Turkey; particularly, problems of democracy, human rights, national minorities, and domestic political conflicts came to occupy a primary place on the bilateral agenda¹⁵. The 1993 Copenhagen Summit was of immense importance for the future of Turkey–EU relations. The political and economic criteria established at the summit apply in full detail to Turkey as well; only by fulfilling these criteria can a state become a full

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kochenov (2008), 29.

¹³ European Council (1993).

¹⁴ Baykal (2002), 22.

¹⁵ Buhari (2009), 97.

member of the EU¹⁶. The primary impediment to Turkey's EU accession was inability to fulfill the political criterion, which was supposed to be done before the membership negotiations begin and which was possible only by implementing huge reforms in Turkey.

However, we should mention that when the EU started process of possible membership with the Central and Eastern European countries and Cyprus, it did not include Turkey in this process. Since meeting the Copenhagen political criteria seemed unattainable for Turkey in a close perspective, the EU proposed to negotiate on the establishment of a Customs Union between Turkey and the EU¹⁷.

In 1995, Turkey moved toward joining the EU Customs Union. The official position of Athens proved problematic for Turkey, as Greece could have invoked its veto right to block Ankara's actions. However, Athens refrained from doing so in exchange for obtaining the consent of EU member states to begin the membership process for the Republic of Cyprus. This led to the Greek Cypriot part of the island being included on the list of states expected to become full members of the EU in May 2004. Thus, Cyprus surpassed Turkey and, along with Greece, could theoretically block any issue related to Ankara within the EU¹⁸. On 6 March 1995, the Turkey–EEC Association Council's 36th meeting adopted the decision creating a Customs Union between Turkey and the EU. The decision came into effect on 1 January 1996, and Turkey's entry into the EU Customs Union represented a significant milestone in its long-standing pursuit of European integration¹⁹. Turkey became the first state to enter into a Customs Union with the EU without holding full membership status. Despite this, it remained excluded from the Union's decision-making processes. In 1996, a free trade area was created between Turkey and the EU. Alongside the Customs Union, Turkey also concluded free trade agreements with the member states of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and with

¹⁶ Keyman (2004), 14.

¹⁷ Turkey's Quest for EU Membership (2008).

¹⁸ Theophylactou (2012), 107.

¹⁹ Sönmezoğlu (2001), 223.

Spain, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Egypt, and Albania²⁰.

Speaking of the Customs Union Agreement, it should be noted that it included three main provisions: technical issues for the free movement of goods, the strengthening of cooperation between Turkey and the EU, and financial cooperation—which, however, was not implemented due to a constant veto from Greece²¹. The entry into force of the Customs Union created the closest form of economic cooperation achievable between the EU and a non-member state. Under Article 5 of the Ankara Agreement of 12 September 1963, the establishment of a Customs Union between Turkey and the European Community was envisaged as the final phase of their association relationship²².

However, despite the certain level of economic integration established between the parties, Turkey was not yet considered fully prepared for accession. In 1997, at the EU conference held on March 7 in Brussels—which addressed the problem of Turkey’s membership—the Christian Democratic parties of Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Spain noted that as long as fundamental political principles remained violated in the country, there can be no question of EU membership. Similar sentiments prevailed at the EU summit in Luxembourg (12-13 December, 1997) where candidate status for full membership was demanded by Turkish authorities. Turkey was formally regarded as eligible for eventual EU membership, it was not incorporated into the Union’s enlargement process at that time. The discussion on Turkey’s accession was postponed indefinitely²³. There were several reasons for the Council’s decision: failure to meet the Copenhagen political criteria, slow progress on the reforms necessary for membership, tense relations with neighboring countries, the unresolved Cyprus issue, human rights violations, and the excessive influence of the armed forces on the country’s internal and external

²⁰ Aybey (2004), 27.

²¹ Decision No. 1/95 (1996).

²² Agreement establishing an Association between the EEC and Turkey (OJ L 217, 29.12.1964))

²³ Luxembourg European Council, 12 and 13 December 1997, Presidency Conclusions

policy²⁴. The Luxembourg Summit also became the first official forum where it was stated, albeit indirectly, that resolving the Aegean Sea issues and the Cyprus problem constituted a condition for Turkey's accession to the EU. These were additional preconditions established for Turkey in addition to the formal Copenhagen Criteria²⁵.

The European Council's decision in Luxembourg to exclude Turkey from the candidate list provoked a wave of discontent in Turkish public and political circles, leading to the freezing of bilateral relations. As a result, Turkey partially suspended its political dialogue with the EU. Although Turkey had planned to join the EU as early as 1998, it initially intended to participate in the European Conference in March; however, due to public dissatisfaction following its exclusion from the list of candidate countries, the Turkish side withdrew from the conference²⁶. In June 1998, the European Council in Cardiff made significant efforts to resume diplomatic engagement with Turkey. The Commission was instructed to prepare a report on Turkey's progress—similar to those drawn up for the candidate countries—even though Turkey was not yet an official candidate²⁷. This recommendation of the European Council was based on Article 28 of the Ankara Association Agreement, which stated: “As soon as the operation of this Agreement has advanced far enough to justify envisaging full acceptance by Turkey of the obligations arising out of the Treaty establishing the Community, the Contracting Parties shall examine the possibility of the accession of Turkey to the Community.”²⁸

This Council decision was largely aimed at normalizing strained relations with Turkey. With this step, the EU sought to demonstrate that Turkey's membership was important to it and that certain steps were being taken in this direction. Nonetheless, European states were unwilling to disregard Turkey entirely or exclude it from the integration process, given various geopolitical considerations. Consequently, in July 1998, Turkey

²⁴ Yeşilada (2007), 6.

²⁵ Kirisci (2004), 3.

²⁶ Hatipoğlu (2005), 104.

²⁷ Shlykov (2010), 38.

²⁸ Luxembourg European Council 12 and 13 December 1997 Presidency Conclusions

submitted its *Strategy for the Development of Turkey–EU Relations* to both the Commission and the Presidency.²⁹

EU-Turkey relations reached a higher level in 1999. At the European Council summit held in Helsinki on December 10–11, a decision was made (unanimously) to give Turkey candidate status for EU membership³⁰. This decision was based on a number of circumstances: Turkey’s relations with neighboring Syria and Greece had significantly improved. After active lobbying by the United States, Turkey’s application was brought back for discussion at the Helsinki summit³¹. Another important factor in the change of attitude toward Turkey was the fact that in the German elections, the Christian Democrats, who opposed Turkey’s membership, were defeated, while the Social Democrats, who supported Ankara, ascended to power³².

However, the changes underlying the reconsideration of the decision largely depended on shifts in governments within the EU, as well as on the realization that rejecting Turkey threatened the EU with the prospect of Turkey’s departure from European values. Candidate status elevated relations between Turkey and the EU to a new level, where not only the economic factor (within the Customs Union) but also the presence of a new political institutional platform became important. Turkey was given an excellent opportunity to become part of a unified Europe, and this fact alone became a tremendous stimulus for the transformation of the country’s domestic political sphere.

However, negotiations with Turkey would not begin until Ankara brought its political system into compliance with the Copenhagen Criteria. As noted by the French ambassador to Turkey from 1988 to 1992, diplomat Eric Rouleau, “Until 1999, Europe believed that the absence of economic and democratic freedoms in Turkey’s state, social, and political institutions deprived it of the right to full membership. In December 1999, the EU softened its position... A turning point in EU-Turkey relations was due to

²⁹ Hatipoğlu (2005), 104.

³⁰ Helsinki European Council, December 10-11, 1999, Presidency Conclusion http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1_en.htm

³¹ Aksu (2012), 13.

³² Kirisci (2004), 4.

several factors: first, the positive development of relations between Turkey and Greece, and second, Turkey was too important an international player for the EU to ignore.” Unlike the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, which were brought into compliance with the Copenhagen Political Criteria even before being granted EU candidate status, Turkey had not yet taken substantial steps to reform its institutions ten months after the Helsinki Summit³³.

During the Cold War, problems related to the democracy and human rights were not a priority in Turkey-EU relations. This was due to two factors: first, since Turkey was not considered a membership candidate, the EU had little interest in the internal functioning and nature of the country’s political system. Second, security priorities dominated the global geopolitical scene, resulting in “soft” issues, i.e. democracy, being considered secondary to “hard” security concerns, such as the “Soviet threat.”³⁴

When the Cold War ended and Turkey attained candidate status for EU membership in 1999, the dynamics shifted. Every flaw in Turkey’s political system came under EU scrutiny, resulting in the Union not only issuing a series of demands but also beginning to monitor the situation in the country through oversight and investigative mechanisms. The EU presents its assessments and recommendations in an annual Progress Report. For the first time, specific democratic problems in Turkey were mentioned in 1998. The report emphasized that the primary obstacle to Turkey’s democratization was the National Security Council (MGK), which wielded disproportionate influence over domestic political life.³⁵

Overall, the ambassadors of EU member states in Ankara repeatedly stated the need to limit the powers of the National Security Council, arguing that its role was not only undemocratic but also fostered an atmosphere of distrust. Moreover, the National Security Council of Turkey, with its broad powers, had no counterpart in any EU member state or

³³ Shlykov (2010), 40.

³⁴ Sönmezoğlu (2001), 701.

³⁵ Regular Report from The Commission on Turkey’s Progress Towards Accession (1998).

candidate country.³⁶ In 1999, the European Commission's annual report identified a number of structural issues that Turkey was required to address. These included raising the level of democracy, protecting human and minority rights, ensuring freedom of expression, eradicating torture, and, most importantly, limiting the outsized role of the National Security Council while ensuring the existence of an independent judiciary.³⁷

Following Helsinki Conclusions of the European Council, to assist Turkey on its path to membership, the European Commission began preparing an Accession Partnership document, which was soon published. The Accession Partnership included the necessary political and economic reforms, the implementation of which would serve as a guiding framework for Turkey in the negotiations with EU. At the same time, a clear start date for negotiations could not be set until Turkey carried out a significant portion of these reforms³⁸. Taking into consideration the practical issues that could arise, the document identified short-term and medium-term objectives; the former were to be achieved within 1–2 years, and the latter within 3–4 years. Moreover, the document was amended three times—in 2003, 2006, and 2007—presenting new requirements to Turkey³⁹.

As part of implementing the Accession Partnership, the ruling coalition in Turkey formulated the “National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis” (EU Legislation). The National Program was published on March 19, 2001, and submitted to the European Commission on March 26⁴⁰. It was created taking into consideration an assessment of short- and medium-term priorities. The coalition government headed by Bülent Ecevit launched a reform agenda aimed at meeting the Copenhagen criteria⁴¹.

The analysis conducted allows us to conclude that the summits conducted both in Copenhagen (1993) and Helsinki (1999) had an

³⁶ Vardan (2009), 51.

³⁷ Council Decision of 8 March 2001 on the principles, priorities, intermediate objectives and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with the Republic of Turkey (2001/235/EC).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Keyman/ Aydın (2004), 17.

⁴⁰ Aybey (2004), 33.

⁴¹ Yeşilada (2007), 7.

important impact on shaping the institutional and normative framework of EU-Turkey relations. It was during this period that the interaction model was established, under which Turkey's prospects for EU membership were made directly contingent on the fulfillment of a stringent set of political, economic, and legal conditions.

The 1993 Copenhagen Summit marked the European Union's transition toward a more formalized and values-based approach to its enlargement policy. Unlike the Cold War period—when geopolitical considerations took precedence—the 1990s saw the normative component become the primary tool for assessing Turkey's readiness for integration.

The decisions made at abovementioned summits as well as the 1997 Luxembourg Summit, demonstrated the existence of significant issues in Turkey's advancement toward EU membership. Despite the deepening of economic cooperation and the establishment of the Customs Union, the political dimension of the relationship developed significantly more slowly, contributing to the formation of an asymmetrical interaction model.

The 1999 Helsinki Summit was an important milestone in the institutionalization of relations, as granting Turkey candidate status allowed it to be included in the formalized pre-accession process. At the same time, the absence of clearly defined deadlines and conditions for concluding negotiations initially limited the practical effectiveness of this decision and perpetuated uncertainty regarding the ultimate goal of integration.

A comparison with the current stage of relations shows significant continuity in this model. The membership negotiation process, formally launched in 2005, is currently characterized by stagnation, and cooperation between the parties is increasingly carried out in sectoral formats. The question of membership has gradually lost its central importance, giving way to practical mechanisms of interaction in the areas of the economy, migration policy, and regional security.

Unlike the 1990s—when the perspective of becoming the EU member was a key stimulus for reforms—this factor has significantly weakened at the current stage. This has led to a change in the nature of mutual conditionality and a reduction in the European Union's influence over

Turkey. Concurrently, Turkey has become more active in implementing a multi-vector foreign policy, reflecting its adaptation to the changed conditions of the international environment.

In the second decade of 2000s, issues of regional and pan-European security have taken on special significance in Turkey- EU relations. The migration crisis, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and the transformation of the role that NATO has in the shaping of Euro-Atlantic security have strengthened the practical interdependence of the parties. During this period, Turkey has acted as a key transit and deterrent actor in the field of migration, as well as an important element of the Black Sea region's security system. However, these areas of cooperation develop primarily in a functional and situational format and are not accompanied by significant progress in the process of Turkey's integration to EU. This indicates the further consolidation of a pragmatic approach, in which Turkey's strategic importance is recognized in specific sectors but does not translate into institutional integration.

Thus, the Copenhagen and Helsinki summits defined the long-term framework and limitations of Turkish-European relations. The current state of these relations indicates that the established model is stable and is largely determined by the institutional decisions made in the 1990s. This allows the problems of Turkey's integration to be viewed not as a temporary deviation, but as an outcoming of the structural features of European policy of enlargement.

**1993 ԹՎԱԿԱՆԻ ԿՈՊԵՆՀԱԳԵՆԻ ԵՎ 1999 ԹՎԱԿԱՆԻ ՀԵԼՄԻՆԿԻԻ
ԳԱԳԱԹՆԱԺՈՂՈՎՆԵՐԻ ԱԶԴԵՑՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ԹՈՒՐԹԻԱՅԻ ԵՎ ԵՄ
ՀԱՐԱՔԵՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ՎՐԱ**

Մհեր Աբրահամյան⁴²

Երկբևեռ աշխարհակարգի փլուզման արդյունքում առաջացած նոր աշխարհաքաղաքական իրավիճակի հետևանքով Թուրքիայի արտաքին քաղաքականությունում տեղի ունեցան էական փոփոխություններ: ԽՍՀՄ փլուզումը մի կողմից թուլացրեց Թուրքիայի նշանակությունը՝ որպես Արևմուտքի գլխավոր գործընկեր ԽՍՀՄ հարավային սահմանների մոտ, մյուս կողմից՝ նոր աշխարհաքաղաքական իրավիճակը և երկրորդ բևեռի վերանալու արդյունքում տարածաշրջանում առաջացած ուժային վակուումը Թուրքիայի համար ստեղծեցին նոր հնարավորություններ: Պատահական չէ, որ 1980-ականների վերջին և 1990-ականների սկզբին աննախադեպ ակտիվություն արձանագրվեց Թուրքիայում՝ ներքին և արտաքին քաղաքականության արմատական վերանայման և դրանց իրագործման փորձերի ուղղությամբ: Անդրադառնալով Թուրքիա-ԵՄ հարաբերություններին, հարկ է նշել, որ արտաքին քաղաքականության նոր ուղղություններին զուգընթաց 1990-ականներին Թուրքիան շարունակում էր ակտիվ պահել հարաբերությունները Միության հետ՝ ձգտելով ավարտին հասցնել այդքան երկար տևող անդամակցության գործընթացը:

Բանալի բառեր՝ Թուրքիա, Եվրամիություն, զագաթնաժողով, միջազգային հարաբերություններ, աշխարհաքաղաքականություն, պատմություն:

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