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## POST-2005 TURBULENT JOURNEY TOWARDS DEMOCRACY. THE ERDOĞANISATION OF TURKEY

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### **Abstract:-**

*Turkey-EU relations have been very unstable over the last decades. Since 2005 the leverage power of the European Union started to reveal signs of stagnation or lack of effectiveness. Simultaneously, Turkey's democratic performance has tangibly weakened.*

*This article postulates that Turkey has worsened its democratic performance since 2005 due to an internal dynamic of a growing authoritarianism and the subsequent drifting apart from the EU. In other words, the Erdoğanisation of Turkey hindered its Europeanisation and democratisation processes.*

*In order to assess the validity of this statement, methods such as literature review, official documents' analysis and quantitative analysis will be used. It will be privileged a hermeneutical approach that underlines the phenomena's interpretation through a hypothetical-deductive reasoning strategy.*

*In terms of structure, this article will be divided as follows: a first section will be devoted to briefly revise Turkey-EU relations, especially considering the breaking point of 2005; the second part will focus on an analysis of the evolution of Turkish democratic performance, including a quantitative approach; and the third section, before the final considerations and reflections, will introduce the concept of Erdoğanisation, attempting to understand its role in the country's developments over the last decade.*

**Key-words:** - *Authoritarianism; democratisation; Erdoğanisation; European Union; Turkey*

## INTRODUCTION

Turkey – European Union (EU) relations have been marked by two fundamental features: volatility and slowness. Since the 1950s, periods of active efforts follow times of stagnation in continuous cycles of advancements and backslides. These dynamics result from a wide range of variables that make the Turkish EU bid thornier and more delicate than all previous enlargements – geography, history, economy, demography, geopolitics, culture and identity are dimensions that make a decadeslong relationship more difficult.

When, in 2005, the European Union opened negotiations with Turkey, something unexpected and unseen in previous accession processes happened: the candidate began to drift apart from the EU. Researchers and theorists started to question this phenomenon and several theories have emerged ever since. Yet, academia has not found a unified answer to that concern. Additionally, there have been some critical evaluations of the Turkish democratic performance since 2005, which raises the possibility that both phenomena may be connected, making it therefore necessary to understand the reasons behind Turkey's deviation from what was expected ten years ago – i.e., the continuation and consolidation of the accession and democratization processes.

Bearing this context in mind, the present paper aims to analyse Turkey-EU relations and to assess Turkey's democratic behavior. Once these hypotheses are verified, it will be necessary to point out a possible explanation. Yet, since democratisation is seen as an essentially internal process with external influences of major relevance, probably the reasons may be found at the domestic level, also considering external factors.

Thus, this article postulates that *Turkey has worsened its democratic performance since 2005 due to an internal dynamic of a growing authoritarianism and the subsequent drifting apart from the EU. In other words, the Erdoğanisation of Turkey hindered its Europeanisation and democratisation processes.*

In order to assess the validity of this statement, methods such as literature review, official documents' analysis and quantitative analysis will be used. It will be privileged a hermeneutical approach that underlines the phenomena's interpretation through a hypothetical-deductive reasoning strategy that assumes the construction of a hypothesis, mentioned above, as a means to solve the problem earlier identified and which will be tested by data to ensure it resists its falsification.

In terms of structure, this article will be divided as follows: a first section will be devoted to briefly revise Turkey-EU relations, especially considering the breaking point of 2005; the second part will focus on an analysis of the evolution of Turkish democratic performance, including a quantitative approach; and the third section, before the final considerations and reflections, will introduce the concept of *Erdoğanisation*, attempting to understand its role in the country's developments over the last decade.

## 1 Turkey-EU relations: a breaking point in 2005?

### 1.1 Pre-2005

What has been happening between Turkey and the European Union since 2005 – the focus of this article – can only be understood in the light of prior events and happenings. More recent developments in Turkey cannot be detached from their evolution in time. As Professor Atila Eralp (2009) proved, 'timing' is crucial in reading Turkey-EU relations: 'there is a close relationship between the factors of temporality, interaction and the process of Europeanization' (168). Based on this premise, Eralp divided those relations into four main periods: 1959-1970 (harmony in the relationship); 1970-1999 (emergent discord); 1999-2004 (positive turn) and 2004 onwards (negative turn).

This chronological segmentation corroborates three previously announced assumptions: first, that Turkey-EU relations are volatile. These four cycles show how they have been based on ups and downs. Second, the period before 2005 was in fact a positive moment in which Turkey has succeeded to come closer to the Union, which granted it the opening of negotiations. Finally, that in the mid-2000s a change in this pattern has occurred and, in order to understand that, a brief overview of the previous years may be helpful.

Having that said, 1999 was a crucial year for Turkey's EU bid given the new official status of candidate attributed to the country. That obviously meant a new impetus to the process, access to the Pre-Accession Framework, more seriously taken negotiations and interactions and, consequently, a very positive phase for Turkish democratic consolidation began as well.

Despite this acceptance, the EU was clear regarding the necessary efforts to be made by the candidate in order to reach the following step in the process: 'compliance with the Copenhagen criteria is a prerequisite for the opening of accession negotiations' (European Commission, 2010, 7). At this point, the Commission was worried about some fundamental areas such as freedom of expression, the judiciary, corruption, civil-military relations, death penalty, fight against drugs and fraud, etc. (12-64).

In the following years until 2004, all Annual Progress Reports alerted the candidate for the need to pursue with more reforms, even though the rapporteurs would recognize the accomplished changes and improvements. Matos (2015, 166) has calculated the percentage of positive references in these documents in contrast with negative evaluations and, from 1999 to 2009, the words 'progress', 'further progress', 'some progress' and 'important progress' composed an annual average of 47% of all the references. This implies that the remaining 53% focused on Turkey's shortcomings ('limited progress', 'no progresses'). Even though the distribution is almost even, there is a slight tendency to negatively, rather than positively, evaluate Turkey's performance.

In the first years of the 2000s, it is possible to list several reforms and changes aligned with EU's demands mainly under the form of constitutional amendments and encompassing harmonisation packages that included numerous adjustments in various fields and which were regarded as the first (positive) responses to European conditionality, even though the

Commission would not stop making further suggestions for improvements and continuous criticisms regarding the country's weaknesses.

Internally, however, the election of AKP in 2002 meant, as far as the party publically recognized, the continuation of the harmonisation efforts. The 2003 Progress Report acknowledged this attitude by stating that 'the goal of EU accession has been amongst the government's main priorities' (European Commission, 2003, 18).

On the European side, in March 2001 the Council adopted an Accession Partnership for Turkey (Council of the European Union, 2001), a helpful document regarding steps to be taken in the short and medium terms by the candidate. Turkey followed with the adoption of the Turkish National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (Secretariat General for EU Affairs, 2001) in which it is possible to read: 'in 2001, the Turkish Government will speed up the ongoing work on political, administrative and judicial reforms' (5). Two years later, the Council revised the initial Partnership and Turkey approved a second version of its National Programme, adapting the new documents to the changed reality of Turkey after a couple of years of intensive reforms.

As a matter of fact, this was the general environment of Turkey-EU relations in the first half of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Examples provided above are only meant to be that – samples of a period of countless changes and interactions between the two entities. Yet, it is undeniable the intensity of those interactions between a very proactive and attentive Union always demanding for more improvements and a not less proactive candidate willing to harmonise with the host organization, which also implied a natural and subsequent enhancement of its own democratic performance.

Whether these demands and the European evaluation were fair and feasible, and whether Turkey's efforts were genuine and were being internalized as the Europeanisation process necessarily implies is a matter of debate that does not fall within the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that some researchers doubt these aspects and consequently doubt the validity of the whole process, challenging the basic premise of this work on the existence of a breaking point both in terms of EU-Turkey relations and the Turkish democratization process.

The fact is that these reported dynamics led to the opening of negotiations. The European Commission 'consider[ed] that Turkey sufficiently fulfills the political criteria and recommends that accession negotiations be opened' (European Commission, 2004, 3). The European Council follows the recommendation and sends a positive signal to Turkey, rewarding the country for its commitment during the previous years. Nevertheless, the warning was also made at this moment:

'the Commission will recommend the suspension of negotiations in the case of a serious and persistent breach of the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law on which the Union is founded' (6).

Recalling Atila Eralp's time division, Turkey and the EU were on the verge of moving to another phase of their relationship – it is necessary therefore to understand what may have led to this 'negative turn' and to the deterioration of the country's democracy.

## **1.2. 2005 and onwards**

Many researchers and theorists have identified the middle of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a turning point in both Turkey-EU relations and Turkish democratization process.

In the context of a research interview, Atila Eralp recognized that 'from 1999 to 2005, Turkey in terms of political reforms and in terms of democratization was doing impressively well. (...) It started to change after 2005 (...)' (Interview, 2013). İlhan Uzgel supported this opinion and underlined that 'in 2004-2005 there is a peak point and then it starts to slow down' (Interview, 2013a). Several other interviewees shared this perception, including officials from the Turkish Directorate for Accession Policy, a department within Turkey's Ministry for EU Affairs.

Regarding literature, Bahar Rumelili (2011, 236) endorses this same argument, stating that the political process lost its momentum after the peak of 2002-2005 and Açıkmeşe (2010) wrote that there were two periods of Europeanisation: before 2005, what the author called the 'golden-age of Europeanisation' and from 2005 onwards with a reversed Europeanisation process. Matos (2015, 183, 213), in a book devoted to this same subject, reached a similar conclusion: 'the breaking moment in Turkey-EU relations of the period under analysis (...) was 2005.(...) Since 2005, the leverage power of the Union started to reveal signs of stagnation or lack of effectiveness'.

In terms of Turkish public opinion, the 75% levels of 2004 in favour of membership cannot be compared to the 42% reached in 2008 after a declining tendency since that year. Conversely, the support for a foreign policy closer to the Middle East grew as fast as the Euroscepticism in the country (Oğuzlu, 2012, 232; Talbot, 2015: 87). Thus, Turkish citizens felt a difference in the country's relationship with Europe and that change has also been captured by academics and the literature in general, as seen above. In fact, there is a widespread consensus regarding this subject, even though the perceptions on the causes underlying this breaking point are not as consensual as the recognition of the moment of the split-up. In this case, there are many theories and explanations.

Several events can compose a list that attempts to disclose the roots for this phenomenon. After a considerably positive evaluation by the European Commission in 2005, internal and external conditions led to a colder relationship. One of the major setbacks that affected the whole process was the Cyprus question. In 2005, Turkey declared the non-recognition of Cyprus and the European Union toughened its position, in order to stand for one of its members, namely through a more challenging (or less feasible for some) Negotiation Framework with new conditions. In the following year, the Commission froze negotiations in eight chapters and Sarkozy started to voice his opposition to Turkey's accession more loudly after being elected. Germany, through the voice of the Chancellor Angela Merkel, reiterated that animosity and the

possibility of a 'privileged partnership' surfaces in the European discourse. France, in the meanwhile, blocked the opening of other five chapters.

Valeria Talbot (2015, 85) explains Turkey's unwillingness to recognize the Republic of Cyprus using the frustration of the country after the failed Annan Plan for the reunification of the island.

Cyprus is such a delicate topic in Turkey that one of the Turkish officials interviewed stated that

'Having Cyprus as a member was a mistake. And after that mistake, Sarkozy and Merkel and Chirac used the Cyprus issue as a scapegoat. (...) You don't do that because we voted yes for the Annan Plan. The other community voted no for that. And the EU backed the Annan Plan' (Interview, 2013b).

It is interesting to notice how the Turkish pro-government elite points the finger to the Cyprus question and, in this particular case, how they refer to the Republic of Cyprus, an official member-state of the European Union as 'the other community', avoiding to recognize its existence, which reveals the sensitiveness of this question.

Internally, the Presidential crisis began and Annual Progress Reports started to reflect the slowdown in negotiations and democratization measures, so as ordinary citizens in

Turkey. As Talbot (85) puts it, 'doubtless, responsibilities for this *impasse* lie with both the EU and Turkey'. Turks accused the Union of double standards and of not keeping its word in what comes to the final outcome of the whole process. Turks felt resented and that helped shape a new foreign policy towards the Middle East, pleasing the then Prime-Minister Erdoğan, who was eager to turn the country to the Arab neighbours.

For these and some other reasons, the accession process was, and still is in part, stalled. More than half of the chapters have not been opened yet, delaying and hampering the reforms and negotiations.

Using the Q methodology, a group of researchers studied the 'existing domestic discourses on the relationship between Turkey and the EU' (Steunenberg, Petek, and R  th, 2011, 450) and came to the conclusion that, when it comes to Turks, the main discourses besides the supporters – usually for economic reasons – are what these authors labeled as the '*pacta sunt servanda* discourse' and the 'pride and independence discourse'. Interestingly, both types of discourse have been reproduced or illustrated above. For Turks, the fact that European leaders may voice some alternatives but full membership is a disrespect for the treaties and agreements signed between the two parts; on the other hand, and as a proud nation, Turkey shifted its foreign policy to reassure its independence and not to hurt even more its pride.

Despite these divergences and the apparent drifting apart between Turkey and the EU, a large extent of the literature recognises the importance of this relationship for Turkish stability. As a typically polarised society whose identity and values have been questioned and redefined over the last decades for several times, the EU plays a key role of mediator. Yet, with the decrease in EU's influence, Turkey has been moving away from EU's norms and the institution's credibility has also decreased, leading to the reversal of the political reform process, as M  ft  ler-Ba   and Keyman (2015, 5) conclude in their study. On the other hand, however, Valeria Talbot (2015, 83) identified in a recent publication that there has been 'in the last year a renewed interest in reviving the accession process' eased by 'the new government led by Ahmet Davuto  lu [who] identified the EU membership as Turkey's strategic goal' (83).

Besides, according to a survey published by the German Marshall Fund of the United States cited by the same author, public support for accession increased from 44% in 2013 to 53% in 2015 in Turkey (84). These numbers imply that Turks, even though politically more distant from the Union, are aware of the role of the organization in their society.

Academics in general share this perception regarding the influence of the EU in country's democratization: M  ft  ler-Ba   and Keyman (2015) by concluding that colder Turkey-EU relations mean a reversal in the country's democratisation are implicitly accepting that EU in fact influences this internal process somehow. This position is also subscribed by Valeria Talbot (2015, 88): 'the EU objective has been considered one of the main catalysts for political and economic reforms during the AKP's first tenure'. Underlying a different dimension, O  uzlu (2012, 241) considers that 'Turkey's European transformation at home (...) will offer the least common denominator, or the most important glue, rallying Turkish people of different stripes around a common flag'. Finally, Matos (2015, 214, 215) after studying a ten-year period of Turkey-EU relations comes to the conclusion that 'accession to the EU and Turkish democratisation are two interconnected mechanisms, because (...) all the hypotheses support the idea that a closer relationship means more democratic efforts'.

In fact, it is therefore possible to draw at least two prior assumptions that will base the continuation of this work: first, that the European Union is a relevant actor in the democratisation process of Turkey; secondly, Turkey-EU relations have experienced a cool-down since 2005. Thus, next section will focus on briefly presenting some signals about Turkish worsening performance at the democratic level, in order to gather some evidence about this statement and the establishment of a relationship between the variables under consideration: EU's influence, Turkish democracy and Turkey's *Erdo  anisation*.

## 2. Turkey's downgrading democracy since 2005

There is a generalised perception of a declining democratic performance in Turkey since 2005. Several academics have pointed that out and quantitative indicators support those findings.

G  nter Seufert (2014, 1), in a recent work devoted to the state of democracy in Turkey, postulates that Turkey is heading towards authoritarianism for some reasons the author presents, including: (i) excessive police violence against demonstrators; (ii) restrictions on freedom of the press and internet; (iii) government interference in the judiciary; (iv) purges in the bureaucracy; (v) anti-European policy shift (Idem).

Several events that have taken place over the last decade constitute concrete evidence of the reasons presented above. For example, there has been a reinforcement of the National Intelligence's power, illustrated among others by an increase in its budget by 40% and an almost unlimited access to several sources (6).

In 2011 the *Ergenekon* case brought to light a struggle between the AKP's government and what it called the deep or parallel state, dominated by the followers of the self-exiled Fethullah Gülen who was accused of plotting against the government. Even though a fight against a parallel state may seem like a proper democratic consolidation action, the way the process was handled did not respect or follow democratic standards – over two hundred of individuals have been taken into custody and accused of being part of a terrorist group. Judicial processes were not as transparent as a democracy requires and the European Commission (2013, 47) criticised the functioning of the Turkish judicial system over this aspect as well in its Annual Report:

'The Ergenekon case was finalised at first instance in August 2013. An Istanbul Serious Crimes Court handed over 22 life sentences, more than 200 prison sentences (...), and 21 acquittals for the 275 defendants. (...) The flaws of the Turkish criminal justice system outlined above undermined the acceptance of the ruling by all segments of Turkish society and tainted it with allegations of political score-settling.'

The last sentence of the quote indicates reflects a feeling among some Turks that the judicial decisions have been driven by political interests or pressures, in an attempt to undermine the Kemalist heritage in central positions of Turkish social, judicial, economic and political life. It was seen by some as a well succeeded form of weakening the regime's opponents. In 2013 the protests at the Gezi Park have been worldwide broadcasted and commented with sever criticisms on the Turkish government's non-proportional and violent reactions. By then, the world that regarded Turkey as the democratic role model for Muslim countries started to question the direction of the process of democratic consolidation in Turkey due to this and other attitudes by the government. Internet and social networks blockages were a constant during the protests and even afterwards. The security reasons presented by officials did not convince the protesters or their supporters who perceived those actions as a pure disrespect for the freedom of expression. Also in the context of the protests, in a document entitled 'Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Situation and operating conditions of civil society organisations in Turkey'' and published in the Official Journal of the European Union in July 2015, the Rapporteur stated that

'The EESC [European Economic and Social Committee] delegation was deeply shocked to hear that, following the Gezi Park protests 'doctors had been forbidden to treat the injured and that patients' files had been demanded for investigative purposes. Some doctors were also allegedly investigated for crimes such as disobeying government regulations because they failed to comply with instructions from the public authorities.' (EESC, 2015, 36)

In the aftermath of the Gezi protests, AKP was shaken by a corruption scandal that exposed 'a number of top figures in and around the party and prompting two ministerial resignations. (...) Erdoğan accus[ed] murky foreign powers of conspiring with a 'parallel structure' (...) to undermine legitimate authorities' (Bechev, 2015, 8). The reaction was ferocious and involved a 'wholesale purge of alleged supporters of Fethullah Gülen' (8).

Yet, all these events have not affected popular perception about the party, since local elections in 2014 resulted in another victory for AKP, further reinforced by the election of Erdoğan for President in the same year at the first round (8).

Bechev also introduces in the analysis of Turkish democracy one of the cornerstones of a liberal democracy: separation of powers and the system of checks and balances. According to this author, 'the country has a long way to go until the rule of law is entrenched and the government made sufficiently accountable' (12). In other words, despite being democratically elected, the government in its executive functions is submitted to the President's will and the judiciary was 'neutralised and brought under government control' (13) and used to achieve political ends, such as in the struggle against the *Cemaat*.

The Turkish National Assembly with an AKP majority does not work as a balance against the government; nor do can media and civil society actively intervene, since they have been persecuted as well for showing positions against the regime (13).

To these events, it is possible to add several other shortcomings – all of them identified and clearly pointed out by the European Commission in consecutive progress reports. Sever limitation to the freedom of expression and the freedom of the press and disrespect for minorities are some of the hot topics between Turkey and the European Union, which has been really vocal regarding these situations.

The EESC's (2015, 34-35) document on the situation of civil society organisations in Turkey reached several findings and recommendations:

'The EESC encourages the Turkish government and administration to recognise civil society organisations as an important part of society and as a key player in Turkey's approximation process with EU values and acquis. (...) As a basic prerequisite for the operation of civil society organisations, separation of powers under the rule of law in all areas must be upheld. Disproportionate state interference that unduly hinders their operation, as is the case with respect to special audits, is incompatible with this principle.'

Thus, Turkey in the last decade has been struggling to maintain its democratic standards. A poor system of checks and balances, with a weak civil society, a weakened media and the highest percentage of journalists in prison in the entire

world, violent reactions to popular demonstrations and a lack of a strong opposition capable of breaking the Turks' enchantment for a party that has ruled uninterruptedly for over a dozen years and other factors mentioned above led to a rather strong conclusion that democratic standards in Turkey have worsened.

In fact, the perception of political entities (such as the European Commission) and academics are reinforced and supported by quantitative data.

In a study that combined over eighty indicators from many different international organisations or international rankings, Matos (2015, 171) proved that from an overall democratic evaluation of 43 out of 100 in 1999, Turkish democracy improved until reaching 50% of democratic quality in 2005. Nevertheless, after 2005 values start to decrease again and achieve in 2009 the approximate value of 1999 – before the golden age of Europeanisation.

Another quantitative approach by the World Bank (n.d) presents the exact same pattern: voice and accountability from 1996 to 2005 increase to the highest value that begins to diminish from 2006 until the last year of the evaluation (2013), reaching values similar to 2002. The same pattern is valid for the variables 'Political stability and absence of violence': the average of the performance in the first period (1996-2005) was higher than in the second period (until 2013) reaching the levels of 1998.

There is, however, an exception to this pattern: government effectiveness is one of the few indicators that steadily increases from the first to the last year under consideration – from 46% in 1998 to 66% in 2013. This assessment can be interpreted as the government's capability of implementing its decisions – it would be a positive signal in other democracy; in Turkey, nonetheless, it may mean that measures are imposed by the executive and that there are no mutual constraints in the exercise of power regarding the different organs of sovereignty of the State.

Given this scenario – i.e. a widespread recognition both at the academic and civil society levels that the European Union induces democratic changes in Turkey within the context of the accession process, and that the Turkish democracy has been worsening its performance – why would the country drift away from the EU and hamper the good results of the *golden age of Europeanisation*?

The central argument of this paper is that this has been happening due to the *Erdoğanisation* of Turkey. Therefore, next sections will clarify the concept and relate it to the country's democratic performance of the last decade.

### **3 Turkey's growing *Erdoğanisation***

#### **3.1. The concept**

Turkey, as a candidate of accession to the European Union, has undergone a very demanding and often criticised process of Europeanisation – similar to other candidates for enlargement. This concept has been widely debated and analysed since EU's pressure may be seen as an understandable form of harmonisation of the European territory at many levels (including identity and other cognitive aspects) or rather as a post-colonialist imposition that disrespects each country's own identity and specific features.

In a context of normative power, the EU uses the Copenhagen criteria and the *acquis communautaire* to achieve the internalisation of European values, principles, structures and patterns of behaviour. Claudio Radaelli (2000: 4) provided the most widely accepted definition of Europeanisation:

'Processes of construction, diffusion and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies.'

According to this definition, several dimensions should be regarded when considering Europeanisation, including an ideational side with both formal and informal rules; not only procedures, but also beliefs. Any country in the path towards accession is requested to take part in this process of becoming Europeanised, which implies more than rule adoption or some external imposition; it is the building of something, a continuous set of simultaneous processes. Due to its nature, it necessarily constitutes a slow movement of social learning and a major condition for diminishing the gap between the candidate and the Union. And, as Caporaso, Cowles and Risse (2001) wrote, the wider the gap, the higher the pressure to Europeanise.

This very brief introduction to the concept of Europeanisation, which cannot be longer analysed in this context, intends to constitute the basis for the analysis of the concept of *Erdoğanisation*.

It was during an academic interview to Savaş Genç at Fatih Üniversitesi in Istanbul in 2013 that we first came across with the concept. According to this academic, 'the EU is the only alternative that can stop the *Erdoğanisation* of Turkey' (Interview, 2013c). In fact, and since the EU has not been very active or present in Turkey ever since, it is possible to come to the conclusion that *Erdoğanisation* has taken place. It is therefore necessary to clarify the concept's meaning.

The wording is obviously based on the last name of the current President of the Republic of Turkey: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The 1954-born former football player became a full-time politician in 1983 by integrating the *Refah Partisi* (the Welfare Party). In 1994, he ran and won the election for Mayor of Istanbul, occupying that position for four years (Mango, 2004, 110). The path has not been smooth; in the meanwhile, Erdoğan was arrested for quoting a nationalist theorist and that experience in prison 'taught him a lesson of prudence' (110). After the imprisonment, Erdoğan re-entered the political world and worked within the system, respecting (at least apparently) the democratic principles and procedures.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) was founded by Erdoğan and, as a new promising political party, granted him an unseen victory in the 2002 elections. He assumed the cabinet in 2003 and ruled as Prime-Minister until 2014. Due to the winning results of the Presidential elections of 2014, he quitted the office and began serving the country as its twelfth President.

This very brief sequence of events only aims to present the highlights of Erdoğan's political career. It hides many relevant options and processes in between. However, it is not possible to develop them in this context. Suffice to say that President Erdoğan has always revealed an extremely helpful charisma that, together with a good first term in office with sound economic results, reinforced his popularity among the masses in an unprecedented way in Turkey.

After a very calm, popular and European-oriented first term, Erdoğan's politics started to change and some social sections that used to support him – mainly some secularists and Kemalists that gave him the benefit of the doubt – started to question his intentions and the possibility of a *hidden conservative and Islamic agenda*. He began to be more vocal against the European Union, even though adopting internal reforms that consolidated his power against Kemalist guardians (i.e. the military, for example), arguing those changes were in sake of the accession process. Erdoğan also redirected his foreign policy towards the Middle East, abandoning the zero-problem approach and replacing it by a more active and intervenient posture in world politics. Delicate issues such as the headscarf ban or some suspicious imprisonments of his opponents started to raise some eyebrows and, of a sudden, Turkey began to look like a country nobody was expecting it to be in the early 2000s – a democracy in peril.

Based on the above described process and paraphrasing Radaelli's conceptualisation, the proposed definition of *Erdoğanisation* is as follows:

*A process of construction and institutionalisation of rules, procedures, styles and ways of doing things proposed or triggered by Erdoğan which shape and change Turkey towards a more conservative, less free and less democratic country in line with Erdoğan's political identity and beliefs in a logic of reinforcement of his power.*

In other words, the Erdoğanisation of Turkey means a continuous process through which Erdoğan has been concentrating power in himself, overshadowing of accountable and representative democratic structures, hampering rule of law and the principle of separation of powers. Besides the political domain, it also entails a movement transforming Turkey into a more conservative country, based on Islamic values and on the weakening of secularist structures and achievements.

This process is perceived through Erdoğan's speeches and comments, attitudes, political choices and proposed rules. In an overall context that facilitates the idea of a strong leader for a strong state that characterises Turkey's history, there is a generalised perception of his increasing and unlimited power. The central argument is that Erdoğan is shaping Turkish politics and society in a way that represents a setback in the democratisation process that began with the application for membership in the EU.

Through a worked charisma both domestically and internationally appreciated, a strong political marketing, a hard rhetoric and an effective propaganda, Erdoğan has succeeded in his endeavours so far, being able to carry out his political wills and goals even in apparently difficult situations that he always managed to overcome somehow.

Having briefly presented the initial considerations on the concept, next section will provide some evidence and support for this theory, based on some academic interviews, theorists and some newspapers' headlines.

### **3.2. Some evidence of Turkey's Erdoğanisation**

Three main domains arise from the proposed definition: Erdoğan is transforming Turkey into a 'more conservative, less free and less democratic' country.

Concerning the first dimension – conservatism – several public interventions by Erdogan can support this claim: promises to end mixed-sex student residences or even the emphasis put on family, on the call for each woman to have three children and on birth control as a conspiracy to weaken Turkey (Kaya, 2015, 60-61) are some examples of the Turkish President's conservative approach and defence. It is possible to add other appeals to ban alcohol or for couples to act morally in public spaces.

Regarding freedoms' constraints, the violence with which Gezi protesters were treated by police and security forces and the constant blockages of social networks and websites are illustrative of the environment in Turkey. The European Commission has been for years very critical concerning this subject. Freedoms of expression and of the press are constantly violated and Turkey has one of the highest rate of convictions at the European Court of Human Rights, very frequently caused by violations of these freedoms. Yet, this subject by its complexity and sensitiveness, can be dealt with in a proper and independent research that extrapolates the scope of this paper.

Finally, the third dimension included in the definition is the danger for democracy caused by Erdoğanisation. For its relevance to the main focus of this research, some particular attention will be devoted to this domain.

One of the cornerstones of the theory of Turkey's Erdoğanisation is the concentration of power. In fact, on a work on Turkey under the AKP, Toni Alaranta (2015, 17) compares Turkey to Russia and postulates that both are heading towards a 'one-party (one-man) authoritarian rule, where the basic freedoms and rights of political opponents are totally suppressed'. Another academic shared this opinion and characterised Turkey 'by the consolidating power of one person and a concomitant relativisation of the influence of institutions without which democracy is inconceivable' (Seufert, 2014, 7). With his ninth continuous electoral victory when chosen for President, Erdoğan embodies, according to Seufert (3) a central aspect of his party's ideology: the fusion of state and nation into a single entity.

A one-man regime necessarily implies a strong and popular leader who can bring the necessary attention and support to undermine the rest of the institutions. In that sense, Bechev (2015, 15) points out that 'Erdoğan's acumen, resolve and personal charisma have already won him a distinguished place in modern Turkish history', namely for his capacity to overcome several crisis. The way he managed to convince Turks that Gezi protests have been supported by Western governments and credit-rating agencies to discourage Turkey to pursue its path as raising power reveals a brilliant strategist and a convincing orator (16).

These skills have been paramount for his election as President: while campaigning, Erdoğan revealed to be aiming at a strong role with executive powers in a dynamics of concentration of power that he had already started (Alaranta, 2015,

20). He clearly presented his objective of introducing a presidential system through a constitutional amendment. The reinforcement of the President's power has been openly assumed and may entail a danger for democracy – in such an immature democratic system with unconsolidated checks and balances, a presidential system may weaken fundamental principles of separation of power, sovereign organs' interdependence and even accountability and rule of law in general. By conducting an attentive study to the 2014 Presidential elections in Turkey, Grigoriadis (2015, 106) came to the conclusion that the topics of the campaign were 'chosen by prime minister Erdoğan' due to 'his personal charisma, as well as government influence on the mass media'. This influence resulted, among other situations, in over 5 hours of broadcasting time allocated to Erdoğan by the TRT Türk (a channel of the national broadcaster) during two days whereas none has been spent with the two other presidential candidates (106).

Regarding, Erdoğan's charisma Time magazine published in the cover of a 2011 number a photograph of the then Turkish Prime-Minister and called it 'Erdoğan's Moment'. In the article, it was reported that Erdoğan was greeted in Cairo 'by thousands of cheering fans (...) chanting throngs. 'Erdoğan! Erdoğan! A real Muslim and not a coward' (Ghosh, 2011). This chants reflected his popularity in the Arab world in 2011 and how Turkey was able to play a key role in the Middle East during and in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. The article also stated that Erdoğan has 'displayed an occasional autocratic streak, running roughshod over political rivals, tossing enemies into jail and intimidating the media (...) But to his admirers, these failings pale against his successes' (Ghosh, 2011), implicitly recognising that the leader's popularity allowed him to exercise power in a way other politicians would have not been able to.

Coming back to the presidential election campaign again, other polemic events took place in Turkey caused by the Erdoğan, as the candidate emphasised in such an intensive degree nationalist and Islamic sentiments that the 'Supreme Elections Council had to ban a political advertisement of his due to the explicit use of Islamic and Turkish national symbols' (Grigoriadis, 2015, 108).

Already as President, and in the context of the political campaign for the legislative elections, Erdoğan actively intervened in the process, not respecting the impartiality the Turkish Constitution demands. A document from the European Parliament on the political situation of the country before the elections reported the situation: '[Erdoğan] is campaigning very actively, partly overshadowing the official leader of AKP, the Prime Minister, and Ahmet Davutoğlu. He has even held 11 electoral meetings of his own' (Perchoc, 2015).

The disrespect for established legal principles can be further exemplified by Erdoğan's disregard for the Constitution when he ignored Article 101 and only resigned from the Parliament after having sworn in as President (Bechev, 2015, 5). Furthermore, there was a clear pressure on the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors during the investigations of the corruption case and the judges and prosecutors involved were replaced by others who coincidentally dropped the accusations (5).

These examples are symptomatic of a broader framework based on 'the imprint of authoritarian legacies on present-day society and politics; institutional imbalances privileging the executive branch (...) [and] Erdoğan's divisive personality and leadership' (9). Concerning this later attribute, more directly linked to the thesis of the country's Erdoğanisation, the author claims that the now President of Turkey was able to 'replace the tutelage of the Kemalist elites with top-down rule backed by an electoral majority' (11), adding that the executive branch of the government is still today dominated in practice by Erdoğan who was also able to bring the judiciary under government control (12-13).

It was possible to reach this stage due to a progressive and almost unnoticed concentration of power. As a Turkish political scientist declared during an interview,

'The problem in Turkish democracy is not about civil-military relations, etc. (...) the point is this: the government itself and its Prime-Minister [Erdoğan at the time] have a very strong tendency to monopolise power. This is the main weakness of Turkish democratisation process; even his ministers cannot make autonomous decisions without asking him first. (...) His authoritarian tendencies are the weakest point of Turkish democratisation efforts today' (Interview, 2013a).

This concentration, on the other hand, was made possible because of a set of other conditions, such as: AKP's electoral successes over the years, a weak opposition unable to gather social sectors that disapproved the status quo and, as Müftüler-Baç and Keyman (2015, 3-4) wrote, the polarisation of the society due to a rhetoric between 'coup' and 'corruption' that alienates part of the public. When combined, these variables resulted in a 'process of Turkish democratic consolidation [that] has unexpectedly turned into majoritarian authoritarianism' (2). In fact, this repressive rhetoric can work in Turkish society because its 'political system is characterised by low tolerance for diverse views and a tendency to suppress dissenting voices' (5).

Besides a weak opposition, Turkish political scene does not count on a strong AKP either. The party is as strong as Erdoğan and it would be interesting to assess its performance and development without its leader. As a conservative democrat mass party, Erdoğan stated about AKP that 'even though the AKP was formed less than 13 years ago, we are the expression of a holy march, a holy cause, originally inaugurated centuries before' (Erdoğan, 2014 *cited by* Alaranta, 2015, 12). In fact, AKP ends up being a not so strong party, since it is very likely to survive due to the popularity of its leader. As Seufert (2014, 3-4) puts it,

'the ambiguity of the current AKP ideology and the vagueness of the policies that flow from it pose no difficulties for the party, which has handed all decisive decisions to its founder and former leader Erdoğan. (...) Where a man and his vision become programme there is no room for consultation, not even for discussion'.



Despite Erdoğan's popularity, there is a widespread feeling of his growing power. When one looks at the distribution of votes both in the legislative and the Presidential elections, more urbanised and educated zones usually cast less votes for Erdoğan, who wins his majorities thanks to the more rural, interior and less educated zones Turkish society is, therefore, divided and polarised both politically and socially. This results in constant demonstrations of opposition against the government, even though the repression of such manifestation has increased – namely through the censorship of certain articles and cartoons, as well as pressure on media groups.

When it comes to reporting news, newspapers' headlines may reveal the centre of the piece of information that is being conveyed. A selection of some articles' headlines helps understand how a newspaper not-aligned with the AKP, such as the Hurriyet Daily News, conveys some messages related to the way how Erdoğan has been exercising power in Turkey.

Among them, one can illustratively list

- 'HDP co-chair says judiciary fears Erdoğan more than god'
- 'Erdoğan casts shadow over fair elections in Turkey'
- 'Turkey keeps 'not free' position in Freedom House report on press freedom'
- 'Court arrests two judges who sought release of Erdoğan's foes'
- 'AKP suggests presidential system for Turkey in line with Erdoğan's insistence'
- 'Erdoğan warns Pope Frances not to repeat 'mistake' about Armenian claims'
- 'President Erdoğan to chair cabinet for the third time'
- 'Turkish cartoonists sentenced to jail for insulting Erdoğan'
- 'Journalist sentenced to prison, as houses of two colleagues raided for insulting Erdoğan'
- 'Turkey blocks Charlie Hebdo's website, 48 others'
- 'Turkish president says he cannot 'bear' opposition's criticism against his former gov't'
- 'Surrounded by Ottoman soldiers, Erdoğan toughens rhetoric against New York Times'
- 'Cumhuriyet's editor-in-chief to 'pay heavy price,' says Turkish president'
- 'President Erdoğan accuses NYT, BBC and CNN of trying to weaken, divide Turkey'
- 'Erdoğan's lawyer demands aggravated life sentence for Turkish journalist over news story'

Popular perceptions on political phenomena are essential for an adequate implementation of any democracy. However, when the information that feeds those perceptions are biased or somehow compromised or constrained by any kind of pressures, the formation and consolidation of public opinion will only echo the status quo and hamper any attempt of true and critical debates on the political phenomena. Therefore, headlines like those reproduced above and many others in different newspapers (in a decreasing number) help build that critical public opinion and urges to be further analysed.

## Conclusion

The drifting apart between Turkey and the European Union is a recognised phenomenon since 2005. On the other hand, different evaluations on the democratic performance of Turkey have also revealed several weaknesses and a pattern of a diminishing democratic quality that puts Turkey at levels prior to its Europeanisation and accession processes.

Based on these premises, it is possible to conclude that Turkey's movement away from the European Union has jeopardised its democratic commitment and results. Of a very sensitive system, still unconsolidated and immature, Turkey's own and lonely democratisation process has not brought fruits. On the contrary, the country worsened as a consequence of that movement.

This paper aimed to propose another variable to introduce in this equation: in other words, it was assumed and evaluated the inclusion of Erdoğan as a central variable to take into consideration, that is to say that the action and conduction of Turkish politics have been deeply influenced by Turkey's leader over the last decade in a way most academics have not foreseen.

Erdoğan has shown some despise for democratic principles and institutions, violating in his speeches, decisions and public acts cornerstones of the functioning of a liberal democracy, such as the separation of power. Through power concentration, the Turkish leader has been able to conduct Turkey towards a model that does not fit in the European standards of respect for the rule of law, accountability, freedoms and liberties.

The *Erdoğanisation* of the country is precisely this dynamics of inducing Turkey into a change that hampers the country's democratic efforts, worsening its performance at several levels, by adopting rules and ways of living that follow Erdoğan's beliefs and interests.

Thus, Turkey is currently in a process of worsening its democratic standards due to its *Erdoğanisation*, which may succeed in a context of some distance from the European Union that has worked as an intermediary player in a polarised society. Further research on *Erdoğanisation* is necessary, focusing on more concrete aspects, in order to test this hypothesis in other domains, so that academics and civil society is aware of the degree of influence this process has on the country's political and social life.

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