

Notification No. F.NO. COE/ Ph.D./(Notification)/575/2025

Notification Date: 28-02-2025

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Topic of Research: Human Rights as a Factor in Turkey-European Union Relations (1998-2016)

Key Words: Turkey, European Union, Human Rights, Foreign Policy, West Asia, International Organisation, Eurasia, Violence

Findings

This thesis examines the human rights aspect in Turkey-EU relations from 1998 to 2016. During the EU Copenhagen Summit, human rights seemed to be essential in shaping Turkey's relationship with the European Union. This matter, in some respect, validates a historical pattern. In the last century of modernisation, Europe has been the principal catalyst in Turkey's pursuit of human rights and democratisation. Despite Turkey's rapprochement with Europe over the last two decades, its record on human rights violations remains problematic. Although reforms in Turkey have primarily aimed at aligning with Western values, they have progressively fostered a political climate in which civil society can influence state policies, independent of external factors, and have led to significant advancements in human rights issues. Numerous challenging topics within the *acquis* may impede Turkey's ultimate accession to the EU. The challenges associated with integrating Turkey's substantial and youthful population into the EU labour market, its conflict with Cyprus, and various other political and social system issues are the evident reasons for this situation. Moreover, Turkey's potential for membership is particularly limited by historical and cultural influences. Turkey has a heterogeneous majority religion and ethnicity and has been a military opponent of Western Europe for centuries. Turkey aspires to join the European Union under these circumstances. Given these significant disparities, EU member states claim that Turkey's accession may fundamentally alter Europe's character, thus their hesitance to accept Turkey as a member. Despite the aforementioned factors and instruments employed by EU member states to obstruct Turkey's EU membership, human rights remains the predominant political factor and tool utilised repeatedly by EU members to hinder Turkey's accession to the European Union. The relationship between Turkey and the EU has been distinctive throughout the years. Turkey is the only candidate nation to possess a Customs Union with the EU before membership (excluding Andorra and San Marino) and has experienced the longest interval between its membership application and the commencement of discussions. Moreover, Turkey is the only candidate nation with the most protracted candidature process to date and is the only candidate country for whom the European Commission has evaluated progress via the greatest number of progress reports. The EU, however, has not obstructed chapters laden with many political constraints and has not reached a common decision to close any chapters. Turkey inherently possesses specific immutable characteristics: its dimensions, demographic composition, cultural identity, and lack of favour among EU citizens, suggesting that, in contrast to the Eastern enlargement, mere adherence to formal criteria may be inadequate for Turkey's complete integration into the Union. What was accurate before is valid now, since Turkey continues to be an EU contender.