Abstract: There is a common tendency to see European Union (EU)-Turkey relationships from an external democracy promotion framework. From a rationalist perspective, academics focus on the conditional nature of the accession negotiations. As a result, democratic reforms made by Turkey are explained with a process in which Turkey experiences a democratic transformation forced by EU-Turkey relations through political conditionality strategy. This paper aims to test how accurate these arguments are. For this aim, depending on the theories on conditionality, under what conditions this strategy might be expected to work will be evaluated. Regarding this, it will be suggested that a credible conditionality strategy that offers a clear membership prospect and favourable domestic conditions are necessary for the strategy to work. Based on this evaluation, two periods Turkey has experienced are believed to represent different levels of external pressure depending on the effectiveness of conditionality strategy. The first period covers the years between 1999, when Turkey was given a candidacy status, and 2005, when the accession negotiations began. The second will cover the period since 2005. Evaluating the two periods in the light of the prerequisites suggested by conditionality theories, it will be suggested that the second period represents a significantly lower level of external pressure. Therefore, quality and quantity of the reforms made in two periods are supposed to differ significantly. This paper will argue that a comparison of the two periods provides two important findings. Firstly, in terms of the quantity of political reforms actually made, there is a considerable difference between the two periods, which may be taken to support conditionality arguments. Secondly, however, the quality of reforms made such as in the areas of civil-military relations, freedom of expression and reform attempts regarding minority rights to solve Kurdish issue during the latter period can be claimed to be far from insignificant. Therefore, even if these cases do not completely invalidate conditionality arguments, they raise important questions on their explanatory power. Hence, it can be claimed that conditionality arguments cannot fully explain recent reform process in Turkey. Thus, alternative approaches to rationalist perspectives deserve more attention than they currently receive in studies of Europeanisation of candidate countries.

Keywords: Democratisation; Europeanisation; Conditionality; Turkey; EU.

I. INTRODUCTION

Turkey has recently achieved significant political reforms that have been widely acknowledged. These domestic changes have been considered as a part of Turkey’s Europeanisation process. Although there are different perspectives to Europeanisation such as bottom-up or top-down [1], when it comes to the case of candidate countries, there is a common tendency to see it as a one way process in which the candidates are shaped by the EU as a result of the conditional character of the game which puts the EU in the role of a referee as well as one of the players [2]. Therefore, in order to emphasize this one way character, Wallace calls the process EU-isation [3].

From this perspective, the EU is seen as a normative power exporting its norms to non-member states through political conditionality strategy [4]. As a result, political reforms made by candidate countries are widely seen to be realised as a result of this conditionality strategy [5]. From this rationalist perspective although other mechanisms such as socialisation are recognised, their roles are not seen as significant as conditionality strategy since it is claimed to be the only mechanism that proved effective [6]. Within this mechanism, the EU demands adaptation of its norms and rules from target states and in return, offers them material benefits such as economic and technical assistance and ultimately membership [7]. The compliance will be rewarded and recalcitrance will be punished [8]. However, the strategy mainly works through rewards rather than punishment [9]. The candidates, in response, weigh the costs of adaptation and expected benefits from membership [10]. Thus, when the expected benefits are higher than the costs, compliance can be expected [11].

Although the conditionality strategy proved successful in many examples, it is also widely accepted that although the same pressures are employed on all the candidates, their responses to European pressure have varied significantly and there have always been reluctant democratizers [12]. Need for possible answers to this variation led academics to question under what conditions the conditionality strategy can be expected to work. Thus, they offered some pre-requisites for conditionality strategy to be effective. Hence, the next part of this paper will outline the conditions for an effective political conditionality strategy in order to test them in the suggested two periods.
II. CONDITIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE CONDITIONALITY STRATEGY

In search of solving the puzzle posed by varied responses by candidate governments to the same external pressure applied by the EU through conditionality strategy, theories have been constructed to explain under what conditions conditionality strategy can be effective. According to these theories, three conditions for conditionality to be successful have been proposed: Sizeable rewards, credibility and favorable domestic conditions.

Taking the cost-benefit calculations of target governments as a base, the first pre-requisite for an effective conditionality strategy is suggested as the presence of sizable carrots as prizes of compliance. It can be suggested that the EU offers financial aid, institutional ties and technical assistance as well as membership as rewards to lure the candidates to comply with its political conditions that require adoption of democratic principles and acts. However, as it is assumed that democratic reforms demanded by the EU mean high political costs for governments of the candidates [13], it is suggested that such high costs can only be balanced by membership prospective as the ultimate incentive [14].

A second condition for an effective conditionality is suggested to be “credibility” in support of the first prerequisite. It is claimed that without credibility transformative power of conditionality is rather low [15]. A review of the literature suggests that credibility of conditionality depends on three qualities. First of all, there must be a clear link between membership and conditions. In other words, candidate countries must know that fulfillment of conditions will result in membership. Likewise, they must also know that otherwise they will not join the Union [16]. Secondly, it is claimed that for conditionality to be credible, fulfillment of the conditions must be judged according to objective criteria. This means that, acceptance of new members should be allowed according to their performances in complying with the EU criteria. Any discrimination either positive or negative towards member states shall have a negative effect on the effectiveness of the conditionality [17]. Finally, in order to support this objectivity it is also suggested that demands of the EU should also be clearly defined, which can be suggested as a third requisite for a credible conditionality. This requires technicality, which means clearly defined standards by which the performance of the candidate country can be judged objectively. This will also help taking enlargement decisions objectively. Thus, a relationship between the EU and the candidate countries can be grounded on a reciprocal perception of reliability, which makes the conditionality more credible [18].

In addition to credibility and sizeable rewards, a final condition suggested for an effective EU conditionality is suggested that domestic conditions should also be favorable [19]. From this perspective, favorable conditions are understood as the costs being lower than the expected benefits of adaptation in the eyes of governing elites [20]. Thus, when the costs are seen too high as in the most commonly given example of Cyprus, even membership incentive can fail [21]. However, as it is mainly argued in this paper, although domestic conditions are suggested as one of the three main pre-requisites for an effective conditionality strategy, very little attention is given to explain this factor. Thus, it is generally used as a complementary factor in these theories to explain the failure of the strategy despite the existence of the first two conditions. Hence, it can be claimed that this factor is somehow seen as a passive factor only emerges as a reaction to external actions.

III. TESTING THE HYPOTHESES ON CONDITIONALITY STRATEGY IN THE TWO PERIODS OF TURKEY’S JOURNEY TOWARDS ACCESSION

In this part of the paper, the hypotheses made by conditionality theorists outlined before will be tested in two periods. The first period starts with Turkey’s acceptance as a candidate in 1999 and ends with the beginning of accession negotiations in 2005. It is widely accepted that the first period provides one of the best examples of how effective conditionality can be [22]. It is also commonly argued that providing Turkey with a clear membership prospect at Helsinki Summit spurred Turkey to realize long due reforms demanded by the EU. Regarding this many examples of reforms were suggested as results of conditionality strategy such as Human right reforms [23], abolition of death penalty [24] and rapid reform movements under Justice and Development Party [25]. Considering the high effectiveness of conditionality strategy these high cost reforms made by Turkey were not seen surprising from rationalist perspectives.

Although it was pointed out that Turkey needs to do more reforms in political area, the progress made by Turkey was seen enough by the EU and accession negotiations were started.

The beginning of the second period meant a lower level of external pressure since the EU’s decision to start the negotiations implicitly meant that Turkey met the political criteria. Therefore, although some political reform demands still existed, the link between political criteria and membership was less obvious meaning a less effective conditionality strategy. Another important factor weakening the link between membership and conditions is, as Aydın and Esen suggest, the fact that the membership prospect became more blurred after 2005 as a result of the emphasis on the open endedness of the negotiations [26]. This emphasis was made with the request of some member states such as Germany, France and Austria as a result of their opposition to full membership of Turkey as they later announced on various occasions [27]. Moreover, proposals by some of these countries to offer Turkey an alternative privileged partnership and their decisions to hold a referendum regarding possible accession of Turkey emerge as factors that shade doubts over membership prospect of Turkey. Thus, as it is widely acknowledged, objections to Turkey’s possible membership emerge as another factor blurring the membership.
prospect of Turkey which diminishes the credibility of conditionality strategy with Turkey [28].

In addition to the broken link between political conditions and membership, a second factor reducing the effectiveness of conditionality strategy is the subjectivity of these criteria. As Grabbe emphasizes, Copenhagen criteria are defined very broadly, thus open to different interpretations. As a result, what actions are necessary to comply with them change according to decisions taken in every EU summit. Therefore, this makes membership a moving target for candidate countries [29]. Moreover, when the EU granted Turkey a candidacy status in 2004, it was suggested that Turkey had a lot to do to fulfill the political conditions. However, what steps should be taken to do so were not clarified and remained ambiguous. Consequently, this ambiguity can be suggested to cause member countries to focus on their own particular interests during accession negotiations. In Turkish case, this led to pressures within the EU to connect Turkey’s possible membership with political issues such as Armenian, Cyprus or Aegean problems [30]. Thus, as Aydin and Esen propose, it is not clear whether conditions will only be restricted with technical conditions or they will include such political conditions [31]. Hence, this haziness emerges as a second factor that reduces the credibility of the EU’s conditionality strategy in Turkish Case.

A third obstacle derives from the fact that Copenhagen criteria include conditions that are out of candidates’ power, such as absorption capacity of the Union. Due to Turkey’s characteristics such as a large population, a low income level and a high unemployment rate, worries are voiced about a potential Turkish membership [32]. Thus, Turkish membership arises as a difficult enlargement decision for the EU in terms of its absorption capacity, which increases the doubts over Turkey’s membership prospect.

A final factor affecting the credibility of conditionality can be suggested as prejudices both within Turkey and among the EU member states. On the one hand, it is suggested that Turkey is being ‘other’ed by the members seeing it as an Islamic country. Islamic population of Turkey is often highlighted during public discussions in some member states especially with large Turkish communities such as Germany, Austria, Denmark or France [33]. As a result, as Jung claims, Turkey is being excluded from European map in minds of most Europeans [34]. On the other hand, there are also prejudices in Turkish public. One of the most striking ones can be proposed as the belief that the EU does not treat Turkey as the other candidates. Actions taken by the EU supported this argument from time to time, too. For example, the EU’s decision to accept Greek Cypriot side as Cyprus even though they rejected and Turkish side accepted the Annan plan suggested by the UN was perceived as a proof of the EU’s double standards [35]. Moreover, demands on topics such as minority rights and Kurdish issue empower the euro-skeptick arguments that voice worries about Turkey’s national integrity and the belief that Turkey will never be accepted as a member [36]. Therefore, it can be claimed that prejudices within both sides emerge as another important factor reducing the credibility of conditionality strategy.

In the light of these conditions it can be suggest that this period represents a significantly lower level of external pressure as conditionality strategy is supposed to be much less effective. However, in this period, Turkey’s will to make further political reforms remained comparable in terms of quality to the first period. One example of such reforms is made in the area of freedom of expression. The highly criticised article 301 of the criminal code that requires punishment of insults to Turkishness was changed in 2008. Although the change cannot be considered completely satisfactory, the importance of the change can only be appreciated considering the fact that change of the article had remained a taboo in Turkish Politics prior to the date. Therefore, it could only be made after a long period of parliamentary discussion and despite the strong opposition parties.

Another example of such high cost reforms can be suggested as the change of the article 250 of the Turkish Criminal Judgmental Code which allows military personnel to be judged by civilian courts regarding with their acts involving civilians in 2009. The change also prohibited the judgment of civilians in military courts. However, the change was cancelled by the constitutional court as a result of an application by one of the opposition parties in the parliament. Nevertheless, it was later realised through the constitutional change in 2010 which could only be made through a referendum as political parties could not establish an agreement on the bill. The importance of such a change can only be acknowledged considering the traditional guardianship role of the Army [37]. The change was seen as ruling Justice and Development Party’s (JDP) attempt to curb the power of the military. Since JDP was seen as a party with Islamic roots by the opposition, they were highly suspicious of the change and anticipated it to bring high political costs as it was seen another step by Islamists to change the power balance in their favour.

Along with these changes an important attempt made by the government to cede further rights to minorities in 2010. Although a draft reform proposal was not proposed, it was suggested by the government that further democratic reforms necessary to solve the Kurdish issue should be discussed by all political parties and civil society. However, Political parties could not reach a consensus as a result of suspicions that such changes could cause disintegration of Turkish society and eventually Turkey. Government also stepped back from this ‘democratic opening project’ with the fear of loosing votes in the upcoming elections in 2011. However, although it failed, the importance of the attempt itself has to be appreciated as it was in an area traditionally considered as a taboo area to the date. Therefore, it can be regarded as one of the highest cost reform topics of all. What makes the attempt more interesting is its timing. No one even dared to talk about such an opening that contradicts with the established policies of Turkish republic since its emergence until that date even when the political
conditionality is considered to be at its peaks just before 2005 with the increasing pressure by upcoming Brussel Summit. Thus, it is very surprising that such a proposition was brought forward in a period when it is much less likely for political conditionality to work.

In the light of these examples, it can be suggested that although the number of political reforms actually made reduced significantly in the latter period, in terms of quality of reforms and reform attempts the second period is comparable to the first one despite the fact that they represent a significantly different levels of external pressure. Hence, they provide surprising findings for theories on conditionality.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper aimed at testing the arguments that suggest conditionality as the main driving force behind the recent reform process Turkey have experienced since 1999. For this aim, depending on theories of conditionality strategy, three conditions have been suggested for the strategy to be effective: offer of sizable incentives such as a clear membership prospect, credible conditions clearly linked with the prizes and favourable domestic environment. In the light of these conditions, it has been suggested that the two chosen periods represent different levels of external pressure by the EU as the effectiveness of the strategy is significantly lower for the period since 2005. Having considered the reforms made in the two periods, two main conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, it can be suggested that there is a parallel structure between the quantity of political reforms and the level of external pressure in the two periods as expected by theories on conditionality. Secondly, however, reforms made after 2005 are far from being insignificant in terms of quality. Hence, it raises important questions on the idea that political conditionality is ‘the’ main driving force behind these reforms by the candidates. Moreover, it also raises questions on the conventional thinking on the working on conditionality theories as it shows that domestic politics is not only passive factor that comes into play while the first two conditions are positive but also an active one that might create change even when the first two conditions are not that strong. Hence, how domestic politics matters and the role of domestic political actors deserve more attention then they currently receive. This consequently requires questioning of rationalist accounts of Europeanisation of candidate countries that sees political conditionality as the main driving force behind these political reforms made by candidate countries. Therefore, it can be suggested that alternative approaches should be paid more attention in the study of Europeanisation of candidate states.

REFERENCES

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