

Influential internal and external factors in German policy towards Turkey's EU membership: more than 'privileged partnership'; less than full membership?

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Abstract

This article focuses on the internal and external factors that influence Germany's policy concerning Turkey's EU membership bid. Firstly, it explains the theoretical framework and historical background of Germany's policies regarding Turkey's EU membership. Secondly, it analyses the role of internal and external factors related to the EU as well as external factors related to Turkey. The internal factors include the integration problems of Turkish immigrants and the rise of Islamophobia in Europe. Their influence on the role of the German public opinion is analysed. Then, the perceptions of Germany's political elites and civil society are discussed, based on face-to-face, in-depth interviews conducted by the author with representatives of several politicians from different political parties in the German federal parliament. Additional interviews were conducted with representatives of several foundations and business organisations in Berlin and one German-Turkish business organisation in Istanbul. Finally, the article argues that Germany has been trying to develop a policy which is in between the idea of a 'privileged partnership' and the full membership of Turkey and tries to evaluate the reasons behind that.

Keywords: Germany, Turkey, European Union, privileged partnership, Turkish community

1. Introduction

Turkey has been associated with the European Union (EU) for almost 50 years. It was given the official candidate status at the Helsinki Summit in December 1999 and negotiations between Turkey and the EU started on October 3, 2005. The political will of member states is crucial for a candidate country to accede to the EU, but currently, the political will is insufficient to support

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Turkey's accession. Germany and France have been the 'motors of European integration', with the largest populations and Germany being the biggest contributor to the EU budget (Mühlenhoff, 2009, p.1). Their support has played a crucial role in the accession of candidate countries, e.g., Germany's role in the Central and Eastern European Countries' (CEEC) accession.

One of the milestones in the Turkey-Germany relations was the agreement on the Turkish workers' recruitment, concluded on October 31, 1961, and suspended in 1973 when foreign workers' recruitment was halted. However, neither this latter decision, nor the re-introduction of visa requirements in 1980 halted the migration from Turkey to Germany because many Turkish 'guest workers' decided to stay in Germany and bring their families to live with them through 'family reunification'. The Turkish community in Germany is now close to three million and has influenced the social, cultural and political atmosphere in Germany over the last 50 years (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The Turkish community in Germany is the largest Turkish diaspora, with half having gained German citizenship, making them an increasingly important part of the German electorate (German Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The presence of Turkish immigrants in Germany and their integration problems strongly influence relations between Turkey and Germany. Although many people from the Turkish community have faced problems integrating within the host society, others have become highly integrated, naturalised and hold crucial political and social positions in Germany. On the other hand, Germany is also the largest of Turkey's EU trading partners, with bilateral trade reaching 31,4 billion Euros in 2011 (Simsek, 2012).

Germany is the central actor in Turkey-EU relations, with Turkey-EU relations stagnating when Germany is against Turkey's EU accession and moving forward when the German government is supportive (Knaus and Christian Altfuldisch, 2013, p.1). This article focuses on the internal and external factors that influence Germany's policy concerning Turkey's EU membership bid. Firstly, it explains the theoretical framework and historical background of Germany's policies regarding Turkey's EU membership bid. Secondly, it analyses various factors influencing the German policy: the role of internal factors in Germany, external factors related to the EU, and external factors related to Turkey. The internal factors include, particularly, the integration problems of Turkish immigrants in Germany and the rise of Islamophobia in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Their influence on the German public opinion, which is one of the most sceptical among EU member states, regarding Turkey's membership, is analysed. Then, the perceptions of Germany's political elites and civil society towards Turkey's EU membership are discussed, based on the semi-structured, face-to-face, in-depth interviews conducted by the author with representatives of several politicians from different political parties in the German Federal Parliament in September 2012, most of whom are members of

the Committees on EU Affairs, Foreign Affairs and Internal Affairs. Additional interviews were conducted with representatives of several foundations and business organisations in Berlin and one German-Turkish business organisation in İstanbul. Finally, one interview was conducted in İstanbul with a German scholar of European politics. The interviews were analysed qualitatively. In terms of external factors related to the EU, the article focuses on how the crisis in the Eurozone and 'enlargement fatigue' in the EU have influenced German policy towards Turkey's EU membership. The other external factors relate to the economic and political developments in Turkey, particularly its higher economic growth rates in recent years, compared to many member states of the EU, a decline in the momentum of the reform process in Turkey, and the Kurdish issue. These have also influenced German policy towards Turkey. Finally, the article investigates whether the idea of 'privileged partnership', which was put forward by German Christian Democrats in 2005, as an alternative to full EU membership for Turkey, is still on the agenda of German politics and tries to evaluate both the internal and external factors that influence German policy towards Turkey's EU membership bid.

2. The theoretical framework and historical background of German policy towards Turkey's EU membership

A EU member state's policy towards a candidate country may change according to different international circumstances or when there is a shift in their governments (Müftüler Baç and McLaren, 2003, p. 23). The preferences of member states can be explained on the basis of rationalist and constructivist approaches. These different theoretical frameworks assume different logics of action which are the rationalist "logic of consequentiality" and the constructivist "logic of appropriateness" (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2002, pp. 508-512).

From a rationalist perspective, the member states' interests are crucially important. According to Baç and McLaren (2003, pp. 20-21), "member states with clients would like to see these clients come in". For example, Germany appeared to take Poland as its client. The enlargement preferences of the member states are influenced by expected costs and benefits from the enlargement (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2002, pp. 508-512).

According to the constructivist approach, the member states foreign policy is influenced by ideational and cultural factors. One of the most influential factors is whether the member states and candidates share a collective identity and common values or not. Member state governments may be influenced by both the national and European identities (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2002, pp. 513-515). Thus, the member state who thinks that they share the same values and norms with the candidate country in terms of its national identity or European identity is usually in favour of its accession to the EU. The German policy towards Turkey's EU membership bid can be explained both on the basis

of the rationalist approach and the constructivist one. Its scepticism towards its full membership can be explained by the constructivist approach while its being in favour of the further integration of Turkey to the EU can be explained by the rationalist approach.

Both domestic politics and external factors may be influential in determining German policy towards Turkey's EU membership bid. Turkey's relations with the EU have usually been closer when the German government had friendly relations with Turkey (Orendt, 2010). The Christian Democrats, who perceive Turkey's membership as a challenge for European identity, tend to be more sceptical (Bache, Stephen and Bulmer, 2011, pp. 547-548), which can be explained on constructivist basis. However, there are some exceptions. For example, Germany's first post-war Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, from the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), was in favour of Turkey's EC membership. Walter Hallstein, who was the President of the Commission and also a CDU member, stated that "Turkey is an integral part of Europe". He was President of the Commission when the Ankara Agreement was signed between Turkey and the European Community (EC) in 1963 (Mühlenhoff, 2009, p.16). Germany was a strong supporter of this Agreement, partly because the strength of the German economy made it necessary to recruit foreign workers for the German labour market. Germany gave significant financial assistance to Turkey within the framework of this agreement. During that period, German policies were formulated mostly by the government, while interest groups did not play an important role (Mayer, 2008). Thus, the economic concerns of the German government have influenced German policy towards Turkey's EU membership, which can be explained by the rationalist approach. When Turkey applied to the EC in 1987, however, Germany's response was cautious. In 1986, before the application of Turkey, Germany's President, Richard von Weizsacker, had stated that, while Turkey was entitled to perform such an application, it was too early for its entry. The Customs Union agreement (1996) between Turkey and the EU was supported by the Helmut Kohl government at a time when the German-Turkish economic relations were close. However, the Kohl government also frequently mentioned serious obstacles to Turkey's EU membership, such as democratic deficiencies and the Cyprus issue. Thus, again economic concerns were influential when Germany supported the Customs Union agreement between Turkey and the EU which can be explained by the rationalist approach. Meanwhile, Germany had still been sceptical about Turkey's EU membership in terms of having common values and norms which can be explained by the constructivist approach. After 1995, Germany turned its attention to the EU's Eastern enlargement. Meanwhile, Turkey, with its predominantly Muslim population was not considered a member of the European family, being rather perceived as a strategic partner (Szymanski, 2007, p. 5). Thus, again, this differentiation of the Eastern enlargement and Turkey can be explained by the

constructivist approach. To Germany's Christian Democrat parties, Turkey could not be integrated into the EU, given that Turkish immigrants living in EU member states already had difficulties integrating (Yilmaz, 2007, p. 299).

German policy towards Turkey's membership further changed between 1997 and 1999. Particularly while Kohl was Chancellor, the German policy was against offering membership. Thus, Germany opposed giving Turkey the candidacy status at the Luxembourg Summit of December 1997 (Orendt, 2010). Before the summit, the Kohl government had argued for offering Turkey a privileged treatment short of membership, while both the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens thought that Turkey could not join the EU because it could not fulfil the Copenhagen criteria. In 1998, Turkish Prime Minister Yilmaz accused Kohl of seeking to turn the EU into a *Christian club*. However, the Kohl government hesitated to give a clear *no* to Turkey's membership, as reflected in its proposal to re-invite Turkey to the European Conference in October 1998 after Turkey had declined to attend. The German policy changed again when the CDU-CSU (Christian Social Union) government was replaced by the SPD and Alliance 90 / the Greens coalition government under the leadership of Gerhard Schröder, who declared that Turkey should be treated on an equal footing with other candidates. The Schröder government focused on Turkey's need to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria (Szymanski, 2007). In a letter to Schröder, Bülent Ecevit, who was Prime Minister of Turkey at the time, acknowledged that Turkey would have to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria in order to start membership negotiations. While it held the EU Presidency in 1999, Germany tried to convince other sceptical members, such as France and Greece, to overcome their reluctance towards giving Turkey official candidacy status. At the June 1999 Cologne Summit at the end of the German Presidency, Schröder proposed that the Luxembourg decision regarding Turkey be changed (Bache et al., 2011).

Germany was an influential actor in helping Turkey to gain the official candidate status at the Helsinki Summit in December 1999, although some opposition German politicians, particularly Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU) and Gerd Müller (CSU), criticised this decision. They argued that it was wrong to give false hopes to Turkey about joining the EU when it had not yet fulfilled the Copenhagen criteria (Szymanski, 2007). However, Germany's former foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, argued that continuing with Turkey's accession process was in the interest of member states, especially Germany. First, he claimed that the membership prospect can lead to the implementation of crucial constitutional and legislative reforms in Turkey. Second, he noted Turkey's strategic importance to European security. Lastly, he stated that Turkey was an important economic partner of Germany and other member states, adding that both German industrialists and unions were in favour of Turkey's EU membership (Fischer, 2004, pp. 2-5). All these factors mentioned by Fischer show that, due to rationalist concerns, Germany has been in favour of continuing

Turkey's accession process while maintaining scepticism towards its full membership.

The first of the factors which have influenced Germany's policy towards Turkey's accession process has been the introduction of several reforms in Turkey, especially since 2000, including the abolition of the death penalty and improvements in human rights standards. Secondly, it was argued that Turkey's EU membership would stop the EU being seen as a *Christian club*, which might help overcome the integration problems of the significant Muslim minority in Germany. However, after the September 11 attacks, the immigration debate shifted from a cultural to a religious approach. That is, although Turkish immigrants had previously been seen as Turks, they started to be seen as Muslims after September 11 (Mudde, 2012, p. 19). The third factor was the reform of the German nationality law that introduced a new approach to getting German citizenship that supplemented the principle of *jus sanguinis* with *jus soli*. This new law led to an increase in the number of people from the Turkish community able to gain German citizenship, and thereby voting rights which influenced the German government's policy towards Turkey's EU accession process. In particular, the Schröder government emphasised the importance of following the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* concerning Turkey's EU membership prospects. In addition, after September 11, Turkey's role in European security returned to the fore as it was noted that Turkey could play an important role in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The Schröder government also pointed out that Turkey's membership benefited Germany economically. At the Copenhagen European Council in December 2002, it was decided that negotiations with Turkey should be started "without delay" if the European Council in December 2004 decided that Turkey could fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria. This decision was in accordance with the Franco-German agreement of December 5, 2002, which recommended that negotiations should start on July 1, 2005, if decided that Turkey could meet the Copenhagen criteria by the end of 2004. At the Brussels European Council Summit of December 2004, the Schröder government supported the start of negotiations with Turkey on October 3, 2005 (Szymanski, 2007, pp. 31-35). Thus, economic and security concerns were influential on Germany's policy when it supported the start of the accession negotiations between Turkey and the EU.

The SPD supported Turkey's membership on a rationalist basis. Widman (Interview, 2013) a DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) Professor at Istanbul Bilgi University, argues while the party's elites are pro-Turkey, local SPD politicians are sceptical about Turkey's EU membership. He noted Turkey's geostrategic position as a *bridge* between the West and the East, particularly as a bridge to areas of interest in terms of energy diversification, such as Central Asia and the Black Sea.

In his book, Schröder (2006, pp. 182-184) claimed that Turkey had a crucial role in EU politics. He argued that the main criticisms against Turkey's membership should have been made when Turkey applied to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1959, when it applied to be a member of the EC in 1987, or before it gained the official candidacy status in 1999. He also pointed out Turkey's geostrategic position and its possible contributions in terms of Europe's security, particularly energy security. He stressed the importance of close relations between Turkey and the EU positively influencing the relations between Europe and the Muslim world. He claimed that fears about a flood of immigrants from Turkey if it became a EU member were groundless because there would be a transition period concerning the free movement of people. He added that Europe needed immigration anyway in order to maintain its social system given the aging of populations in many EU member states. Thus, he emphasises the German policy rationalist concerns towards Turkey's EU membership.

When the Christian Democrats returned to power in Germany in 2005, with CDU leader, Angela Merkel, becoming Chancellor of Germany, the German policy moved against Turkey's full membership. The CDU and the CSU formed a coalition government with the SPD between November 2005 and October 2009. In October 2009, they established a new coalition government which included the CDU, CSU and the Free Democratic Party (FDP). The CDU party program states that Turkey must fulfil the Copenhagen criteria to gain EU membership, and that the EU's *absorption capacity* has to be taken into consideration. It also states that the CDU favours a "privileged partnership" rather than full membership (Mühlenhoff, 2009, p. 4). The CSU is totally against Turkey's accession. Both parties are influenced by the immigration issue with a tendency to link the integration problems of the Turkish community in Germany to Turkey's membership bid. Although the SPD and the Greens also perceive Turkey as culturally different (Mühlenhoff, 2009, pp. 11-14), they regard Turkey's membership as an asset rather than a burden in establishing a multicultural Europe.

In 2005, Merkel tried to include the term 'privileged partnership' in the negotiation framework between Turkey and the EU, but it was not accepted. Germany then followed the principle of '*pacta sunt servanda*', so Merkel did not block negotiations between Turkey and the EU like France did under the influence of her coalition partners. The FDP's position, which focuses on the potential economic benefits of Turkey's accession, is more positive than that of the CDU and CSU, although it is less supportive than the SPD. The coalition agreement did not reject membership for Turkey; however, it did not show clear support either, stressing instead the open-ended characteristic of the negotiations (Mühlenhoff, 2009, p. 3).

Overall, none of the German political parties want to exclude Turkey completely because of Germany's own economic, security and social interests which can be explained by the rationalist approach. At the same time, the CDU and CSU are more sceptical towards Turkey's membership to the EU especially with regard to its compatibility with the European culture and identity, which can be explained by the constructivist approach.

3. The factors influencing Germany's policy towards Turkey's EU membership

This section considers the role of internal factors in Germany, external factors related to the EU, and external factors related to Turkey which influence Germany's policy towards Turkey's membership bid. The influence of these factors on German public opinion, and the perceptions of German civil society and German political elites on Turkey's membership to the EU will be evaluated.

3.1. The role of internal factors

The internal factors under evaluation are the scepticism of the German public opinion regarding Turkey's membership, economic concerns and business interests of Germany about Turkey's EU membership bid, immigration issue and integration problems of the Turkish community in Germany.

3.1.1. German public opinion regarding Turkey's EU membership bid

Turkey is the least popular and the least wanted candidate country in the EU. The countries that most strongly opposed to further enlargement in general are Germany (71 percent opposed), France (69 percent) and Austria (67 percent) (European Commission 2014). As Saz (2011, p. 485) argues, the higher the number of Turkish immigrants in a member state, the higher the level of negative opinion about Turkish membership. According to Yılmaz (2007, p. 293), identity-based arguments against Turkey's EU membership are strongest in France and Germany, where public opposition has been much higher than the EU average. The integration problems of Germany's Turkish community and the rise of Islamophobia in Europe have influenced the German public opinion, making it the most sceptical among EU member states. A German newspaper poll showed that 60 percent of Germans remain firmly against Turkey's membership (Euronews, 2013). Barysch (2007, p. 4), argues that "issues of immigration and integration are a key ingredient of the debate about Turkey's membership to the EU in Germany".

Seufert (Interview, 2012), who is one of the interviewees and working as a senior associate at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, argued that nobody in the German public wants further enlargement because

they believe that enough German money is already going to Greece and Spain. Posch (Interview, 2012), also a senior associate at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, claimed that the German public opinion is also against membership of Greece, Bulgaria and Romania, while two diplomats from the German Federal Foreign Office (Interview, 2012), argued that the German public is not only sceptical about Turkey's membership bid but also about any further EU enlargement. The German public generally believes that Turkey's EU membership will cost Germany a lot of money. They also feel that Turkey has a different cultural and religious identity, because of the visibly non-integrated Turkish immigrants. In short, there has been increasing scepticism among the German public opinion about further enlargement, especially after the economic crisis in the EU. This has been further increased in Turkey's case by the integration problems of the Turkish community in Germany. Thus, not only cultural but also economic concerns have influenced the German public opinion's perceptions on Turkey's EU membership bid.

Polenz (Interview, 2012), a CDU member, noted that anything terrible that happens in Afghanistan or Pakistan is categorised under Islam. As he put it, "in the public awareness, they are linked to Islam and then they say Turks are also Muslims". He argued that, in order to overcome the German public scepticism about Turkey, "we have to overcome the problems of integration and the image of Turkish policy", which has deteriorated a bit in recent years. Hunko (Interview, 2012), from Die Linke, argued that there is a general perception that the EU has already enlarged a lot and that therefore Turkey's membership will be too much; he added that far-right tendencies that try to use the mood against Turkey's EU membership, are rising in Europe. While acknowledging that there is no far-right party capable to enter the German parliament, he noted that these tendencies are nevertheless partly evident within other parties, especially the CSU.

Nietan (Interview, 2012), from the SPD, argued that Germany's political elites use the negative public opinion about Turkish membership as an excuse. Because of the EU's economic crisis and stereotypes about Turkey, many people assume that, if Turkey becomes a member, Turkey could become the next Greece. He claimed that, while Germany's economic and political elites do not share these stereotypes, the overwhelming majority of average citizens do. As he noted, "nobody would say that openly but I think a lot of the problems that we have in getting support for Turkey's way into the EU have to do with the absolutely irrational Islamophobia". He argued that it was necessary to explain people that Turkey's recent economic growth rate has been one of the best in the world, "so there is no reason to fear, there is more reason to fear if we do not cooperate with Turkey". He added that, "if Turkey would go on that way in terms of growth, development in economy and society, Turkey would be a very supportive part of the European economy", rather than a burden. Nevertheless, due to several external factors related to the EU, particularly *enlargement fatigue*

and the Eurozone crisis, as well as internal factors, such as the rise of Islamophobia, far-right tendencies in Europe and the integration problems of Turkish immigrants, the German public opinion is mostly sceptical about further enlargements, especially the accession of Turkey.

3.1.2. The role of economic and business interests

In utilitarian terms, Turkey represents an important market potential for the German economy. Turkey's better economic growth rates in recent years compared to many EU member states and the close economic relations between Turkey and Germany have influenced German business organisations' approach towards Turkey's EU membership bid.

The CDU and CSU are usually supported by businesses, the self-employed and entrepreneurs, while the SPD has close links with the unions. The FDP's main support also comes from business people, while the Greens are usually supported by higher-income voters with an above-the average standard of education (Hartmann, 2005, p. 57). Because of business interests, the FDP may move towards a more supportive position towards Turkey, in accordance with Turkey's strong economic position. While the CDU and CSU are also influenced by economic interests, they are also supported by conservative voters so they do not depend as much on business groups as the FDP (Mühlenhoff, 2009, p. 14).

Widman (Interview, 2013) argued that Turkish and German businessmen are pushing the German Foreign Ministry, which is currently headed by an FDP foreign minister, to support Turkey's EU membership bid. He predicted that the high level of interactions between Turkey and Germany in business relations and education will have a positive influence on the longer term. The Turkish Chairman of TD-İHK, Suat Bakır (Interview, 2012), argued similarly that business organisations are very influential in German politics, noting that TD-İHK is working for the interests of both Germany and Turkey. Policies only change slightly when there is a change government in Germany. After 1999, when Turkey was given the official candidate status, he felt that the EU membership prospect accelerated Turkey-Germany relations and made Turkey an attractive place for investment. He argued that there is currently silence about the Turkey's membership prospects on both sides. He stated that his organisation was primarily lobbying for visa facilitation for Turkish businessmen, indicating that the Ministry of Interior was the main challenge rather than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in this respect. He added that TD-İHK's short-term goal is the abolition of the visa requirement for Turkish citizens, with Turkey's EU membership as a longer-term goal. Although negotiations between Turkey and the EU have reached an impasse, the interest of German investors in Turkey continues. If the EU sends a more positive signal to Turkey, this may accelerate further German investment in Turkey. In December 2013, the EU-Turkey

readmission agreement was signed and simultaneously, the EU started a visa liberalisation dialogue with Turkey. If Turkey fulfils the requirements mentioned in the roadmap prepared by the European Commission, it may lead to a visa liberalisation for Turkish citizens in three and a half years' time.

The German Chairman of TD-İHK, Marc Landou (Interview, 2012), argued that the organisation cooperates with business organisations in Turkey and chambers of commerce all over the country. He stated that their main partner is the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), although they also cooperate with the Turkish Industry and Businessmen Association (TÜSİAD). While the EU's share in Turkey's foreign trade has relatively decreased in recent years, Germany is still one of the biggest trade partners of Turkey. He defined Turkey "more or less as a global player", emphasizing that the EU membership prospect has played an important role in this. He reported that chamber members think that "Turkey should become a full member as soon as possible".

Strachwitz (Interview, 2012), the Director of the Maecenata Institute, argued that business organisations are much more influential in German politics than non-governmental organisations (NGOs). He put forward several reasons in favour of Turkey's EU membership. Firstly, regarding Turkey's geostrategic importance, he remarked that the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean area, where Turkey is situated, is the most important one for the EU to concentrate on. Secondly, he claimed that "Turkey should belong to Europe" rather than forming an alliance with its other neighbours. Thirdly, he stated that Turkey belongs to the EU's economic area. Fourthly, he touched on the common cultural history of Turkey and the EU. Lastly, he stressed the importance of improving the situation of ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey. Overall, it can be argued that German business organisations mostly support Turkey's accession because they think that it can further develop close economic relations between Turkey and Germany. Thus, their support for Turkey's EU membership can be explained in rationalist terms.

3.1.3. The role of immigration and the integration of the Turkish community in Germany

In addition to its effect on the German public opinion regarding Turkey's membership bid, the presence of the Turkish community in Germany and its integration problems have influenced the perceptions of both German civil society and political elites. As Stelzenmüller (2007, pp.105-106) argues, the German debate on Turkey's membership to the EU is closely linked to Turkish immigrants and German identity. It is claimed that integrating Turkish immigrants is more challenging than other immigrant groups because they are the largest group and due to the many cultural and religious differences in the host society (Kaiser Pehlivanoglu, 2002, p. 55). Widman (Interview, 2013)

stated that the integration of immigrants in Germany is closely linked to Turkey's EU membership prospects. Turkish immigrants used to be referred to as *guest-workers*. However, especially after September 11, they have been usually referred to as Muslims.

Seufert (Interview, 2012) argued that immigration is always on the agenda of Turkey-Germany relations. He stated that Germans do not discuss Turkey in Germany, but rather Turkish immigrants in Germany. He also noted that "we cannot overcome the question of immigration till we redefine German society". However, he acknowledged that there had been changes in the Germans' perceptions regarding Turkey in the last five-six years due to several factors, such as Turkey's active participation in the Frankfurt book fair and İstanbul's selection as European Capital of Culture in 2010, which transformed Turkey's image from a problem country to a country of culture. However, he claimed that Turkey had recently reverted to its image as a problem country. Posch (Interview, 2012) argued that immigration was really shaping the whole debate on the Turkey-EU relations.

Reichenbach (Interview, 2012), from the SPD, argued that the non-integration of Turkish immigrants was still being used by conservatives to gain votes. However, some German Christian Democrats disagree with the official CDU position on Turkey. For example, Polenz, Chairman of the German Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, who wrote a book called *Better for Both: Turkey Belongs to the EU*. While accepting that his opinion might be a minority in his party, he refers to other prominent CDU figures, such as the former Defence Minister, Volker Rühle, and the former President of the German Parliament, Rita Süßmuth (Widman, 2012, p. 4). Polenz (Interview, 2012) also stated that "in Germany Turkey is still evaluated by Turkish immigrants and their life style". On the other hand, integrated immigrants are seen as Germans.

Some interviewees reported that educated German Turks have recently tended to go back to Turkey. Nietan (Interview, 2012) suggested that Germany should take a step towards visa liberalisation. He also pointed out that Germany suffers from a brain drain, with more people of Turkish origin leaving in recent years than have come to Germany. Taşkıran (Interview, 2012), a member of the German-Turkish Forum in the CDU, stated that the reason for this recent trend resides not only in the recent higher economic growth rates in Turkey, but also in the non-acceptance of Turkish immigrants in Germany.

Thus, the immigration issue is one of the main internal factors influencing the German public opinion and political debate, particularly for the Christian Democrat parties, about Turkey's membership bid. Most of the interviewees emphasised the effect of the immigration issue and integration problems of Turkish immigrants on Turkey-Germany relations and on German policies regarding Turkey and its EU membership.

3.2. External factors

External developments in global politics have also affected Germany's policies regarding Turkey's EU membership bid. The following section analyses the effect of external factors related to the EU and political and economic developments in Turkey on the German policy towards Turkey's membership bid.

3.2.1. External factors related to the EU: *enlargement fatigue* and the Eurozone crisis

The main EU-related external factor is the *enlargement fatigue* following the EU's Eastern enlargement and recent crisis in the Eurozone. Several of the interviewees emphasised that the EU has suffered from *enlargement fatigue* and wishes to focus on its internal problems rather than further enlargement, especially given the financial crisis in the Eurozone after 2008.

Boehnke (Interview, 2012), Head of the Berlin Office of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), argued that, at the moment, "Turkey's membership to the EU is mission impossible". He stated that the EU's focus was on the Eurozone crisis rather than foreign policy issues. Widman (Interview, 2013) and Polenz (Interview, 2012) agreed that there is currently a focus on the Eurozone crisis, with nobody talking about further enlargement, so the time is not right for Turkey to become a EU member. Hunko (Interview, 2012) stated that he is in favour of Turkey's integration within the EU. He thinks that the problem is on both the Turkish and the EU side. On the EU side, the main problem is the economic crisis. In short, most of the interviewees stressed the issue of EU *enlargement fatigue* and EU's increasing focus on internal affairs, especially after the economic crisis, as negative external factors influencing the German policy towards Turkey's EU membership bid.

3.2.2. The challenges in Turkey-EU relations

According to the interviewees, one of the significant factors affecting the German policy towards Turkey's EU membership bid is Turkey's geostrategic regional importance, especially after September 11 and the Arab Spring.

Sarrazin (Interview, 2012), from the Greens, claimed that the end of the Turkey-EU relations would be really expensive for both Turkey and the EU: a *lose-lose* situation. He advised that Germany could make a difference by changing its attitude towards Turkey. He stated that they both needed each other in order to reach their own strategic aims. Without any EU membership prospects, Turkey would not be a strong regional power. However, he doubted that either Turkey or the EU were aware of their mutual necessity. He suggested that Turkey should implement the Additional Protocol and make greater efforts to solve the Cyprus issue.

Kahrs (Interview, 2012), from the SPD, argued in favour of Turkey's membership because of the mutual benefits for Turkey and Germany. Reichenbach (Interview, 2012) claimed that the cooperation with Turkey needs to improve at the legal, police and organised crime levels before membership happens. He saw the Positive Agenda of the Commission, introduced in 2012, just as a temporary solution. The two diplomats from the German Federal Foreign Office (Interview, 2012) viewed the Positive Agenda not as an alternative to membership but rather as a way to continue relations because the negotiations had stalled. Both stated that Turkey and Germany already have close relations that could be deepened if Turkey gained EU membership. Boehnke (Interview, 2012) saw the Positive Agenda as a step forward, both for Turkey and the EU, but added that Turkey has to think where the Positive Agenda leads to. He claimed that Turkey and the EU needed to reset their relationship, adding that something new outside the membership process needed to be created, such as a "strategic dialogue on foreign and security policy". He noted that the German Foreign Minister supports Turkey's membership bid, but added that the coalition government had declared that the question of Turkey's membership was not an issue for the government until after the next elections in 2013. Regarding the Cyprus issue, he claimed that many German politicians now regretted having accepted Cyprus as a EU member state before solving the Cyprus issue.

Thus, the interviewees mostly view the Positive Agenda between the Commission and Turkey favourably, although they do not see it as an alternative to membership negotiation process, but rather as a complementary way of gradually increasing cooperation between Turkey and the EU. On the other hand, the Cyprus issue was frequently mentioned by the interviewees as one of the main challenges for Turkey's accession process to the EU.

3.2.3. The compatibility between Turkey and European identity

Another crucial factor influencing the German policy towards Turkey's membership bid is whether Turkey is perceived as a part of European identity or not. Christian Democrats usually define the European identity culturally; thus, they usually have a more exclusivist approach, while Social Democrats, Liberals and Greens usually define it on the basis of values and therefore they usually argue that if Turkey fulfils the Copenhagen criteria, it may become a member of the EU.

Polenz (Interview, 2012) defined European identity in relation to the Greek heritage, Roman law, religion (especially Christianity), Enlightenment ideas and the French Revolution. In terms of compatibility between Turkish and European identity, he stated that "in history, the Ottoman Empire functioned as someone different from us ... even in the relationship between Germany and France, France functioned as something different. Therefore, I do not see any reason why we

should not also overcome this perception that Turkey is different". He added that including Turkey would send a strong message that the EU does not want a *clash of civilisations*. Although Polenz is from the Christian Democrats group, he is in favour of Turkey's accession to the EU, if it fulfils the criteria.

Kahrs (Interview, 2012) emphasised the position of Turkey as a *bridge* between the EU and the Muslim world and the Middle East. He believes that Turkish people have the impression that the EU does not want them and that the EU is a *Christian club*. He defined European identity on the basis of values, noting that, in the case of Turkey's membership, there is little room for compromise in the fields of minority rights, women rights and freedom of the media. Reichenbach (Interview, 2012) claimed that the doubts as to whether Turkey belongs in the European house or not has led Turkey to orient itself more towards its Eastern and Southern neighbours. Nietan (Interview, 2012) defined European identity as a European umbrella under which different cultures and religions can live together. He claimed that it is possible to have a Turkish or Muslim identity in a bigger Europe.

Hunko (Interview, 2012) warned that "there is a growing conservative right wing mood in Europe and a lot of parties try to direct this mood against Turkey's accession". Boehnke (Interview, 2012) claimed that the numbers opposing Turkish EU membership on the basis of cultural and religious arguments have been decreasing because it is beginning to be understood that the Turkish way of Islam is a lot more moderate than the rest of the Muslim world.

In short, the Social Democrats, Greens, Die Linke and Liberals, who have a more value-based approach towards European identity, mostly reject excluding Turkey on the basis of culture, religion or European identity. On the other hand, Christian Democrats are mostly more sceptical about Turkey's compatibility with the European identity, although there are few exceptions.

3.2.4 External factors related to Turkey: the role of political and economic developments in Turkey

This section analyses the effect of political and economic developments in Turkey on German attitude towards Turkey's membership bid. Most of the interviewees acknowledged Turkey's faster economic growth rates in recent years compared to many EU member states. Widmann (Interview, 2013) claimed that Turkey's economic strength has made it more attractive in recent years. The image of Turkey as Europe's poor backyard is changing as it becomes more attractive for business and economic elites. The two diplomats from the German Federal Foreign Office (Interview, 2012) stated that, especially after the economic crisis in the EU, the Turkish market has become more important for Germany. Sarrazin (Interview, 2012) noted Turkey's economic success and its higher credibility in attracting foreign direct investment. He suggested that the situation can improve further if Turkey becomes a EU

member. However, he was sceptical about the sustainability of this economic success. Kahrs (Interview, 2012) argued that the growing Turkish economy has made many Turkish people start to think that they do not even need to be a EU member because Turkey is already a regional power. However, he criticised this over-confidence and stated that Turkey or Germany mean nothing alone. He suggested that the combination of the dynamism of a young Turkish population and Turkish entrepreneurship, on the one hand, and the experience and knowledge of Germany and its social security system on the other, could be unbeatable in the world market. He noted that Germany tried to support Turkey's route into the EU, at least until Merkel took power. Polenz (Interview, 2012) claimed that there was a perception that "Turkey's will to join EU has decreased".

Regarding challenges, the Kurdish issue was mentioned frequently by the interviewees, as one of the main blocks to Turkey's accession. Boehnke (Interview, 2012) mentioned the Kurdish issue and Syria conflict as the main challenges to sustaining Turkey's recent economic success. Posch (Interview, 2012) predicted that solving the Kurdish issue will stimulate the economic boom in Turkey. However, if not solved, it will be hard for Turkey to enter the EU. He added that Turkey also has to focus on the Syrian crisis. The two diplomats from the German Federal Foreign Office (Interview, 2012) argued that the main challenges for Turkey's membership are the adoption of the EU *acquis*, the Kurdish issue, human rights and the Additional Protocol implementation.

In addition to the Kurdish issue, the interviewees considered that the lack of freedom of the media and prosecution of journalists hindered Turkey's accession. Polenz (Interview, 2012) criticised Turkey for the prosecution of journalists. Sarrazin (Interview, 2012) also criticised the prosecution of journalists in Turkey, warning that this made it more difficult for left and liberal political groups in Germany to argue in favour of Turkey's accession. Reichenbach (Interview, 2012) criticised various problems concerning human rights, freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Hunko (Interview, 2012) also criticised the human rights situation in Turkey, mentioning that some journalists were in prison, and that the Additional Protocol has not yet been implemented by Turkey. However, he also noted the lively civil society in Turkey, particularly in İstanbul which reflects the influence of the Europeanisation process on Turkey.

Nietan (Interview, 2012) criticised Turkey's political culture, which is intolerant of opposition. He claimed that, for now, there is no signal from the EU that they really want Turkey, so he suggested that new initiatives were necessary to revigorate negotiations between Turkey and the EU. The first step should be that key member states like Germany and France, make clear that it is in their own interests to play their part to create this new dynamism. He does not consider the *Positive Agenda* to be a substitute for the negotiation process, although he

acknowledged that it might be a way to create a more positive dynamism, which could then be transformed from the *Positive Agenda* into a negotiation process. He claimed that if the EU provided positive signals, Turkish people could see that they are welcomed in the EU. Thus, those who are in favour of reforms in Turkey will be encouraged to push for further reforms. In relation to this, he noted the growth of Turkish civil society, especially in major cities.

Overall, most of the interviewees saw Turkey's comparatively high economic growth rates in recent years as a potentially positive factor for Turkey-EU relations, although some were sceptical about the sustainability of this economic success. They emphasised the mutual interdependence of Turkey and Germany in economic, social and cultural terms. Some of them noted the geostrategic importance of Turkey, including its role as a *bridge* between the EU and the Middle East, as a positive factor for Turkey-EU relations. Some also noted approvingly of the increasing activism in Turkish civil society, especially in the major cities. On the other hand, most saw the Kurdish issue and the restrictions on the freedom of the media as the main challenges blocking Turkey's membership which also weaken the position of German supporters of Turkey's membership.

4. Privileged partnership: neither with nor without Turkey?

The Christian Democrats' concept of *privileged partnership* has been a tool to respond to both intra-party and domestic pressures. This concept was first introduced by Mathias Wissman, Chairman of the German Parliament's EU Affairs Committee and Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg, a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, later Germany's economy minister and, after that, defence minister. For them, it refers to Turkey's stronger integration into the single market and intensified cooperation in the field of CFSP. However, Turkey rejected the idea of *privileged partnership* from the outset. When Merkel visited Ankara in February 2004 as opposition leader, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan rejected this idea. In 2006, a working paper by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which is affiliated with the CDU, recommended that "the political elite at the national or EU level should no longer use the concept of privileged partnership" because Turkey totally rejects it. Nevertheless, the term *privileged partnership* was still mentioned in the party programs of the CDU and CSU. The 2007 party program of the CDU stated that "not only the fulfilment of the accession criteria is a condition for the admission of new members, but also the absorption capacity of the EU itself. We believe that the privileged partnership of the EU and Turkey is the right solution". In the party program of the CSU, which was approved in 2007, the rejection of Turkish membership was connected with a cultural perspective. Both parties also used the term *privileged partnership* in their manifestos for the European Parliament (EP) elections in 2009. The CDU's general party convention in November 2011, in Leipzig,

confirmed the prominence of this concept, making it part of the general resolution of the party's EU policies. However, it is not the position of the federal government due to the influence of its coalition partners. This term is used as a formula to overcome inner-party conflicts. It is also used to get a higher level of support from the more conservative Christian voters (Widmann, 2012, pp. 5-8).

Taşkıran (Interview, 2012) argued that the *privileged partnership* is mostly preferred among CDU politicians. However, he added that a small but growing number of CDU politicians, like Polenz, supported Turkey's membership bid. He recalled that the German-Turkish Forum in the CDU reminded CDU members that its policy may be perceived as discriminatory by Turkey. However, alienating Turkey, as a *bridge* between the West and the Muslim world, is not in the interest of Europeans or the Muslim world. He claimed that Turkish EU membership is beneficial for the whole Europe, not just Germany.

Not only Liberals, who have a market-oriented approach, but also Christian Democrats have started to understand that it is hard to go on with the existing approach towards Turkey, particularly with the term *privileged partnership*. In March 2010, at a press conference in Ankara, after a meeting with her Turkish counterpart, Merkel stated that "now, I have understood that privileged partnership does not have a favourite appeal at all here" (Widmann, 2012). Polenz (Interview, 2012) argued that "my party [the CDU] is not using this label very much anymore; even those who are not in favour of Turkey's EU membership have understood that privileged partnership is perceived in Turkey in a way that is not positive". He added that CDU members want to have good and friendly relations with Turkey. Therefore, "they do not want to insult Turkey by using this privileged partnership".

Thus, the term *privileged partnership* is less used among the Christian Democrats. Instead, new alternatives have been sought for Turkey, such as "European Economic Area Plus" or "gradual membership" (Szymanski, 2007). Philipp Missfelder, CDU Foreign Affairs spokesman in the German Parliament, declared in an interview in September 2011 that, "I believe that we need a thinking process what we can offer Turkey beyond a privileged partnership in order not to lose a country as a partner" (Widmann, 2012). In an article on Turkey-EU relations for EurActiv's German webpage, CDU politician Elmar Brok, a member of the European Peoples Party (EPP) at the EP and Chairman of the Christian Democrats Federal Expert Committee on Foreign, European and Security Policies, gave up using the term *privileged partnership* in November 2011. To him, negotiations should focus on the Turkish membership in the European Economic Area (EEA), commenting that this could include everything from the single market to security policies (Widmann, 2012). However, if Turkey enters the EEA, it will still be considered as in a kind of *privileged*

partnership because, again, Turkey will not be part in the decision-making process in the EU institutions.

During the interviews, Sarrazin (Interview, 2012) stated that he has not heard about *privileged partnership* for a long time, while Nietan (Interview, 2012) argued that there is no public debate about *privileged partnership*, which refers to “anything but membership” at the moment. Hunko (Interview, 2012) also felt that *privileged partnership* has not been an issue in the last two years. He thinks that *privileged partnership* is a step back. This is a compromise inside the government. Only Reichenbach (Interview, 2012) claimed that *privileged partnership* is still on the agenda, although he accepts that it is not very realistic.

Spatz (Interview, 2012) argued that both Turkey and the EU prefer to maintain close relations. He claimed that Turkey may better perform its *bridge building* function between Europe and Middle East by having very close relations with the EU rather than being a full member. Other interviewees also claimed that Turkey's interest in EU membership is also decreasing so that, maybe, one day it may prefer a different type of relationship with the EU, rather than full membership.

Posch (Interview, 2012) argued that there is already a *privileged partnership* because relations are very close. He added that it is a “domestic German debate. It has nothing to do with Turkey and the EU; it has everything to do with Turks in Germany”. As he commented, Turkey's EU membership is usually used as a domestic policy issue in Germany rather than a foreign policy one. Seufert (Interview, 2012) claimed that the concept of *privileged partnership* does not have any content because Turkey is already a privileged partner; the two diplomats from the German Federal Foreign Office (Interview, 2012) also argued similarly. They claimed that maybe one day, Turkey could prefer something close to this option instead of full membership.

High-level visits between Turkey and Germany have taken place frequently in recent years. Merkel visited Turkey in March 2010 and February 2012, while Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan (currently President of Turkey) visited Berlin in October 2010, February 2011, November 2011 and October 2012. Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu (currently Turkish Prime Minister) visited Germany in March 2010 and December 2011, while former German Foreign Minister Westerwelle visited Turkey in January 2010, July 2010, July 2011, October 2011, December 2011 and May 2012. Westerwelle, in his speech in Istanbul in May 2012 at the Bertelsmann Foundation's Kornberg Talks, suggested closer German-Turkish ties through a *strategic dialogue*, chaired by the Foreign Ministers and the establishment of a *Turkish-German Youth Bridge* (Widmann, 2012). This was launched in late November 2012 by Davutoğlu and Westerwelle. In his speech at the opening of the new Turkish Embassy in Berlin, attended by Erdoğan, Westerwelle (2012) stated that “we have a shared interest in drawing the EU and Turkey closer together” (Simsek, 2012). Erdoğan warned

that the EU would lose Turkey if it did not accept Turkey as a member by 2023 (Reuters, 2012).

During her most recent visit to Turkey in February 2013, and although still sceptical about full membership, Merkel argued that she is in favour of opening a new chapter to accelerate the slow negotiation process between Turkey and the EU (Euronews, 2013). As she put it, “I agreed on open-ended talks over Turkish membership of the EU, although I am sceptical” (Euronews, 2013). Her attitude slightly changed negatively about opening of a new chapter in the ongoing negotiation process after the Gezi Park protests (June 2013) and the harsh reactions of the Turkish police forces towards the protesters. In June 2013, Germany persuaded the EU European Council Summit to delay opening the chapter on regional policy until after September 2013 even though Turkey has fulfilled most of the criteria. This chapter could be opened in November 2013.

Seufert (Interview, 2012) argued that the Schröder government tried to cope with the internal resistance against Turkey’s membership, whereas Merkel has not prevented Turkey’s membership although she does not fight against internal challenges. He predicted the accession process may accelerate with the new German government that will come to power after the 2013 elections. Then, a new coalition government was established under the leadership of Merkel with the SPD. There have not been any crucial changes in German policy towards Turkey’s EU membership bid.

Overall, the term *privileged partnership* is an element of the defensive tactics of Christian Democrats to maintain the support of more conservative groups within the party and among the electorate (Widmann, 2012). In recent years, the term *privileged partnership* has been rarely used by the German political elites, even the Christian Democrats. However, despite this positive tendency, the Christian Democrats, who are the most important partner in the coalition government, still prefer maintaining close relations with Turkey without granting full EU membership. Thus, they try to formulate the German policy towards Turkey’s membership in a new way that avoids using the term *privileged partnership*.

5. Conclusion

Germany’s policies towards Turkey’s EU membership bid have been influenced by internal factors in Germany, including economic concerns, sceptical German public opinion about Turkey’s membership, immigration issues and the integration problems of Germany’s Turkish community. In addition, it has been influenced by external factors related to the EU, especially the *enlargement fatigue* following the last Eastern enlargement, the Eurozone crisis, and doubts about the compatibility between Turkey and the European identity. Finally, external factors related to Turkey, particularly its political and

economic development and the momentum of the reform process, have affected Germany's policies regarding Turkey's EU accession process.

Although Turkey has a growing importance for Germany and the EU, many European leaders have not yet been convinced regarding Turkey's full membership (Simsek, 2012). The discussions on Turkey's membership are closely related to discussions on German identity and the integration problems of the Turkish community. As Kaya (2009) argues, the perceptions on Turkey have been constructed in Germany through Turkish immigrants and discussions on their integration problems. The debate on the EU Turkish membership has also been linked with the debate on the German identity in the 21st century.

There was a federal parliament election in Germany in September 2013. As Widmann (2013) claimed, any change would not be very dramatic, but it would influence the tone. As Hunko (2012) predicted, another coalition emerged between the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, which brought no crucial changes with regard to the German policy towards Turkey.

The concept of *privileged partnership* has been rarely used by German politicians in recent years once it was understood that it is not accepted as an alternative to full membership by Turkey. However, most of the Christian Democrats, in particular, are still against full membership. One of the main reasons is that they do not believe that European and Turkish identity are compatible with each other. Secondly, because of the high level of scepticism in the German public opinion towards Turkey's EU membership, they find it risky to change their policy for that might lead to losing some votes. They have tried to reformulate their policy without changing their main principles, so that it could offer more than *privileged partnership* but less than full membership.

With the crisis in the Eurozone, there has been an increase in discussions about a *multi-speed Europe*. It has been argued that variable integration levels on different issues like the security or immigration policy may enable Turkey to join an *outer circle* that reduces the burden for the EU (Göksel, 2012, p. 3). Thus, the economic and political developments in the EU as well as its future institutional structure will also influence the German policy towards Turkey.

In conclusion, neither Turkey nor Germany, neither Turkey nor the EU want to lose each other. However, neither the EU nor particularly the German government is ready to accept Turkey as a full EU member. While the term *privileged partnership* has been rarely used by German politicians in recent years, new options for Turkey as a member of the EEA or as a member of an *outer circle* of a *multi-speed Europe* have begun to be discussed. The crisis in the Eurozone may lead to a reconstruction of the EU's institutional structure for there is a necessity to move towards a more federal direction among the Eurozone countries, while non-Eurozone countries, particularly the UK, are sceptical about a federal EU. The British Prime Minister David Cameron promised that, if reflected, he would renegotiate the UK membership terms and

hold a referendum on whether the UK should stay or leave the EU (Glencross 2013, p. 17). How these discussions turn out will then affect the German policy regarding Turkey's EU membership and Turkey's position vis-à-vis the EU.

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