

**GEZI PARK PROTEST AND THE COUP
D'ETAT: EU DEMOCRATIC
CONDITIONALITY IN TURKIYE'S
FROZEN ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS**

A Thesis

**Submitted to The Master's Study Program of Political Science at the
Faculty of Social Sciences in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of**

Master of Art (M.A.)



by:

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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INTERNASIONAL INDONESIA

DEPOK

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ABSTRACT

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Turkiye's desire to become a part of the European Union has existed even before the country became a republic, championed by the republicans of the country who view Europe as a source of economic, political, and social progress. Turkiye is the country that has been in the accession process, called accession negotiations, the longest, a process that every candidate country must go through. The glimmer of hope in these accession negotiations was finally extinguished in 2018 when the process was put on standstill by the Council of the European Union. "Standstill" is actually a somewhat ambiguous status because it does not specify in detail whether Turkiye's accession negotiations have been canceled or will not be continued. Furthermore, the reason for the standstill status was not explicitly stated in the decision issued, such as what event or Turkish government policy was considered the most significant contributing factor to the decision to put the accession negotiations on standstill. Scholars also provide various interpretations regarding the most contributing factors, including increased authoritarianism under the leadership of the AKP, territorial disputes with Greece, the Cyprus conflict, and cultural and social differences between Turkiye and European societies. This thesis argues that there are two major events considered to have significantly contributed to the council's decision to put the process on standstill. These events are analyzed using democratic conditionality theory and the process tracing research method on the two cases. Additionally, this research validates findings by comparing them with the scholarly statements made by three scholars concerned with Turkiye and the European Union.

Keywords: *Accession Negotiations, The Gezi Park Protests, The Attempted Coup 2016.*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Turkiye's ambition to become part of the European Union (EU) is not something new that has only been launched under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Since the country was founded in 1923, in order to become a modern state, it has undertaken a series of domestic reforms, such as the introduction of a Latin-script alphabet, a raft of European-inspired laws, drastic changes in dress codes and the enactment of secularism in the constitution¹. Besides, an additional transformation in Turkiye's foreign policy can be seen from the country's active membership of international organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The next big step that Turkiye took in order to modernize its country was on July 31, 1959 when Turkiye applied for associate membership of the European Economic Community (EEC), aiming to forge economic ties between the associated country and the EEC without full membership. The latter was the predecessor of the EU, in 1992 following the Maastricht Treaty the EEC transformed into the EU². The application for association was made by the then Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes of the Democrat Party, PM Menderes³ stated that the application for association was the first step for Turkiye into Europe (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Turkiye).

Turkiye applied for full membership of the EEC, the predecessor of the EU, on April 14, 1987. In 1999, Turkiye was declared by the Helsinki European Council a candidate

¹ A series of Ataturk reforms, these are significant developments that have shaped the modern legal and social landscape in Turkiye after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The goals of reform were diverse and aimed to address various social and economic issues through adopting modernity in the west.

² Some key developments of Maastricht Treaty: Transformation of EEC into European Union, introducing European citizenship and creation of euro as a single European currency. See Britannica (2024).

³ Adnan Menderes was a Turkish politician who served as the prime minister of Turkiye from 1950 to 1960, during his tenure PM Menderes made a major breakthrough in the direction of Turkish foreign policy.

country. Subsequently, various milestones and developments have occurred in Türkiye's path toward EU membership (European Commission).

The reasons for Türkiye's pursuit of membership of the European Community (EC), are cultural, political, and economic. They highlight Türkiye's historical ties to Europe, its aspirations for a European identity, and persistent efforts to join European organizations. The political motivations behind Türkiye's applications for EC membership include the country's post-war foreign policy alignment with the West, and its response to Greece's application⁴. There are also economic considerations, emphasizing the significance of European integration for Türkiye's economy. The economic advantages that Türkiye anticipated from EC membership included access to a large and stable market, opportunities for exports, potential for foreign investment, benefits for Turkish agriculture, financial assistance from Community funds, and access to Western know-how and technology (Sanverdi, 2010). At the beginning of membership registration, the dominant motives were primarily political and social. Considering that the desire to become part of the EC arose after the revolution that transformed the Ottoman Sultanate into a republic in 1923. Abdullah Cevdet⁵ said;

"There is no second civilization, civilization means European Civilization and it must be imported with all its roses and its thorns" (Sanverdi, 2010).

In December 2004, the European Council⁶ declared that Türkiye sufficiently met the criteria for opening accession negotiations that were held in October 2005 (European Commission). Türkiye had been an applicant to accede to the EU since 1987. Türkiye and the EU signed a Customs Union agreement in 1995, and on December 12, 1999, during the European Council summit in Helsinki, Türkiye was formally acknowledged as a candidate for full membership. On October 3, 2005, negotiations for full membership started. The same day marked the adoption of Türkiye's Negotiation Framework Document, which detailed the procedures and technical aspects of the talks. The EU

⁴ On June 12, 1975, Greek Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis formally submitted its application, Greece officially became a member of the EU on January 1, 1981 (European Commission).

⁵ Abdullah Cevdet was born on September 9, 1869, in Arapkir, Malatya, Ottoman Kurdish, activist, philosopher who campaigned vigorously for secularism and modernism in Türkiye.

⁶ The European Council is a collegiate body that defines the overall political direction and priorities of the European Union (EU). It consists of the presidents of the European Commission and the European Council, as well as the heads of state or government of the EU member states. Attending its meetings is also the Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (European Council, Council of the European Union).

accession process for Türkiye is carried out within the framework of negotiations over 35 chapters⁷ (Arısan & Eralp, 2010).

Erdogan is a prominent political figure in Türkiye and served as the country's prime minister from 2003 to 2014 and as its president since 2014. He co-founded the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2001 and has been its leader since 2017 (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye). Erdogan's leadership style changed significantly when he transitioned from prime minister to president of Türkiye. As prime minister, he was known for his Islamist political stance and was often seen as a role model in the Muslim world. During his tenure as prime minister, he presided over a period of steady economic growth and won praise internationally as a reformer. However, his leadership style became more centralized and authoritarian after he was elected president in 2014. He subsequently won a referendum in 2018 that concentrated power in the president's hands, leading to a transition from a parliamentary system to a presidential one. This change allowed Erdogan to become the head of state, head of government, head of the ruling party, head of the national police, and head of the military as chief of staff, effectively consolidating power around himself (Aliriza, 2018). Erdogan's leadership style change and the concentration of power in his hands have had a significant impact on Türkiye's relations with the EU and its bid for membership (Uras, 2023). This change in leadership style has led to criticism voiced by EU leaders regarding various government policies deemed to not uphold fundamental human rights, which of course is not in line with the democratic criteria of the EU.

The topic in this study is considered highly significant, given that studies on Türkiye's accession negotiations are still widely examined by scholars, especially supporters or opponents of Türkiye's entry into the EU. Additionally, Türkiye's membership status is deemed extremely unusual, as Türkiye has held the status of candidate country for the longest time. The association negotiation process that has been ongoing since October 2005 has still left Türkiye as a candidate country. Compared with other countries that applied for membership and underwent accession negotiations after Türkiye, countries like Malta and Poland obtained membership status relatively quickly and without obstacles. Furthermore, the findings of this study have significant implications,

⁷ A chapter is a specific one of the 35 policies or areas that a candidate country must complete in order to become a member of the European Union. Every chapter relates to a particular policy domain, like financial services, education and culture, or science and research, and it contains a set of norms and conditions that Türkiye needs to fulfill in order to prove that it complies with EU regulations (Directorate of EU Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Türkiye).

particularly for scholars in addressing the factors behind the freeze in accession negotiations and predicting the dynamics of EU-Turkiye relations in the coming years. The year 2028 is widely debated by many scholars as it marks the time when Erdogan will no longer be able to run for president due to the law limiting the presidential term to 10 years, which Erdogan will reach in 2028. This debate revolves around predictions and analyses of whether Erdogan's absence as the singular figure in Turkish politics and governance will pave the way for the accession negotiations to resume and Turkiye to attain membership status. This analysis is supported by the fact that until the decision to halt accession negotiations in 2018, Turkiye was still considered a potential candidate, and Turkiye remained a working partner with the EU in several sectors. Turkiye's membership status was not unilaterally revoked or terminated by the EU, despite concerns about democracy violations.

1.2. Research Problem

The accession negotiations of Turkiye refer to the process through which Turkiye is negotiating its accession to the EU to be a full member state. Under the leadership of Erdogan this process involves Turkiye's progress in preparing for accession, economic and social convergence, and the acceptance of the rights and obligations attached to the EU system and its institutional framework. The negotiations also involve discussions and agreements on issues such as human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and economic policies (Akyıldız, 2022). Ultimately, the hopes were dashed, according to the European Union General Secretariat of the Council 10555/18 issued in Brussels⁸ June 26, 2018. The Council Conclusion on Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process noted that the accession negotiations for Turkiye had reached a standstill, Turkiye's separation from the EU has, as a result, been increasing, there is no longer any possibility to open or close any more chapters in the accession negotiations with Turkiye, and no additional work is anticipated to be done to modernize the EU-Turkiye Customs Union. The term "standstill" in the context of Turkiye's EU accession process refers to the halt in the negotiations and the inability to move forward under the current circumstances, primarily due to concerns over Turkiye's democratic values, rule of law, and human rights record (S&D, 2023; Fraser, 2023).

⁸ Brussels is the de facto capital of the European Union, with several EU institutions headquartered in the city.

Turkiye has been a candidate for EU membership since 1999 and began membership negotiations in 2005. However, the process has faced challenges and has been at a standstill due to various issues, including Turkiye's democratic backsliding, disputes with EU member Cyprus, and opposition from some EU member states. Despite this, Turkiye has expressed its resolve to join the EU and has urged the EU to clear the path for its membership (Elveren & Kay, 2005). The document additionally noted that the Council expresses concern over the erosion of fundamental rights, including freedom of speech and the rule of law, and the ongoing incarceration of EU nationals, particularly two Greek military personnel. The Council urges Turkiye to address these issues and strengthen its ties with the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights. The Venice Commission criticized recent constitutional changes for compromising power separation and a lack of checks and balances (European Council, 2018). Despite the fact that the conclusion of the general affairs council did not specifically state what events were behind or considered by the Council of Europe to have violated the principles of democratic life and freedom, the decision has been one-way stalling accession talks for now.

This study deems that there were several cases considered by the EU Council when deciding on a halt to accession negotiations, including the EU's allegation that Turkiye violates human rights, especially following the coup attempt in 2016 and the 2017 constitutional referendum. More than 45,000 police and military officers, as well as more than 130,000 civil servants and government workers, including more than 60,000 individuals, were fired or suspended by Turkish authorities in the wake of the coup attempt in 2016. The EU and other international organizations denounced this widespread termination and suspension of employees as a breach of human rights and the rule of law (US Department of State, 2019). At the time of this thesis being written Turkiye has not become a member of the EU despite accession negotiations having started in October 2005.

Democratic backsliding is the process through which democratic institutions or values lose their integrity within a political system. It is typified by the breakdown of democratic institutions, norms, and practices, which frequently leads to a reduction in a nation's level of democracy. The suppression of civil liberties, prejudice or animosity against religious or racial minorities, and the emergence of authoritarianism or illiberal democracy are just a few ways in which this phenomenon can show itself (Bermeo, 2016). Several experts emphasize that democratic backsliding in Turkiye has occurred within the past 10 years

under the AKP rule, during which the regime has transitioned into a competitive authoritarian regime. Türkiye's democratic backsliding has stymied the country's democratic institutions. The erosion of democratic gains, constitutional changes, suppression of opposition, EU accession process, are some of the key factors contributing to Türkiye's democratic regression. The European Commission⁹ has criticized Türkiye for not complying with the principles of the rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms which led to the country's bid to join the EU being frozen in 2018 (Özkırmı, 2023; SCF, 2022). Democratic backsliding criticized by the EU include the measures President Erdogan took after the July 15 2016 coup attempt, including a crackdown on those suspected of involvement in the coup. Tens of thousands of people were arrested pending trial, and there were widespread dismissals of civil servants, military personnel, and academics. The government also declared a state of emergency, which was in place for two years, and allowed the government to rule by decree (Ibrahim, 2022). Even though the EU condemned the coup, it stated that the government's post-coup actions are out of scale and should be treated very seriously.

The EU laid out its criticism by asserting the president's failure to commit to the Copenhagen criteria. These criteria include respect for human rights, a well-functioning democracy, and the rule of law. The measures taken by the government, such as dropping the parliamentary system, have been viewed as breaching these criteria (Lynch, 2023). Government actions have led to a deterioration in Türkiye's prospects for EU membership, as the country's political actions have not aligned with the democratic and rule of law standards outlined in the Copenhagen criteria (Toygur, 2022).

The Copenhagen criteria are a set of criteria developed by the European Council in 1993 for countries that want to join the EU (EUR-Lex). The Copenhagen criteria were laid down in Copenhagen, Denmark. These are essential conditions that all candidate countries must meet to become a member state of the EU. They are divided into three categories: political criteria, economic criteria, and administrative and institutional capacity. The political criteria require stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities. The economic

⁹ See European Union. The executive branch of the EU is the European Commission. It is in charge of creating and carrying out EU legislation, overseeing the EU budget, and making sure that EU law is followed by all member states. The Commission is headed by the Commission President and consists of 27 Commissioners, one from each member state of the EU. The President, who is chosen by the European Parliament, is in charge of establishing the Commission's policy direction.

criteria require a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition and market forces. The administrative and institutional capacity criteria require the ability to effectively implement the acquis and the ability to take on the EU's capacity to absorb new members while maintaining the momentum of European integration. The EU reserves the right to decide when a candidate country has met these criteria and when the EU is ready to accept new members (European Commission). Turkiye has been the focus of continuous discussion and criticism for violating the Copenhagen criterion. Turkiye's adherence to the criteria has been under observation by the European Commission, which has produced multiple studies pointing out notable deficiencies in regard to international law, human rights, and the rule of law. In its resolution, the Parliament made clear that Turkiye must strengthen ties with all EU members and uphold human rights, the rule of law, and international law. Turkiye's failure to achieve the Copenhagen criteria has posed a serious obstacle to the country's EU accession process, since the European Commission and the European Parliament have expressed concerns about Turkiye's progress toward achieving these requirements.

President Erdogan's frustration regarding Turkiye's membership process, which has been prolonged and suspended was manifested in progressively more bellicose rhetoric, and his growing authoritarianism strengthened the argument of the European naysayers. Erdogan's noncompliant leadership toward Copenhagen might be caused by the distrust of accession negotiations that continue to lag, and the difficulty of achieving full membership means Erdogan no longer uses the Copenhagen criteria as a guide in carrying out domestic and foreign policies. Turkiye has been eager to join the EU since 1987, but the accession process has been slow and fraught with difficulties. As of June 2006, only 15 of 35 chapters of the European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement had been completed, with only one chapter being closed (Valeria, 2023).

The accession process for Turkiye is conducted in 35 chapters within the context of the negotiation framework. These chapters cover various aspects of EU legislation and policies, and they serve as the basis for the accession negotiations. Some of the chapters include topics such as the free movement of goods, the right of establishment and freedom to provide services, financial and budgetary provisions, economic and monetary policy, regional policy, and coordination of structural instruments, and institutions. Each chapter represents a different policy area or aspect of the EU's legal framework, and the negotiations aim to align Turkiye's legislation and practices with the EU standards and requirements (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republik of Turkiye). The chapters are

designed to ensure that candidate countries, such as Türkiye, are able to effectively implement and enforce the EU's body of laws and regulations, known as the *acquis Communautaire*¹⁰ (the acquired community), upon accession. The process of opening and closing chapters in the accession negotiations is a key aspect of the overall accession process, and it reflects the progress made by the candidate country in aligning with the EU's legal and regulatory framework (European Commission). As of November 2022, out of the 35 chapters, 16 chapters have been opened, and only one chapter, Chapter 25 on science and research, has been provisionally closed (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Türkiye). According to the European Council Enlargement and Stabilization and Association Process - Council Conclusion 2018, the accession process has essentially reached a deadlock and no more chapters can be considered for opening or shutting. The negotiations with Türkiye are open-ended, and full membership is not expected to be achieved earlier than 10 years from the start of the negotiations.

In contrast, other candidate countries that successfully obtained EU membership, such as Croatia joined the EU on July 1, 2013, which was about 10 years after it applied for membership. The negotiation phase of joining the EU is typically the longest, and the time between the launch of negotiations and the signing of an accession treaty has taken an average of five or more years for 11 of the 21 current EU countries that went through the process (Leppert, 2022). However, the fact remains that Türkiye is the country that has been waiting for EU membership for the longest time.

Moreover, the EU's opposition to Türkiye's membership bid has grown, with many countries expressing skepticism about Türkiye's readiness for EU membership. Türkiye has limited support within the EU for its membership bid, with many countries expressing concerns about Türkiye's democratic backsliding and assertive foreign policy (Toygür, 2022). Several member states, such as Austria, France, and Germany, have called for Türkiye to have a different form of partnership with the EU (Uras, 2023). However, the overall trend in Türkiye's EU accession negotiations has been marked by slow progress, distrust, and an increasingly authoritarian stance.

On the EU leaders' side, they see that Türkiye's noncompliance policy, which is increasingly moving away from the Copenhagen criteria, makes accession negotiations

¹⁰ The term "*acquis Communautaire*" refers to the body of cumulative laws of the European Community, which includes case law, substantive rules, policies, primary and secondary legislation, and the goals of the European Community. This corpus of law, which signifies "that which has been acquired or obtained" and "of the community" in French, is a component of the legal system of the EU (See Eurofound, 2007).

difficult to continue or reopen, and Turkiye's prospect of becoming a member of the EU will be increasingly impossible. The EU has not officially ended Turkiye's membership bid, but the prospect of Turkiye's full membership is currently considered to be unlikely by most EU countries. Therefore, while Turkiye's bid for EU membership is not officially over, the current status indicates significant challenges and a lack of strong support within the EU for its full membership.

The EU's and Turkiye's willingness to work through these issues and reach agreements will determine how well the membership talks progress. Turkiye's chances of joining the EU will also be greatly impacted by the direction of political developments in both Turkiye and the EU (Grigoriadis, 2006). However, it is certain that if Turkiye and the EU have the same intention to resolve their disagreement on this issue, consensus can be reached on Turkiye's membership status.

1.3. Research Questions

1. As stated in Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process - Council conclusions from the General Secretariat of the Council, Council of the European Union on June 26, 2018 No.10555/18 has Turkiye's democratic backsliding resulted in the standstill in Turkiye's accession negotiations to become an EU member?
2. What are the specific backsliding events that the council conclusion referred to when declaring serious backsliding as mentioned in the document?

1.4. Research Objective

This study aims to investigate whether Turkiye's democracy backsliding resulted in a standstill in Turkiye's accession negotiations to become an EU member. More in depth, this study examines the main reason behind the standstill in Turkiye's EU accession negotiations, with a particular emphasis on whether the country's grave violations of fundamental rights, democracy, the rule of law, and the independence of the judiciary were the main causes of the standstill.

To identify the case events, specifically the 2013 Gezi Park incident and the attempted coup in 2016, that triggered the halt of Turkiye's EU accession negotiations. To describe

the factors, norms and rule of law of the EU that influenced the decision to bring accession negotiations to a standstill.

1.5. Significance of Study

The study's relevance and importance in relation to the two research questions is essential for comprehending the research's significance within the larger field of study. The study's relevance is a documented justification for the investigation's necessity and possible influence on the field. It serves as an explanation of the significance of the work and how it adds to fresh information that helps others in the field.

For the first research question, the significance lies in its potential to inform readers that the cause of the standstill in accession negotiations was the deterioration of democracy as stated in the council conclusion and the broader implications for the stability and Turkiye's relationship with the EU. The study could contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between democratic backsliding and the accession process, which could have significant policy implications for the EU and its member states.

For the second research question, the significance of the study is in identifying the specific events or developments that led to the declaration of serious backsliding in Turkiye. This could provide valuable insights into the nature and extent of the backsliding, which could inform policy decisions and international (EU member state) responses to the situation.

1.6. Research Limitations

This study is a work prepared for a master's thesis, which undoubtedly requires further development regarding the research methods employed, theories, empirical data, and data analysis.

In terms of timing, this thesis gathers research data from the years 2013 to 2018, during which period there were assessed to be two quite significant violations of democracy. For further research, a broader investigation could delve into the time span from the initiation of accession negotiations in October 2005 to 2024, as undoubtedly there have been notable dynamics in the relationship patterns between Turkiye and the EU over a longer period. This study is a literature study that utilizes secondary data to address the research questions outlined above. While the use of premier data is considered more accurate, for subsequent research, the study could obtain data from the Directorate for EU Affairs,

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Turkiye, and by conducting interviews with officials involved in the accession talks with the EU.

The utilization of different theories in this research topic will undoubtedly have implications for the quality of the results, offering a more varied and measurable outcome. Ultimately, this study on Turkiye's accession negotiations encompasses numerous facets that can be further developed to better comprehend the relationship patterns between the two parties and to predict whether the accession negotiations will culminate entirely, or if Turkiye will succeed in attaining EU membership.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1. Literature Review

Concerns over Turkiye's democratic deterioration have caused the deadlock in EU accession negotiations with Turkiye since 2018. Human rights, the rule of law, and democratic principles have all been underlined by the EU repeatedly throughout the accession process. The membership talks have come to a halt, nevertheless, as Turkiye's recent political developments have sparked worries about the erosion of these ideals. The purpose of this study of the literature is to give a broad overview of the status of the field's current understanding of how democratic backsliding affected Turkiye's accession negotiations.

This study, which argues that democratic backsliding in the areas of democracy, rule of law, fundamental rights and the independence of the judiciary led to the standstill in accession negotiations, is in alignment with Amor (2022) who stated that Turkiye is experiencing a deliberate regression, eroding fundamental freedoms and rule of law, and is facing a potential end to democracy. In addition, he believes that the accession negotiations will not endure on its axis for the next five years. Amor highlights several cases that are considered to have contributed to the standstill in accession negotiations, such as a human rights advocate, philanthropist, and civil society activist Osman Kavala, who has encountered mistrust and even charges from the Turkish government. He was imprisoned in 2017 and has spent more than four years behind bars without being found guilty. He is accused of planning and funding anti-government demonstrations around the country in 2013 and taking part in the failed coup attempt in 2016. Although Amor's argument aligns with this study, he presents his words in a press release, which lacks the rigor needed to meet the standards of academic research. Additionally, Amor discusses a case involving only individuals, which is believed not to have too significant an implication for the EU Council in deciding the accession negotiations status. This is comparable with more extensive cases, such as the government's policy response after the attempted coup in 2016, which is mentioned by many scholars.

However, in considering the factors deemed more dominant in contributing to the standstill, scholars have their own preferred paths for discussion. Arisan and Eralp (2010) focus more on international issues, in contrast to Amor, who addressed both domestic and international issues simultaneously. Arisan and Eralp state that the continuing Cyprus dispute remains an unavoidable major factor affecting the negotiations. As a stress point, major events that led to the deterioration in Türkiye-EU relations after 2004 were the Cyprus referendum and the Republic of Cyprus' admission to the EU without a resolution to the issue. The statement that democratic backsliding indeed led to the standstill is also conveyed by Toygür (2022). Unlike the two previous scholars who did not mention the 2018 EU Council decision, Toygür explicitly refers to it in his writing, since the standstill in 2018, Türkiye has no credible prospect of membership in the near future. In fact, Toygür presents more criticism and suggestions for the EU, such as modernizing the EU's 1963 association agreement with Türkiye would be the best course of action in order to promote rules-based cooperation and strengthen the normative underpinnings of the partnership. However, it is regrettable that Toygür does not address any events or policies referenced by the EU Council in determining the existence of democratic backsliding. Indeed, concrete examples of instances of democratic backsliding can provide readers with a more detailed and insightful understanding of the findings on backsliding.

Another recent study that looks at the backsliding factor is Gumuscu (2023), in his book chapter the author questions where the AKP used the instrument of elections to secure political dominance, the author underlines that historically Türkiye had a very strong democratic foundation compared with other countries in the Middle East before the AKP came to power. The author further emphasizes that the AKP's manipulation of the electoral process contributed to the decline of civil liberties and political rights in Türkiye, demonstrating the negative effects of using elections for authoritarian goals. The factors that worsen the image of democracy raised by Gumuscu are different from the cases discussed above. Here the author uses the method of changing electoral politics by comparing the foundation of democracy in the period before the AKP took power with afterward.

Although here the author does not consider that from 1950 until the AKP came to power Türkiye had the most frequent military coups and the overthrow of power by groups of military officers. How can it be said that it is the most democratic country, having had the most coups? The reference to the leadership periodization referred to by the author is somewhat irrelevant to the findings and arguments presented. In addition, this study does

not address the implications of the deterioration of democracy on the standstill in Turkiye's accession negotiations and also finds no discussion of the response to the 2016 coup attempt.

The works that explicitly emphasize that the attempted coup of 2016 played a significant role in Turkiye's accession negotiations are extensively discussed in literature that directly examine it after the event occurred. This means that these studies were conducted during a period of democratic deterioration. The peak of this decline can be highlighted during the state of emergency and the constitutional changes that took place until the referendum was held in 2017, followed by the elections in 2018. Çınar and Şirin, in their 2017 article "Turkiye's Human Rights Agenda", state that the attempted coup in Turkiye had significant repercussions on various aspects of the country, including human rights issues, the political environment, and social dynamics. It led to a state of emergency being declared, affecting different sectors and creating challenges in the context of EU accession negotiations. The aftermath of the coup, with the declaration of a state of emergency and the crackdown on dissent, raised concerns about Turkiye's commitment to human rights and democratic principles, affecting its accession negotiations with the EU. The EU Commission's report highlighted issues such as the impact on freedom of expression, the rule of law, and the broader human rights situation in Turkiye. The aftermath of the coup had significant implications for the stalling of accession negotiations through the operations post-coup that have targeted various sectors of society, leading to closures of companies, seizures of assets, and pressure on human rights organizations. Declaring the state of emergency has negatively impacted the Kurdish question, resulting in serious clashes and rights violations. The imprisonment of co-presidents of the Pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), and the appointment of trustees in municipalities have escalated tensions. Turkiye's human rights record has faced challenges, with violations reported by international bodies, affecting the country's reputation. As such, this work is in line with the arguments in this thesis, although it does not discuss other events that also contributed.

The above argument is irrefutable in an article written by Özgöker and Bedirhan in 2018. The attempted coup in Turkiye in 2016 had a significant impact on accession negotiations to become an EU member. Following the failed coup attempt, there were widespread purges and arrests in Turkiye, leading to concerns about human rights violations and the state of democracy in the country. This work states an argument that is in the same vein as the argument in this thesis, even more specifically according to Özgöker and Bedirhan

that the European Parliament expressed its concerns over the lack of principles such as liberty, democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law in Türkiye, leading to calls for a temporary freeze on the ongoing accession negotiations with Türkiye. Additionally, there were calls for the suspension of accession talks with Türkiye due to serious and persistent breaches of fundamental EU values. These developments strained the relationship between the EU and Turkey, with the EU taking a more critical stance toward Türkiye's democratic credentials and human rights record. The EU's response to the events following the coup attempt played a role in the discussions and decisions regarding Türkiye's accession process to the EU.

Özgöker and Bedirhan's argument is further strengthened by İçener's argument in the same year the coup happened, which states that the EU's response to the coup attempt and its aftermath highlighted existing challenges in Türkiye's path toward EU membership, including democratic backsliding and rule of law issues. The attempted coup in 2016 and its repercussions contributed to a more challenging environment for Türkiye's accession negotiations with the EU, as they underscored concerns about democratic governance, human rights, and the rule of law in Türkiye. İçener's work did not specifically predict a standstill in the accession negotiations, as his work was published too early in the same year as the coup. However, his arguments do not diverge from the main argument in this thesis. If İçener's argument were to be continued and discussed after the standstill decision in 2018, it would align with all the arguments presented.

There is much debate on whether the Gezi Park protests contributed to the standstill. This debate centers on how the Gezi Park events in 2013 influenced the standstill in 2018. Hacıbektaşoğlu, in his 2021 thesis, stated that indeed in the context of Turkey's accession negotiations to become an EU member, the Gezi Park protests did not directly influence or contribute to the standstill in the negotiations. However, the Gezi Park protests highlighted certain challenges and issues related to democracy, freedom of expression, and human rights in Turkey. The EU has consistently emphasized the importance of these values as essential components of the accession process. Therefore, events like the Gezi Park protests, which raised concerns about the state of democracy and civil liberties in Turkey, could indirectly impact the perception of Turkey's progress toward meeting EU standards. This event may have had implications for Turkey's image and relations with the EU, the overall progress in meeting the EU's criteria and fulfilling the requirements for membership remain the primary focus of the accession negotiations.

In contrast to Hacibektaşoğlu, Narlı (2014) exactly one year after the Gezi Park protests occurred stated that the Gezi Park protests influenced Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU. Concerns regarding Turkey's adherence to democratic principles were raised by the severe actions taken by the Turkish government against the protestors and the subsequent criticism from European nations and EU institutions. The accession negotiations came to a halt as a result of this. By drawing attention to worries about democratic liberties and the Turkish government's increasingly authoritarian policies, particularly with regard to the government's treatment of demonstrators, the Gezi Park protests led to the impasse in Turkey's EU membership discussions. As a result, the Turkish public's support for EU membership decreased, and the EU harmonization changes slowed considerably.

Although there is much debate in the literature about whether the Gezi Park protests had a direct impact on the standstill, the democratic index and development in Turkey are monitored annually through reports released by the EU. These reports are considered to have contributed to the realization of the decline of democracy in Turkey, and led to the accession negotiations coming to a standstill.

The study in this thesis presents more comprehensive answers. Not only will it address whether the standstill in Türkiye's accession negotiations in 2018 was caused by democratic backsliding, but it will also highlight the events or policies referenced by the EU Council in deciding on democratic backsliding. By showcasing specific cases or events, this study provides a concrete foundation for the arguments presented. Furthermore, it allows readers to emotionally connect with the examples provided and convince them of the correlation between the variables, demonstrating how democratic backsliding influenced the EU Council's decision to halt the negotiations.

2.2. Argument and Hypotheses

The serious backsliding in democracy, rule of law, fundamental rights, and the independence of the judiciary in Türkiye is significantly correlated with the standstill in Türkiye's accession negotiations with the EU in accordance with the Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process - Council conclusions from the General Secretariat of the Council, Council of the European Union No.10555/18.

It is argued in this study that the event that contributed most to the stalling of the accession negotiations was the government reaction after the 2016 attempted coup. Beyond the reason that the government reactions after the coup occurred in close proximity to the EU council conclusion in 2018, the accession deadlock was actually preceded by a vote in the EU parliament at the end of 2016, the European Parliament passed a non-binding resolution asking the European Commission to halt accession talks with Turkiye for a while because of the Turkish government's "disproportionate repressive measures" against those who took part in the coup attempt in that country. In less than two years the EU responded that there was a disproportionate policy and treatment by the government in response to the 2016 coup and ended with a council decision letter that froze the accession negotiations.

The violent and chaotic 2016 coup attempt in Turkiye was a pivotal moment in the nation's modern history. On July 15, 2016, a section of the Turkish military staged a coup with the intention of toppling President Erdogan's administration. Tanks, fighter jets, and helicopters were used in the coup attempt, and the coup plotters' F-16 fighter jets bombed Turkiye's parliament building in Ankara 11 times. This attempt, which was ultimately unsuccessful, marked a turning point in Turkiye's political history and had far-reaching consequences for the country's political landscape, economy, and international relations. That night, the Turkish military headquarters, the presidential palace, and the parliament were all targeted in a concerted attack by a group of military officers with the help of some military units. Using artillery, fighter aircraft, and tanks, the coup plotters attempted to overthrow the government and took control of a number of important sites, including Istanbul's Bosphorus Bridge. The coup started with the takeover of several key bridges in Istanbul and the capital, Ankara, by military units, accompanied by fighter jets and helicopters patrolling the skies (Dragonas, 2021).

The halt in the accession negotiations was not the result of only one incident. The other event that is considered to have contributed the most is the 2013 Gezi Park protests. Although the Gezi Park protests, were not an event that occurred close to the EU Council conclusion 2018, as they were five years earlier. However, the assessment of the democracy index in Turkiye had been monitored and was of concern to the EU since the accession negotiations started in 2005 and received negative reports in the last 15 years. The Gezi Park protests in Turkiye began on May 27, 2013, as a peaceful sit-in against the urban development plan for Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park. Protests against the government's intentions to demolish the park and replace it with a shopping mall and

luxurious apartments were spurred by outrage over the violent eviction (Taştan, 2013). It was initially an event that only involved a group of protesters, but it triggered the involvement of many parties nationally and even internationally and was portrayed by the government at the time as a political event orchestrated by opposition political rivals.

About 50 environmentalists spearheaded the first protests, which swiftly expanded into a nationwide movement involving millions of people from various backgrounds, including trade unionists, feminists, secular Kemalists, nationalists, anti-capitalist Muslims, and soccer fans. The protests were characterized by a wide range of methods, including sit-ins, strike actions, demonstrations, online activism, protest marches, civil disobedience, and civil resistance. The government responded to the protests with force, leading to the deaths of 11 people and injuring at least 8,163, with many more detained and arrested (Gümrukçü, 2023). The government's violent response to the demonstrations, which resulted in deaths, was unacceptable to many national and international human rights institutions and parties. Police abuse during the protests was reported, including the use of water cannons, tear gas, and excessive force (Hanh, 2018).

The attempted coup in 2016 and Gezi Park protests in 2013 were events that involved many parties and were national in scale. In addition, these two events received more international attention than other events, which only involved violations of democracy to individuals. Certainly the EU Council took these two events very seriously and they obviously had implications for Türkiye's accession negotiations.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

This study has considered several theories that are considered relevant for the sake of providing a structure for the complete research process, to link the researcher to current knowledge, assisting in the identification of gaps and providing good study guidance, to focus on specific variables and define the viewpoint for analyzing and interpreting data. In choosing an appropriate theory, this study has reviewed course readings and pertinent research studies, has analyzed models relevant to the research problem stated above and has connected the chosen theory to the analysis of relevant literature. The finalized theory is democratic conditionality.

According to the theory of democratic conditionality, the level of democracy in non-EU nations is a determining factor in the EU's relations with them. This concept is predicated on the notion that the degree of democratic progress in non-EU nations should affect the EU's interactions with them. The theory's foundation is the idea that democratic conditionality can be applied to advance democratic ideals and values throughout the world, especially in relation to EU accession and expansion procedures (Monte, 2023; Schimmelfennig, Engert, & Knobel, 2003; Schimmelfennig & Scholtz, 2010; Pridham, 2008). Democratic conditionality throughout the EU is perceived as a means of guaranteeing that prospective members fulfill specific democratic requirements prior to their accession. This conditionality is implemented at several points during the EU Commission's evaluation of candidate nations and the ultimate awarding of full membership privileges. The purpose of the democratic conditionality is to guarantee that newly admitted members uphold democratic norms and processes inside the EU (Schimmelfennig, Engert, & Knobel, 2003). With the accession negotiations that began in 2005, Türkiye as a candidate country is expected to adopt and absorb the values and principles of democracy that apply and have been recognized in the European Union, accession negotiations seek to apply the process of equalizing these values and principles in order to be equal to countries that have joined the EU.

The EU's democratic conditionality is supported by various studies that highlight its role in promoting democracy and democratic values globally. For example, it has been said that a major contributing element to the democratization of Eastern European nations during the EU enlargement process was the democratic conditionality of the EU. For some believe that applying sanctions and punishment can have the opposite effect of what is intended and may not result in meaningful changes to the democratic process. Promoting democratic values might instead be more successful with more favorable incentives and interaction with non-democratic regimes (Monte, 2023). The impact of EU democratic conditionality has been studied in various case studies, including "The Impact of EU Democratic Conditionality on Latvia, Slovakia, and Türkiye" by Frank Schimmelfennig, Stefan Engert, and Heiko Knobel investigate the efficacy of democratic conditionality within the EU in three "hard cases": Latvia, Slovakia under Meciar, and Türkiye. The authors contend that EU democratic conditionality is a "reinforcement by reward" tactic that relies on intergovernmental material bargaining and that the political costs of compliance incurred domestically by candidate governments determine how effective it is. The report emphasizes that EU conditionality is ineffective in situations

like Türkiye under Erdogan and Slovakia under the Meciar leadership, where there are significant domestic power costs associated with compliance. Because of their strong internal support and the lack of major costs associated with non-compliance, the administrations in these circumstances were able to resist pressure from the EU. On the other side, EU conditionality was more successful in fostering democratic reforms in Latvia since domestic power costs were lower there.

The theory of democratic conditionality has been applied by numerous academics to the case study of Türkiye due to the importance of Türkiye-EU relations both historically and currently. Since 1999, Türkiye has been a candidate for EU membership, and significant events such as the Helsinki Summit in 1999 and the Copenhagen Summit in 2002 have marked the country's entrance process, making Türkiye the longest standing country in the process of EU membership. Türkiye has encountered substantial challenges for democratization and human rights. Türkiye is a crucial case study for academics studying democratic conditionality because the EU has played a significant role in advancing, promoting, and pushing democratic reforms and human rights in that country. Türkiye's politics have been greatly influenced by the EU, especially in light of its conditionality policies. The other researchers have examined the ways in which Türkiye's political developments—such as its shift from a military-dominated to a more democratic system—have been impacted by the EU's conditionality. Türkiye's situation provides a special chance to compare and contrast with other nations that have gone through democratic processes. Türkiye geographically borders the continents of Europe and Asia, although more than 90% of the land in Türkiye is part of Asia, but culturally and socially Türkiye is closer to Eastern Europe.

Under EU pressure, Türkiye has carried out a number of major reforms to bring it into compliance with EU membership requirements and standards. Türkiye abolished the death penalty in 2004, which was a significant step toward aligning with EU human rights standards. In 2002, Türkiye implemented a significant change aimed at safeguarding the rights of minority groups by granting property rights to minority foundations. Türkiye granted freedom of expression in languages other than Turkish and Türkiye implemented reforms to strengthen civilian control over the military. (Ulusoy, N.d.). But until the accession negotiations came to a standstill in 2018 the conditionality had not succeeded in perfectly and thoroughly encouraging and forcing Türkiye to be able to implement the

values and principles of democracy recognized in the Copenhagen criteria, where these criteria are the only standard for membership.

Among the several items of literature that have used this theory are, "The Impact of EU Democratic Conditionality on the Democratization Process in Turkiye" by Ali Resul Usul 2011; "The State of the Art in the EU Democracy Promotion Literature" by Peter Simmons 2011; a master's thesis from V. Krysko, University of Twente School of Management and Governance Masters Degree Programme in Public Administration "The Conditions of the Effectiveness of EU Democratic Conditionality in Central and Eastern European Countries in the Context of EU Enlargement" in 2008.

This theory receives criticism and opposition from various perspectives, including the point that sanctions and other punitive actions may not result in substantial democratic improvements and may even have the opposite effect. Some academics and politicians disagree about how effective EU democratic conditionality is. Some contend that despite certain advancements, a nation's democracy may still be "fragile" and the EU's conditionality is restricted to the constitutional and legal spheres. The democratic legitimacy of the accession process is called into question by the concentration of powers in the hands of the European Commission, which is not directly accountable to the people.

The democratic conditionality of the EU has been criticized for not adequately addressing the needs and rights of minority groups (Monte, 2023). The halt to Turkiye's accession negotiations process in 2018 is regarded as the application of sanctions by the EU against Turkiye, for not reaching the democratization standards set by the EU. These sanctions are considered inappropriate because they have the opposite effect, where Turkiye does not pursue EU membership but increases authoritarianism. Turkiye no longer sets EU membership as a national target as evidenced in every presidential campaign, where Erdogan has not regarded EU membership as a national interest.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1. Research Method and Case Selection

This chapter will explain the methods used to answer the research questions in this study. The choice of research method for this study considers the research questions and hypotheses generated from the problem statement above. The research questions above were created from the EU Council conclusion which summarized the negative milestones in the non-achievement and misalignment of democratic values and principles understood and applied by Turkiye and the EU.

Based on the research questions above, the qualitative process tracing method is considered suitable to answer them using the evidence attached and explained in the findings and discussion section. Because the case relies heavily on qualitative evidence and historical reports, this method makes it possible to comprehend the precise decisions, actions, and results that led to the deadlock in the negotiations for accession in a more nuanced manner (Collier, 2011), which process tracing is well-suited to analyze. The goal of the process tracing method is to comprehend the mechanisms and causal processes that connect interventions to results. Rather than just summarizing the effects of interventions, it aims to explain how and why they are effective (Raimondo, n.d.). It is possible to assess causal inferences about the case by process tracing. It is feasible to determine if democratic backsliding was the main reason for the halt in negotiations or whether other causes were more important by looking closely at the particular actions and decisions that led to it. The EU has issued reports on every event that is deemed to have undermined democracy, so process tracing was carried out on these reports. The reports that are considered significant are those following the 2016 attempted coup and the Gezi Park protests. Toward the event of democratic backsliding, process tracing involves a detailed case study analysis of Turkiye's accession negotiations and democratic backsliding. This allows for a deep understanding of the specific events, choices, and outcomes that led to the standstill in accession negotiations (Collier, 2011).

After determining the hypotheses, this study has established a timeline in the research problem section starting from Turkiye applying for associate membership in 1959 until the accession negotiations came to a standstill in 2018. This timeline includes the milestones achieved by Turkiye during the accession negotiations and the discussion of

events that are argued to be the EU's reference in deciding the standstill status in the discussion and findings section.

This research provides two case studies, namely the attempted coup in 2016 and Gezi Park in 2013, which are analyzed in depth and prove that the two events are related to democratic backsliding by examining the two case studies with evidence of reports and resolutions issued by the EU that mention the occurrence of democratic backsliding.

Data collection in this study relies on literature studies that use secondary data as data used to prove hypotheses, such as annual reports and resolutions issued by the EU on the progress of accession negotiations and resolutions. In addition to these, the secondary data used is any criticism, comments, or input from EU country leaders and the EU Commission or EU Council on the two democratic backsliding events discussed in the findings and the discussion section should be used as evidence that the two backsliding events are the premier events that contributed most to the deadlock.

As supporting material, this study also uses answers from interview questions that were sent to scholars who have expertise and focus in the field of Türkiye and the EU. Their answers served to clarify and verify the research answers in this study. The interview questions were conducted via email and answered by the scholars via email as well. The interview questions will be included in the appendix section of this thesis. The three scholars who contributed by answering the interview questions are:

1. Associate professor Dr. Hanefi Yazıcı is a lecturer at Bandırma Onyediy Eylül University Türkiye. He was considered competent in answering the research questions and verifying that the democratic backsliding by the government caused the standstill because Dr. Yazıcı received his PhD degree from Yeditepe University Türkiye in political science and international relations and his expertise in the field of international relations and European studies. This can be proven from his works such as, “Türkiye’s Middle East Policy” (2021), “Turkish Foreign Policy During Jdp Era: Regional Coexistence and Global Cooperation” (2021), “Uluslararası Güç Mücadelesinin Yeni Arenası Doğu Akdeniz” (The New Arena of International Power Struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean, 2021), “İktisadi, Sosyal Ve Siyasal Boyutları İle İslam Ülkeleri Arasındaki İlişkiler” (Relations Between Islamic Countries with Economic, Social and Political Dimensions, 2018).

In addition to this, Dr. Yazıcı has a special interest in Turkish political history and Middle East policy, and of course the focus of his field involves Türkiye's foreign policy with regard to European countries, including the EU as an institution, among the works he has published in journals are “Regional and Global Reflections of the 2013 Ukraine Maidan Incidents” (2021), “Proxy Wars in Syria and a New Balance of Power in the Middle East” (2018).

2. The second scholar asked to verify the research answers in this study is Prof. Dr. Ziya Öniş, professor of International Political Economy at Koç University in Istanbul, he did his PhD program in Development Economics at the University of Manchester, which provides a strong foundation in economic theory and Türkiye's international relations. He is a former director of the Center for Research on Globalization and Peace and Democratic Governance (GLODEM). Among his research areas are new directions in Turkish foreign policy and domestic politics-foreign policy interactions, politics, foreign policy and political economy of contemporary Türkiye, democratization dilemmas in emerging powers and the EU. Prof. Öniş is considered competent to answer whether democratic backsliding resulted in the halt to Türkiye's accession negotiations, due to his expertise in the field of international relations and Turkish politics. His research focuses on the dynamics of EU-Türkiye relations, particularly in the context of Türkiye's accession negotiations and the impact of domestic and foreign factors on these negotiations. He has authored or co-authored “The EU's Declining Transformative Capacity in a Shifting Global Context: The Turkish Experience”, in Elena Baracani and Merve Çalıklı, eds., “European Perspectives on Türkiye's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy” (2017), “The Dynamics of Emerging Middle Power Influence in Regional and Global Governance: The Paradoxical Case of Türkiye” (2017), “Conservative Globalism at the Crossroads: The Justice and Development Party and the Thorny Path to Democratization in Türkiye” (2009), “Globalization and Social Democracy in the European Periphery: Paradoxes of the Turkish Experience” (2007), “Contesting for Türkiye's Political ‘Center’: Domestic Politics, Identity Conflicts and the Controversy over EU Membership” (2010), “Europe and the Impasse of Center-Left Politics in Türkiye: Lessons from the Greek Experience” (2010). Prof. Öniş has published extensively on Türkiye-EU relations, including books and articles in leading journals of political science, international relations, and development

studies. His work has been widely recognized and cited, demonstrating his expertise in the field.

3. Dr. Phil. Jan-Markus Vömel completed his PhD at the University of Konstanz, Germany. Dr. Vömel could provide answers to the research interview questions due to his focus as an academic in the field of contemporary history of Türkiye. He is a German scholar and researcher of Türkiye, focusing on domestic politics in Türkiye, Türkiye's foreign policy, Türkiye and Middle East studies, and Türkiye's relations with the EU. More in-depth, Dr. Vömel is considered competent to answer the question about democratic backsliding and the deadlock in Türkiye's accession negotiations because of his expertise in the fields of European politics, democratization, and the EU's enlargement policies. His research focuses on the challenges and complexities involved in the EU's integration process, particularly with regard to Türkiye's foreign policy. His works include “Pathos and Discipline: Islamist Masculinity in Türkiye, 1950-2000”, “Die Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş. Geschichte, Ideologie, Organisation und gegenwärtige Situation” (The Islamic Community Milli Görüş. History, Ideology, Organization and Current Situation, 2023) , “AKP vs. Gülen - Partei und Gemeinde. Der Putschversuch vom 15. Juli 2016 und der Zusammenprall zweier Entwürfe des politischen Islams in der Türkei” (AKP vs Gülen - Party and Community. The Attempted Coup Of 15 July 2016 and the Clash Between Two Concepts of Political Islam in Türkiye).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study will attempt to focus on proving that backsliding as intended by the EU Council Conclusion 2018 is the main cause of Turkiye's accession negotiations coming to a standstill. This will include presenting the events that are considered to have contributed most to the unilateral decision to halt them. This study will not only actualize the normative factors that have been raised by the literature so far for the case of Turkiye's stalled accession negotiations, these factors should be better understood in the interpretation of concrete events in order to then be correlated into historical evidence.

The facts and events presented in the findings and discussion section have automatically answered that democratic backsliding in Turkiye is the main factor that caused Turkiye's accession negotiation to come to a standstill in 2018. This fact is supported by reports issued by the EU several times after the coup which empirically confirm the argument that democratic backsliding led to the negotiations ending. Furthermore, this study explores the events referred to by the EU Council conclusion and analyzes them with reference to control variables in order to gain an understanding that its decision was in accordance with the organizational rules that the EU applies to all candidate members who want to join.

4.1. Democratic Backsliding in Turkiye: The Gezi Park Protests and the Attempted Coup

According to Roberto Foa and Yascha Mounk (2016) Democratic backsliding¹¹ happens when signs indicate a turn toward authoritarianism. Democratic backsliding refers to a process where an existing democracy gradually becomes less democratic. This phenomenon involves the erosion of democratic political institutions, often through legal or institutional means, which can lead to a decline in the quality of democracy within a country (Carothers & Gropas, 2021). Backsliding may be indicated by a reduction in

¹¹ This study prefers to use the term 'democratic backsliding' because it is a common term used by much literature describing democratic decline and deterioration.

election competition, which is frequently characterized by the dominance of one party or candidate (The Economist, 2023). Repression of media freedom whether explicitly via censorship or self-censorship motivated by fear of retaliation (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2020). The executive or legislative branches takeover of the judiciary and can potentially undermine the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary (Carothers & Gropas, 2021). A reduction in electoral competition, characterized by the dominance of one party or candidate (Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, n.d.). The integrity of democratic processes can be jeopardized by the executive branch or other powerful actors (Hudson, 2021) through restrictions on fundamental rights such as freedom of speech, assembly, or the press (Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, n.d.). Democratic backsliding can be assumed to be the main factor why Türkiye's accession negotiations are at a standstill, as it has become a major concern for many scholars, leaders of member states, and the EU institution.

This phenomenon, which is marked by a decline in democratic practices and institutions, has been linked to a number of things, such as the emergence of authoritarianism and the breakdown of the political system's checks and balances. Kirişçi and Sloat (2019) identify democratic backsliding in Türkiye starting from when the AKP came to power under the leadership of Erdogan in 2002. According to them, there were several factors that influenced how democratic backsliding could emerge, including internal factors such as the political tradition in Türkiye of an acceptance of “big man rule¹²”, which erodes democratic values and applications in government structures. Within the society itself there is less attachment to liberal democracy, which contributes directly to society becoming less tolerant and freedom declining. Another loaded factor is that the failure of accession negotiations to become a member of the EU contributed externally. In addition to this, the regional geopolitical turmoil that has created security instability has also likely been a factor in triggering democratic backsliding in the country.

Türkiye does not have a track record of applying the values and norms of liberal democracy. Türkiye has not experienced freedom in every aspect of life since it became a republic in 1923. Apart from frequent coups, the influence of the military and its values on the traditions of society is very strong. The democratic values that were supposed to be implemented in the constitution for the sake of the state and nation could not compete

¹² ‘Big man rule’ is a term in the context of politics that refers to the concentration of power in an individual. This phenomenon is more easily found in non-democratic countries where a state leader has dominance and influence over all aspects of life.

with the secularism that was more strongly appreciated and the nationalism of Atatürk as a founding father. The sense of loyalty to these two elements has prevented democracy from having a greater place in the life of the state, because democracy is not a value and principle that respects the cult of one individual, but rather a sense of respect and appreciation for the rights of each individual as an object in democracy. In a democracy, everyone has the same rights and obligations, and is seen in the same light.

The value of democracy interpreted in the Turkish constitution emphasizes that the sovereignty of the state is above the sovereignty of all things even the people, meaning that the state is more important than the people. Segregation of powers provides control of power among fellow state institutions and a sense of love, patriotism and willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the state and nation. Every country is entitled to have a concept of democracy that is chosen and suitable to be applied according to the history and character of its own nation.

Democratic backsliding in Türkiye is more often categorized as a competitive authoritarian and hybrid regime. One of the primary factors contributing to democratic backsliding in Türkiye is the rise of authoritarianism under the leadership of President Erdoğan. Erdoğan, who has been in power since 2002, has been accused of gradually dismantling democratic institutions and consolidating his power through various means, including the suppression of opposition voices and the manipulation of the media (Elazazi, 2021; Metin & Morales, 2022). Türkiye's democratic backsliding is a complicated problem with many underlying causes. Important elements in this process include the emergence of authoritarianism, the disintegration of checks and balances, and the repression of civil society and media freedom.

4.2. Disproportionate Scales and Measures After the Attempted Coup in 2016

The EU Council did not take long to respond to the July 15 2016 coup in Türkiye. Two days later the council of the EU issued press release 463/16 - 18/07/2016. In this conclusion the EU condemned Türkiye's attempted coup and supported its legitimate institutions, emphasizing the importance of restraint and the rule of law. It called for respect for democratic institutions, including the elected government and the Grand National Assembly. The EU emphasized the need for democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms, including the right to a fair trial. Türkiye was a key partner for the EU, and the EU remained committed to working with a democratic, inclusive, and stable

Turkiye to address common challenges. More in depth, the EU demanded that Turkish officials, especially the police and security services, exercise restraint. Everything needed to be done to stop more violence, save lives, and bring peace back. In full accordance with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, including Protocol 13 on the abolition of the death penalty, the EU emphasized the need to preserve democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms, as well as everyone's right to a fair trial. In this regard, the EU recalled that a fundamental component of the union *acquis* is the categorical rejection of the death penalty. (Council of the European Union, 2016). In this decision, made after the coup occurred, in addition to focusing less on the events of the coup or the perpetrators who masterminded it, the council took more positions on actions that were considered overreactive and disproportionate to groups that were considered core players in the launch of the coup attempt. The content of the council conclusion was of concern to the Turkish government which considered that the EU was not fully concerned about the coup attempt and its impact on the country. Turkiye expected a sense of concern and solidarity that should have been highlighted by the EU for the victims, not the perpetrators of the coup. The leaders of the EU member states and officials did not visit Turkiye in a show of solidarity after the coup. This difference in perspective also strained relations between Turkiye and the EU and certainly had a serious impact on accession negotiations in the period before the 2018 standstill. Additionally, Erdogan has continuously dismissed EU criticism of the decline in the rule of law following the attempted coup in 2016 (Euronews, 2021).

Erdogan: "Brussel's Lack of Empathy" (Idem)

An additional subject that made the gap between the EU and Turkiye even deeper was political asylum, when European countries competed to offer asylum to members of the network of organizations considered to be the main actors behind the attempted coup. FETO¹³ (Fethullah Terrorist Organisation) members applied for asylum to other countries

¹³ FETO is a term coined by the Turkish government to label an international organization accused of being the mastermind behind the attempted coup in 2016. Initially, this organization was a community or *hizmet* dedicated to social and religious activities. It was originally one of President Erdogan's allies before the rift in 2012. This organization venerates a leader named Fethullah Gulen, who voluntarily exiled himself to Pennsylvania, the US, in 1999 and obtained a green card as a permanent resident in 2001. Among the US public, Fethullah Gulen is not widely known, but the organization itself is an internationally scaled entity with many members, sympathizers, and significant financial resources. Prior to the conflict between the government and Fethullah, the organization owned many properties and had business interests in Turkiye. When the coup attempt occurred, the government requested Fethullah Gulen's extradition, but it failed because Turkiye and the US did not have an extradition agreement. The Turkish government then urged all

in the world, such as the US, to Asian, African, and European countries. The European Asylum Agency (EASO), which has its headquarters in Malta, stated that 51,225 FETO members applied for asylum in EU nations following the July 2016 coup attempt. According to a study compiled by the agency, 6,500 members of FETO filed applications for asylum with Greek authorities (Güzel, 2019). For this stance and policy, the Turkish government and supporters of Turkiye's accession negotiations criticized European countries, which are considered hosts of democracy and the rule of law, but did not show a relevant and competent attitude toward the impact of the attempted coup that occurred in the country.

In the subsequent report, detailed within the European Commission's communication on the Enlargement Policy of Turkiye Report, issued in Brussels on November 19, 2016 (SWD (2016) 366 final), the EU strongly condemned the attempted coup of July 15, 2016, which resulted in the loss of 241 lives and left 2,196 wounded. This coup was deemed a direct assault on democracy and the state institutions. The EU reiterated its support for the Turkish people and democratic institutions in Turkiye.

The EU highlighted several actions taken by the government following the attempted coup, including the declaration of a state of emergency on July 20, 2016, initially announced for a duration of three months and subsequently extended for another three months. This emergency was issued by decree and significant changes to the legislation were introduced. Additionally, following the coup attempt, there were widespread suspensions, dismissals, arrests, and detentions based on alleged links to the Gülen movement and involvement in the attempted coup. The measures had an impact on all facets of society, although they were most felt by the military, police, gendarmerie, courts, civil service, local government, educators, attorneys, media, and business community. A number of private businesses and institutions were closed, and their assets were either seized or given to public organizations.

In this report, the EU also reminded Turkiye and its domestic authorities, as a candidate country for EU membership, to uphold the rule of law and fundamental rights with a high level of respect as an international commitment. Turkiye should establish trust and loyalty

countries where there were business networks or organizational partners of this organization to immediately extradite their members and shut down all their activities in those countries. Only a few countries complied with the government's request at that time, such as Azerbaijan, as Turkiye's main ally. However, most other countries refused.

between civil servants and the state, ensuring transparent procedures for allegations of wrongdoing. Individual criminal liability should respect the separation of powers, judicial independence, and the right to a fair trial. Measures should be taken only when necessary and proportional.

Since the EU accession talks began in 2005 until before the attempted coup in 2016, progress in opening and finalizing chapters in the accession negotiations was notably slow and had already received criticism and negative comments from the Turkish government at that time. This slowdown occurred for various reasons, including the interdependence of each chapter on others. There were no new chapters opened in the negotiations in 2011, which proceeded slowly. Due to Turkiye's noncompliance with the Additional Protocol and the Cyprus issue, the EU Council decided not to open eight chapters of the *acquis* (Congressional Research Service, 2013). When Turkiye failed to show compliance in resolving a particular case, such as Cyprus, which was always a trending topic in EU enlargement policy, the EU would block the opening of other chapters until the problematic chapter was addressed.

Erdogan has repeatedly accused the EU of treating Turkiye unfairly when it comes to its membership pursuit. He has charged that Turkiye is being purposefully excluded from the EU based more on political than on scientific grounds, and he has accused the EU of having double standards. This double standard also refers to how the EU treats Turkiye's accession compared to other candidate countries. Presiden Erdogan said “For more than 50 years, Turkiye has been awaiting entry into the European Union, while nearly every NATO member is currently a member of the EU. I am addressing these nations that have prevented Turkiye from entering the European Union for almost 50 years”. He added “Come and open the way for Turkiye's membership of the European Union. When you pave the way for Turkiye, we will pave the way for Sweden as we did for Finland¹⁴.” (Euronews, 2023). The implementation of the standstill status by the EU Council in 2018 demonstrated the failure of the EU to persuade Turkiye to adopt and implement the values and principles of democracy as stipulated in the Copenhagen criteria.

¹⁴ Finland and Sweden were the first to complete accession negotiations and were granted membership status in 1995, which took only two years for these countries to complete the accession.

Table 1: A table showcasing process tracing on the EU democratic conditionality

Year	Case	Description	Implication	EU Democratic Conditionality
2013	The Gezi Park protests	Mass protests in 2013 against government policies and authoritarianism	<p>Reports:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Department of Communications the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council 'Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2013-2014', COM (2013)700 final) 2. The European Court of Human Rights has established a commission to investigate the case in an independent 3. European Parliament resolutions issued on 13 June 2013 (2013/2664(RSP)) 	Triggered EU concerns about democratic principles and human rights
			<p>Critics:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. EU foreign policy director Catherine Ashton 2. Udo Steinbach believes that Turkiye is a deeply divided nation 3. Cem Özdemir, the co-chairman of Germany's Green party 4. Rolf Mützenich - The center-left Social Democratic Party's (SPD) foreign policy spokesman 	
2016	The attempted coup	Military coup in 2016 failed, leading to a significant deterioration in democratic norms	<p>Reports:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Council of the EU Press release 463/16 - 18/07/2016. 2. European Commission's communication on the Enlargement Policy of Turkiye 19/11 2016 (SWD (2016) 366 final. 3. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - The Impact of The State Emergency. 4. Euronews published a report on July 14, 2017. 	EU concern deepened about rule of law, human rights, and democratic norms
			<p>Critics:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cezar Florin Preda, Head of the Council's Parliamentary Assembly Delegation 2. German Chancellor Angela Merkel 3. European commission 4. A chairman of Die Linke party, Katja Kipping 5. Die Linke co-chair Bernd Riexinger 6. Gabi Zimmer a leader faction in the European Parliament Zimmer 7. EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn 8. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, foreign minister of Germany 	
2018	Standstill in accession negotiations	Turkiye's democratic backsliding influenced the EU's conditionality mechanisms	The Council of the European Union General Secretariat of the Council noted that the accession negotiations of Turkiye had come to a standstill	Ineffectiveness of EU democratic conditionality

4.2.1. The Changes After the Attempted Coup 2016

The attempted coup in Turkiye on July 15, 2016, led to a set of policies and implications that the EU considered undermined democratic principles and institutions in Turkiye. This led to Turkiye's accession negotiations coming to a standstill less than two years after the coup.

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The attempted coup gave the governing administration the boost it needed to amend the constitution and consolidate control. More than 50% of voters supported the constitutional amendment, which was intended to increase the powers of the president of Turkiye. The amendment was ratified by referendum. After the 2019 presidential election, this reform was finalized. With critics arguing that it led to one-man rule. The 2017 changes to Turkiye's constitution marked a dramatic shift in the political landscape of the nation and were known as the "Constitutional Change." The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the ruling AKP supported the amendments. By eliminating the position of the prime minister and giving the president additional and full executive responsibility (Ekim & Kirişci, 2017).

Table 2: Differences and characteristics between the constitution before and after the 2017 referendum

Parliamentary System	New Amanded Presidential System
Prime minister's office was executive and head of government.	The office of the prime minister was abolished and yielded to the office of the president who is the only chief of the executive.
As head of state, the president had few executive powers and a mostly symbolic role. The president was responsible for ceremonial duties, such as receiving foreign dignitaries and representing the country internationally. The prime	The president was essentially granted substantial executive authority, he is able to promulgate decrees with legal force pertaining to political, social, and economic matters.

<p>minister possessed most of the executive authority, hence the president had little impact on the day-to-day functioning of the government.</p>	
<p>Parliamentary elections were held in every four years.</p>	<p>The parliamentary elections were extended to every five years and held concurrently with the presidential elections.</p>
<p>The number of seats in parliament was 550.</p>	<p>After the constitutional change, the number of seats increased to 600. This change was made to reflect the country's growing population and to ensure that the parliament better represented the diverse demographics of the nation.</p>
<p>Military courts operated.</p>	<p>As part of the constitutional amendment intended to uphold the rule of law and guarantee that the armed forces are bound by the same laws as the civilian population, military courts were abolished in Turkiye. The action was perceived as a step in the direction of democratization and a reduction in the military's hold on the democratic system.</p>
<p>The minimum age to be elected was 25.</p>	<p>Lowered to 18. This is a significant milestone since it lets younger people get involved in politics and broadens the pool of possible candidates.</p>
<p>No restrictions on candidates.</p>	<p>Individuals who have ties to the armed</p>

	forces are not permitted to run for office.
No provision to suspend elections.	In a state of war, parliamentary and presidential elections may be postponed for a maximum of one year.
The parliament had ability to scrutinize ministers and hold the government to account.	Under new reform this power was abolished and ministers now have the authority to make decrees on specific topics.

Opposition parties and non-governmental organizations expressed strong opposition to the proposed constitutional amendments. The amendments, according to critics, would weaken the separation of powers and perhaps result in a one-man government by consolidating authority in the executive branch (Bora, 2017). Human rights, the rule of law, and the future of democracy in the nation were all considered to be threatened by these changes. But these criticisms had little effect, more than 50% of the Turkish population agreed to the constitutional reform in a referendum, transforming Turkiye into a country with a presidential system of governance, with centralized power vested in the hands of the president.

THE CHANGE OF EMERGENCY STATE STATUS

Initially the state of emergency was declared in reaction to the July 15, 2016, coup attempt. It was meant to provide the administration with the power it needed to deal with the current security issues and prevent more unrest. Several extensions have been made to the state of emergency. The state of emergency allowed President Erdogan to bypass parliament and suspend various rights and freedoms, giving him extraordinary powers to manage the country's response to the crisis (Euronews, 2017). The state of emergency was imposed in order to address immediate security issues, but it has also generated serious questions about governance and human rights, and its effects are still being felt on Turkiye's political scene.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner For Human Rights issued a report on the impact of the state of emergency on human rights in Turkiye in March 2018, including an update on the southeast from January – December 2017 , it explained that

the state of emergency had led to the arrest and detention of more than 160,000 people, many arbitrarily, for alleged connections to terrorist organizations, including FETO (Fethullah Terror Organization) considered to be the mastermind behind the attempted coup in 2016. Over 152,000 civil servants, including teachers, judges, and lawyers, had been dismissed without due process, often based on vague accusations. The state of emergency resulted in the shutdown of media outlets, the blocking of websites, and the arrest of journalists, severely curtailing freedom of expression. The state of emergency allowed President Erdogan to bypass parliament and concentrate power in his hands. There is a lack of accountability and transparency as a result of the emergency decrees that have been implemented without enough cause or explanation, using the state of emergency. Turkiye's international human rights obligations have been criticized as being violated by the state of emergency. Numerous serious human rights violations, the deterioration of democratic norms, economic instability, and social unrest have all resulted from Turkiye's declaration of an emergency. In response, the international community has criticized Turkiye and put pressure on its government to resolve these problems and bring back the rule of law.

According to Euronews, as published on July 14, 2017, the government had purged 103,824 state employees and suspended 33,483 since July 15, 2016. Additionally, 50,546 “suspects” were in prison as of July 3, and judicial bodies processed the cases of 168,206 people linked to the coup attempt, with arrest warrants issued for 8,000 others. Nearly 3,000 judges and prosecutors have been sacked, with almost all of them in prison. More in depth, the purge of judges has had significant and far-reaching impacts on the Turkish judiciary. The purge has brought corruption investigations to a halt, and the justice system has been crippled. Over 4,000 judges and prosecutors, a quarter of the total, have been dismissed by decree, mostly due to alleged links to the Gulen movement (The Economist, 2017). Most of the prosecutors and judges who were fired, including two members of the constitutional court, were imprisoned. Few of them have heard official charges, which suggests that the rule of law and due process are lacking, the purge has been seen as a means to consolidate power and undermine judicial independence. Judges have been dismissed and arrested without due process, and their families have been targeted as well. The same report said that Turkish authorities shut down 156 media outlets for alleged links to terrorism and revoked press accreditation for 750 journalists. During the post-coup crackdown, almost 100 journalists were imprisoned, increasing the total number of journalists behind bars to 165. In response to the failed coup, nearly 1,400 non-governmental organizations were placed under emergency closure. Additionally,

government decrees closed 19 labor unions, 15 colleges, 35 hospitals, 934 schools, and 109 dorms. Fethullah Gulen, who is currently living in the US, has been the subject of repeated requests from Turkiye for his extradition. Tensions between Turkiye and Washington, D.C. have worsened as a result of this. Since the attempted coup in 2016, the government has continuously rejected criticism from the EU on the erosion of the rule of law. In addition, the Turkish government has conducted other forcible extradition operations against suspected accomplices of the coup plotters in Central Asia, Africa, and the Balkans.

The policies and actions of the government following the attempted coup in 2016 are considered the major contributing factors to the halt in accession negotiations in 2018. This event was seen as the peak of democratic backsliding from a series of democratic backsliding events that had occurred in previous years. This peak of backsliding was not only a national event but also drew international attention from scholars, human rights activists, international organizations, and, notably, the EU. In every report issued, Turkiye has been reminded that as a country currently holding candidate status for EU membership, it is called upon to adhere to, observe, and respect any actions deemed to infringe upon individual freedoms and rights. Additionally, the EU expects Turkiye, as a candidate member, to align every step taken after the attempted coup with the Copenhagen criteria.

4.2.2. The EU's Comments and Reactions

In this section, reactions and criticisms from EU member states are presented, consisting of statements from heads of state, the EU Council, international observers, and scholars, countering the actions taken by the Turkish government that were deemed to undermine democratic principles and not in line with the Copenhagen criteria. These reactions and criticisms unequivocally demonstrate that the democratic backsliding undertaken by the government following the attempted coup in 2016 led the EU Council to issue the decision to halt accession negotiations.

THE IMPACTS OF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

After the referendum was held to ask the opinion and will of the Turkish people “yes” or “no” for the change from a parliamentary system to a presidential system, it raised reactions among various parties, especially the EU. This criticism was even consolidated among EU leaders and councils before the referendum was held in 2017. However,

foreign observers called attention to an “unlevel playing field”, and detractors warned that this will end Turkiye's stuttering attempts to accede to the EU (BBC News, 2017). In addition, before and after the referendum was held critics alleged that the attempted coup was a government fabrication to create a strong reason for changing the constitution, of course this accusation was denied by referendum supporters.

Among the most critical comments were those made by a small number of foreign observers. Cezar Florin Preda, head of the Council's Parliamentary Assembly delegation said: “Generally speaking, the referendum fell short of the standards set by the Council of Europe” (Idem). The Turkish government is considered to have undermined the fundamentals of freedom by holding a referendum, before the implementation of which the voters were considered not to have obtained impartial or balanced information. As a list of constitutional changes, the age limit of candidates, which was lowered to 18 years, was not in the ballot box for constitutional change. Criticism of the constitutional change also came from the country where the largest Turkish diaspora resides, Germany. German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned that the tight referendum outcome revealed the extreme divisions in Turkish society, which placed a great deal of responsibility on President Erdogan and the Turkish government. This criticism was complemented by the European Commission, which asked Turkiye to undertake measures with "the broadest possible consensus" in mind. It made reference to "alleged irregularities" in the voting and stated that it was waiting on the evaluation from foreign observers (Idem). A huge amount of criticism from EU leaders surrounded the referendum which was deemed incompatible with the EU and some campaigned to block Turkiye's bid to join the EU.

Germany is a highly significant and influential member state of the EU, and in addition to playing a crucial role in shaping the EU and its policies, Germany's political and economic contributions are highly valued within the organization. On March 27, 2017 the day that referendum voting began in Germany for the Turkish diaspora, Die Linke chairman, Katja Kipping played the role of an opposition party leader by promoting on her Twitter the phrase "No to Erdogan means yes to democracy and EU membership," along with the hash tags "HDP" (Peoples Democratic Party) and "No." Similar to the HDP, Kipping opposed all of the policies of Erdogan and the AKP, as well as Germany's arms sales to Turkiye, and the activities carried out in Turkiye following the coup attempt. Kipping made an ambitious appeal to the German people to boycott travel to Turkiye and demanded that the propaganda tactics of the ruling Turkish politicians in Germany be prohibited during the referendum process. In a bitter critique of Erdogan,

Kipping even went so far as to declare, "Turkiye is a beautiful country, but it will be better without Erdogan." Kipping contended that this boycott would send a clear message to Erdogan about human rights and democracy. Bernd Riexinger, another Die Linke co-chair, disagreed with the right of Turkish politicians from the AKP or its coalition to speak about the upcoming constitutional referendum in Turkiye while they were in Germany. In response, Riexinger called on the German chancellor and foreign minister to "take a stance against Erdogan's constitutional reform" and stated that the German government should not remain silent about the "Turkish government's campaign in Germany to create a dictatorship". Leader of the ultra-left GUE/NGL faction in the European Parliament, Gabi Zimmer, was also in agreement with Die Linke, the party he belonged to. In a press release issued on April 16, the day of the referendum, Zimmer sharply condemned Erdogan, alleging that the AKP manipulated the vote and that Erdogan was abusing democracy to amend the constitution to suit his own agenda (İnat, 2017).

THE IMPACTS OF STATE OF EMERGENCY

A number of political figures have highlighted the state of emergency as a step taken by the president to strengthen his position and eliminate political opponents. When this decree was issued various parties objected and it received criticism from many European leaders. Declaring a state of emergency in Turkiye concerned EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn, according to an external statement. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the foreign minister of Germany, encouraged Turkiye to respond to the coup attempt with moderation. "A crackdown of exceptional proportions" is how Amnesty International, a human rights organization, characterized the actions of the authorities (BBC News, 2016).

Johannes Hanh: All citizens, especially those who are defending fundamental rights and freedom of expression, must be treated with greatest caution when a state of emergency is declared.

With the issuance of this decree, many EU member states were worried that Turkiye's entry into the EU as a country that did not share their views on democracy and human rights standards would undermine the well-consolidated understanding among EU member states. According to Austrian Chancellor Christian Kern, Europe should reconsider considering Turkiye's potential EU admission. When he was interviewed by broadcaster ORF said: "Can we accept anybody inside the EU who violates democratic

norms, struggles with human rights, and disregards humanitarian needs and requirements pertaining to the rule of law? This is the primary question that needs to be discussed” (European Affairs Magazine, 2016). In addition to social and religious reasons, the EU member states that negatively evaluated Turkiye's membership candidate noted that the Ankara administration had failed to understand basic rights. And any measures taken by the authorities in response to post coup 2016 without consideration of human rights law and individual freedoms were unacceptable.

President Erdogan: We want the death penalty.

In the process of responding to the attempted coup in 2016, the Turkish president spoke to a crowd of supporters in Istanbul a few weeks after the coup, demanding capital punishment. The president was considered to be about to reinstate the death penalty, which Turkiye had not imposed since 1984. In 2004 the death penalty was actually officially abolished under the AKP administration as a condition for accession negotiations to begin at that time. In front of his supporters President Erdogan said: “We want the death penalty. Decisions in democracies are decided by popular vote. I believe that our government will meet with the opposition and reach a decision. We cannot wait any longer because in this nation, those who carry out a coup will have to pay the price” (CBC News, 2016). These speeches were delivered by the president in order to request the extradition of Fethullah Gulen and his organization, which was considered the mastermind behind the coup. Although this extradition request was rejected by the US and other countries, the president of the European Commission on May 31 2017 said that although the EU should carry on the accession negotiations with Turkiye, the process would undoubtedly come to an end if the death penalty was reinstated (Gotev, 2017). Every measure, policy and action taken by the Turkish government in response to the 2016 attempted coup d'état has been criticized and commented on by EU leaders, many of whom have threatened and reminded Turkiye that it was a candidate member that should always pay attention to the values and principles of democracy that are standardized by the EU. The criticism threatened termination of Turkiye's membership status because it did not comply with the Copenhagen criteria. Despite criticism and threats and even published annual reports on the progress of Turkiye's flawed democratic record by EU standards, accession negotiations are still in place although there is no talk at the time of writing of accession negotiations being reopened or being removed from the EU enlargement agenda.

4.3. The Gezi Park Protests 2013

The events that precipitated Turkiye's accession negotiations, now at a standstill, can be traced back even before the attempted coup because the accession negotiations were a series of processes that started in 2005 until the 2018 standstill. In this series of processes, many events can be cited as reasons why the EU decided to stop the negotiations. Of the many events considered to be large scale, attracting international attention and of course of Europe, the Gezi Park protests, which resulted in multiple fatalities in 2013, were prominent in the lead-up to the suspension of negotiations.

The 2013 Gezi Park incident, which demonstrated a decline in the democracy index, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and expression, was not only monitored but was criticized by the EU, which recommended the relevant authorities to take a balanced and measured policy toward the demonstrators. Since the development of democracy in Turkiye is closely monitored by the EU every year, the Gezi Park case contributed greatly to the stalling of accession negotiations.

The Gezi Park protests were originally organized by a group of young environmentalists protesting the cutting down of trees in a park called Gezi in the Taksim district of Beyoglu, Istanbul. This park was included in the government's development plan to be replaced by a shopping mall and a replica of the Ottoman-era barracks. A group of protesting environmental activists was blocked by the government, causing the protests to grow in size. This protest was not just a protest against the plan to cut down trees, which was considered damaging to the environment, but it was more colored by a form of dislike and hostility toward the current government. Political opponents and those with opposing ideologies to the government felt that before the Gezi Park events occurred, many Turkish government policies were starting to lead to the Islamization of Turkiye and restrictions on freedom of expression.

Among those protesting the Gezi Park plan were leftist and secular groups, including the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Turkish Workers' Party (TİP), and the Young Civilians, who were actively involved in the protest as a platform to disagree with the government, an opportunity to challenge the government's authoritarian tendencies and to promote democratic values. This action was also certainly used by the opposition and political opponents to gain the votes of anti-government demonstrators. Many of the

protesters were young people who felt that individual freedom and freedom of expression had been restricted by government policies. For example, LGBT people who have been marginalized and discriminated against used this protest as a platform to speak out against the government suppression of individual freedoms and rights. The Gezi Park protest was not only owned by those who had an interest in caring about the demolition of Gezi Park but was followed by many groups who made this protest a common vehicle with different interests.

In the progress report from the Department of Communications the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2013-2014, COM (2013/700 final) it was explained that protests against the urban development project in Istanbul's Gezi Park escalated in late May, involving violent protestors and excessive police force. The report alleged gross human rights violations at the time of the demonstration even though the Ministry of Home Affairs had launched an administrative investigation into whether violations had been committed by 32 police chiefs and 30 police officers, and the case file had been submitted to the court. The European Court of Human Rights established a commission to investigate the case in an independent, impartial, and effective manner involving victims and law enforcers suspected of unlawful acts.

The European Parliament resolutions issued on June 13, 2013 (2013/2664(RSP)) revealed that Turkish police used excessive violence to disperse demonstrators protesting against tree felling for the new construction project in Gezi Park. Heavy police intervention led to clashes with protesters, resulting in deaths, injuries, mass arrests, and property damage, while tear-gas was used extensively. Demonstrations in Turkiye had gained support from various societal strata, with equal participation from men and women. The government's harsh condemnation seemed counterproductive, and protests were linked to concerns over alcohol restrictions, educational reforms, minority representation, authoritarian governance, and fair trials. Mainstream media remained silent, and Turkiye must respect democracy and human rights. The resolution urged the authorities to investigate, bring responsible individuals to justice, and offer compensation to victims. It also called for the immediate release of detained protesters, unrestricted access to lawyers, and information on the exact number of detainees and injured. Additionally, Turkiye had responsibility to foster an inclusive, pluralist democracy, involving all citizens and civil society in decision-making processes, and respecting diverse views and opinions.

The Gezi Park incident, which was followed by many demonstrations, caused the government to react harshly, brutally, and aggressively. The government's reaction to the protesters was considered to have violated individual rights, the freedoms of assembly, voice, and expression and the principles of democracy. The Gezi Park incident had implications for Türkiye's accession negotiations. The opening of the chapter in November 2013 was delayed for four months due to pressure from Germany, following the excessive crackdown on anti-government protests over the construction projects in Gezi Park. (Chislett, 2014).

The Gezi Park incident damaged Türkiye's accession negotiations as evidenced by the resolutions that were issued by the European Parliament following the incident. This event was also characterized by strong protests from various European leaders. EU foreign policy director Catherine Ashton called the events aggressive and emphasized that the police approaches were a key source of concern. The European Parliament urged Prime Minister Erdogan to ease tensions between protesters and law enforcement, highlighting the freedom guaranteed by the Turkish constitution to hold peaceful, nonviolent gatherings and protests. Erdogan's softening of stance was seen by Udo Steinbach, a Türkiye expert at the Humboldt-Viadrina School of Governance in Berlin, as an effort to defuse the situation and appease foreign criticism. He believes that Türkiye is a deeply divided nation but, Steinbach continued, he did not think the debate over Türkiye's future in the EU should be revived in light of the most recent conflicts. Cem Özdemir, the co-chairman of Germany's Green party, questioned Erdogan's continued interest in Türkiye's EU membership. Özdemir was supported in holding this opinion. The center-left Social Democratic Party's (SPD) foreign policy spokesman, Rolf Mützenich, stated he believed Erdogan was starting to turn away from the EU (Lütticke, 2013).

Özdemir: Türkiye - pretends that they really want to join EU.

Erdogan expressed disapproval and resistance in response to the EU's resolution over the protests in Gezi Park. Erdogan dismissed criticism of his government's handling of the protests and accused EU members of hypocrisy and using double standards. Erdogan defended his government's actions, labeling protesters as "vandals" and comparing the forceful methods used by Turkish riot police to quell the protests to those employed previously in the US and UK. He also accused international media of spreading lies about the situation in Türkiye and suggested that Twitter, which, having earlier been written down as a "menace," was involved in disseminating false information. Erdogan's position

suggested that he had no intention of reaching a compromise with the demonstrators, the majority of whom were middle-class, secular Turks. Having won three straight elections, he stressed his democratic mandate and charged his opponents with undermining the "national will" (The Guardian, 2013). Erdogan's attitude was considered by many political observers and scholars including Marc Pierini, a senior fellow at Carnegie Europe, as aggressive, stubborn, and authoritative.

These facts are further strengthened by the fact that the imbalance in understanding the application of democratic values in Turkiye and EU standards also triggered many voices from various parties calling for the permanent closure of Turkiye's accession talks. When the protests occurred, the Turkish government was considered to have taken a number of steps and reactions that clashed with the value of democratic freedoms recognized in the EU. The arrest of protesters, activists, individuals, the use of excessive force in responding to demonstrators, restrictions on social media, lack of dialogue with civil society, restrictions on protests, and repressive actions were steps that were contrary to the values and principles that should support Turkiye's accession negotiations to become part of the EU. Germany was the most vocal country against opening any chapter of accession negotiations in a situation that could not guarantee democratic rights.

There were concerns among European countries that Turkiye's inability to adopt democratic values and principles. For the EU, the application of democratic values could not only be seen from the existence of civil society and democratic institutions such as the legislature, judiciary, executive, mass media, and elections that are directly elected by the people. The EU wanted a government that accommodated all criticism, guaranteed individual and group freedom in public places, respected democratic institutions and played an active role with civil society in creating a fair democratic climate.

Among the reports and resolutions issued by the EU regarding the violation of democracy in the Gezi Park incident, the most condemnation, criticism, and input from the EU came from Germany. All these components supported and participated along with other democratic backsliding events, eventually culminated in the accession negotiations coming to a standstill in 2018.

4.4. Academic Insights on Democratic Backsliding and the Standstill in Türkiye's Accession Negotiations

In this section, the opinions and analyses presented by several scholars who specialize in and have concerns about Türkiye's accession negotiations and democratic backsliding will be examined. The views expressed by these scholars support the argument in this study, which concludes that democratic backsliding was the factor that led to Türkiye's accession negotiations coming to a standstill in 2018. The scholars' opinions will vary, and while they may not all pinpoint the exact red lines in this study, almost all scholars agree that democratic backsliding was one of the factors that stalled Türkiye's accession talks due to discrepancies in the understanding and application of democratic values and principles in Türkiye and in EU countries.

The rule of law, independence of the judiciary, fundamental rights, and freedom of expression are all essential components of a functioning democracy. The rule of law is a fundamental principle that guarantees all people, institutions, and organizations must be subject to and be accountable to the law. It serves as the cornerstone of a system of democracy by guaranteeing that power is used fairly and openly and by providing a framework for governance. The rule of law in a democratic society means that everyone is subject to the same laws, including the government (Tommasoli, 2012).

An independent judiciary is crucial in supporting the rule of law, since it guarantees that judges can make unbiased decisions based on the law and facts, free from outside influences. Maintaining human rights and making sure the law is enforced equitably and consistently depend on this independence. It is frequently protected by constitutional provisions pertaining to things like tenure security, financial stability, and administrative autonomy. This guarantees judges' objectivity and makes them resistant to outside pressure (Préfontaine and Lee, 1998). A democratic system must include fundamental rights like the right to a fair trial. These rights are intended to safeguard people against the abuse of authority and guarantee that they receive respect and decency in treatment. The rule of law is essential to the safeguarding of fundamental rights because it guarantees that the law is administered in a manner that upholds the rights of every person (Council of Europe, 2019). One fundamental right that is necessary for a democratic society is the freedom of expression. It enables people to voice their thoughts, participate in public conversation, and hold those in positions of authority responsible. The rule of law and freedom of expression go hand in hand because they both guarantee people's ability to

engage in democracy and hold those in positions of authority responsible without fear of retaliation (Tommasoli, 2012).

Dr. Hanefi Yazıcı from the International Relations Department of Bandırma University Türkiye, explains that in answering the question as to whether the standstill in Türkiye's accession negotiations was caused by democratic backsliding as written in Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process - Council conclusions from General Secretariat of the Council, Council of the European Union on June 26, 2018 No.10555/18. He replied that the EU Commission Progress Report 2018 indicated a serious backsliding over concerns about Türkiye's record on human rights and respect for the rule of law. The EU Council was concerned about backsliding in the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, fundamental rights, and freedom of expression. And he explained that these issues had not been resolved, which led to the accession negotiations coming to a standstill.

In answering the question of what specific events the EU referred to in deciding to halt Türkiye's accession negotiations, Dr. Yazıcı answered with a broader range of points, not only highlighting that democratic backsliding continued during the reporting period, but also structural deficiencies in the presidential system remained in place and serious backsliding regarding civil society issues continued and civil society organizations faced increased pressure. Türkiye also remains at an early stage of preparation in its judiciary. Serious backsliding continued and the structural deficiencies in the judicial system remained unaddressed. Moreover, on freedom of expression, the serious backsliding continued. Broad restrictions on the activities of human rights defenders and critical voices continued to have a negative effect on the exercise of their freedoms. From the democratic backsliding points discussed by Dr. Yazıcı structural deficiencies were one of the factors that caused the accession negotiations to come to a standstill. As discussed and argued in the findings and discussion chapter, the Constitutional Change through the referendum that changed the parliamentary system to a presidential one was considered very ambitious to accommodate the continuation and strengthening of the authoritarian model of President Erdogan's government. Dr. Yazıcı's answers certainly support the findings and discussion in this study, because what he said did not contradict the facts that clearly state the correlation between democratic backsliding and the standstill in accession negotiations.

Dr. Yazıcı's statement did not outline the specific events referred to in the Council conclusion. However, other points mentioned by Dr. Yazıcı, such as violations of

freedom of expression, the structural deficiencies in the judicial system, restrictions on the activities of human rights defenders and critical voices, and manifestations of the state of emergency issued by the government through decree were the specific events referred to by the Council conclusion in 2018.

Furthermore, in order to support the answers and research findings discussed in the discussion and findings section above, supporting arguments have been obtained from Prof. Ziya Öniş an academic in international relations at Koç University Istanbul. In answering the question whether the standstill in Türkiye's accession negotiations was caused by democratic backsliding Prof. Öniş replied that there was indeed democratic backsliding in the area of fundamental rights and human rights. The Turkish government is failing to take into account the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights. This point of democratic backsliding has attracted the attention of member states of the EU and this answer is the subject of continuous criticism from key European institutions. This answer also supports the findings and discussion in this study.

As to what specific events the 2018 Council conclusion refers to, Prof. Öniş was more inclined to discuss a case involving the individual unlawful imprisonment of Osman Kavala, a civil society activist. Kavala is a Turkish businessman, philanthropist, human rights defender, and member of civil society who has been imprisoned since October 2017. In 2020, he was found not guilty after being first charged under Article 312 of the Turkish Criminal Code¹⁵ for trying to overthrow the government. He was, however, detained and found guilty once more in 2022 on the same charges, and he was given an aggravated life sentence. It can be concluded that Prof. Öniş recognizes that there are two significant violations in the area of the rule of law that have been identified: the arrest of journalists and civil society activity.

The answer raised by Prof. Öniş has a common thread with what is discussed in the discussion and findings of this study. The arrest and imprisonment of Kavala, which was carried out under the state of emergency decree after the 2016 coup, is an action and effort taken by the government that was not commensurate with the Copenhagen criteria as a standard norm and value that applies to EU membership, so the action was an example of democratic backsliding, which certainly contributed to the standstill in

¹⁵ See İncekaş (2021) the Turkish Criminal Code's Article 312 is a crucial clause that establishes the legal parameters for crimes against the government, such as violent and forceful overthrow attempts. The article covers many facets of criminal responsibility, jurisdiction, and punishment in Türkiye and is a part of a larger legal framework.

accession negotiations. In this section, Prof. Öniş argues that individual cases like Kavala received more attention from the EU in contributing to the standstill in accession negotiations. Initially, this study also examined several cases implicating individuals besides Kavala, such as Taner Kılıç, İdil Eser, Özlem Dalkıran, and many other human rights activists who were arrested following the 2016 attempted coup through decrees. However, the study contends that individual cases did not receive significant attention from the EU for several reasons, including human rights violation cases involving individuals receiving little comment and criticism from EU member states. It is believed that individual cases can occur in various countries, including within EU member states themselves. Therefore, there is not a strong basis for the EU to reference individual cases as a major contributor to the freezing of accession negotiations. Moreover, any form of human rights violation in Türkiye, no matter how small, surely receives comments from some EU leaders, given Türkiye's position as a subject of democratic conditionality.

Prof. Öniş further explained that the stagnation in Türkiye's accession negotiations had occurred earlier in the mid-2000s. When accession talks began in 2005, there was a problem that had not been revitalized by either party at that time, namely the Cyprus problem. He considered that since the accession talks began in 2005, the standstill was caused by the Cyprus problem. This was exacerbated by the record of the decline of the democracy index, manifested by many actions carried out by the Turkish government that were contrary to the Copenhagen criteria, at both national and international scale. The Cyprus problem was an issue predating the start of accession negotiations in 2005. This study did not consider the Cyprus problem as a case factor leading to the freezing of accession negotiations. This is because Türkiye's occupation of Cyprus has been ongoing since 1974, and the EU was already aware that Turkish policy toward Cyprus would not change under any conditions. It can be proven that with the start of accession negotiations in 2005, the EU did not reference the Cyprus problem as a major issue that would hinder Türkiye's membership process. Therefore, the Cyprus problem is not a contributory case referred to in the Council conclusions of 2018. Indirectly, by commencing accession negotiations in 2005, the EU signified acceptance of the current two-state solution implemented in Cyprus, even though virtually no EU member states recognize the sovereignty of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

The next answer that supports the empirical data discussed in the discussion and findings above is the refined answer from Dr. Phil. Jan-Markus Vömel from the University of Konstanz, Germany, an academic specializing in the contemporary history of Türkiye and

a Turkologist. Dr. Vömel answered the question whether the standstill in Türkiye's accession negotiations was due to democratic backsliding, although many other factors also contributed to the pause. He also included the factor of support from European countries as a factor that should be taken into account in Türkiye's accession negotiations. This answer certainly takes into account many responses that indeed argue that democratic backsliding was a key factor causing Türkiye's accession negotiations to come to a standstill. Certainly, this answer does not contradict the findings and discussions within this study.

Dr. Vömel accompanied his answer regarding what events the EU referred to with the answer in this study. The Gezi Park protest in 2013 was in general public debate in Europe and the government's response was declared authoritarian. Dr Vömel's answer certainly supports one of the discussions described in this study that after the attempted coup of 2016, another event that the EU referred to in deciding on the standstill was the Gezi Park incident in 2013. As mentioned in the discussion, the Gezi protests were not an event with national implications only, the case became a general public debate in Europe, where it was concluded that there was a lack of understanding of the principles and values of democracy as outlined in the Copenhagen criteria.

In responding to the questions posed by this study, Dr. Vömel did not directly specify which cases contributed most significantly to the freezing of accession negotiations. Instead, he tended to evaluate that Türkiye's desire for EU membership had degraded under Erdogan's leadership, which aligns with statements made by Özdemir, the co-chairman of Germany's Green party, that Türkiye pretends to want to join the EU. Although Dr. Vömel did not mention the 2016 attempted coup as a primary contributor case, when he stated that the 2013 Gezi Park protests were influential because they sparked general public debate across Europe, it is implausible that the 2016 attempted coup did not also spark general public debate in Europe, given that the coup involved larger-scale fatalities and casualties compared with the Gezi Park protests, which ranked second. For this reason, it can be determined that Dr. Vömel's answer is compatible with the findings and discussion in this study.

Based on the arguments of the scholars above, it is agreed that the democratic backsliding in Turkey under the AKP government ultimately led to Türkiye's accession negotiations coming to a standstill. The disagreement among the scholars lies in which events are considered the most significant references for the EU in contributing to the standstill. Dr. Yazıcı tends to highlight issues such as violations of freedom of expression, structural

deficiencies in the judicial system, and restrictions on the activities of human rights defenders and critical voices as causes for the standstill. Prof. Öniş prefers to focus on the individual case of Kavala and the Cyprus issue, although he does not mention why an individual case like Kavala's is considered more contributory to the standstill. Unlike the others, Dr. Vömel directly highlights the Gezi Park protest as a case contributing to the standstill, arguing that this case became a part of the public discourse in European society.

4.5. Democratic Conditionality Analysis and Constructivist approach

The selection of this theory is considered relevant for one convincing reason: this theory has been widely used by previous researchers to assess the democratic readiness of candidate countries for EU membership, which have now officially obtained membership status. Ultimately, Slovakia and Latvia, countries with democracy issues during their accession negotiations, successfully became EU members in 2004. What about Türkiye, which has undergone the longest accession negotiations in the history of candidate members? In this study, democratic conditionality is used to examine whether Türkiye complies with the democratic standards required by the EU. The purpose of this theory is to confirm that the democratic criteria set by the EU have continuously declined, and led the EU to freeze Türkiye's accession negotiations in 2018. This marked the climax of the ongoing process.

Türkiye, at its inception as a republic, was based on Kemalist ideology, which did not allow liberal democracy to develop as it would threaten the existence of Kemalist principles. Evidently, from 1923 to 1950, the country implemented a single-party system and experienced several military interventions because the overthrown governments did not adhere to Kemalist principles. Additionally, the aspiration to become part of the European community placed Türkiye in a state of uncertainty, with the majority of the country's elite unilaterally claiming that Türkiye was an inseparable part of Europe. On the other hand, Europe continued to develop with its regional organizations upholding principles of liberal democracy and human rights in various aspects of national and international life. Türkiye experienced its last coup before the AKP came to power in 1997, and the country continued to be maintained by Kemalist principles, with military interventions being accepted by society at that time. This, of course, conflicted with the

Copenhagen criteria. When Turkiye was declared a candidate for EU membership, efforts to align with the Copenhagen criteria were pursued, further strengthened by the AKP's electoral victory in 2002. As a result, with Erdogan's campaign promise at that time to pursue EU membership, Turkiye abolished the death penalty in 2004. This indicated that the EU's membership by carrot strategy was successful in one step. The conditionality required by the EU led to a positive step for Turkiye, allowing accession negotiations to successfully commence in 2005.

The democratic standards in Turkiye have been reported on annually by the EU. Since 2011, Turkiye's democracy index has shown a study of incompatibility with the democratic principles upheld by EU members. Freedom of speech and the press has been restricted, and repeated violations of human rights have occurred in Turkiye. In 2013, the Gezi Park protests erupted, becoming a major discourse in Europe and marking the first major turning point for the decline in democracy. This event garnered significant international attention, as evidenced by reports of democratic regression from the EU, EU Parliament resolutions, and condemnations from EU member state leaders and international human rights activists. This incident was followed by the attempted coup in 2016, which resulted in an even greater democratic decline. The constitutional changes through the 2017 referendum and the state of emergency status by presidential decree allowed the country to act unilaterally without considering democratic principles and human rights. It is clear that Turkiye has increasingly diverged from the Copenhagen criteria. Ultimately, these two events led the EU to impose a freeze on Turkiye's accession negotiations.

Democratic conditionality by the EU seeks to persuade candidate countries considered non-democratic by offering the prospect of EU membership. Accession negotiations serve as the vehicle to encourage these candidate countries, with the Copenhagen criteria acting as the benchmark on their journey toward the ultimate goal of EU membership. This can be demonstrated by the fact that the EU convinced Turkiye that their relationship, both before and after the coup attempt, continued to progress amid the same opportunities and challenges. As decided at the EU-Turkiye Summit on November 29, 2015, it actually started strengthening relations in important areas of mutual interest. There were high-level political discussions, as well as discussions on economics and energy. The EU commended Turkiye for its amazing efforts to house more than 2.7 million refugees from Iraq and Syria. By utilizing the perspective of democratic conditionality, the EU endeavored to dangle the prospect of full EU membership before Turkiye while

reminding it of the steps and progress it had made so far. The EU's persuasion by reminding Turkiye to pay attention to and respect the rule of law and fundamental rights was part of the EU's strategy to promote the preservation of democratic values and institutions in countries that the EU considers to be under non-democratic regimes. The original goal of the EU's democratic conditionality was to encourage political changes in Turkiye during the country's accession process. This strategy has been weakened by the standstill in negotiations, however, since Turkiye's democratic retreat is no longer connected to the country's accession process. Because Turkiye is not motivated to carry out democratic reforms in order to enhance its chances of becoming a member of the EU, this has resulted in a situation where the EU's democratic leverage has essentially become insignificant.

Turkiye is no longer motivated to pursue EU membership for several reasons. Turkiye no longer expects that joining the EU will significantly boost its economy. Turkiye views the accession negotiation process pessimistically, as it has taken an unusually long time, making the wait for membership excessively prolonged. President Erdogan has repeatedly stated that the EU treats Turkiye's accession negotiations with double standards. Ultimately, it can be concluded that the EU's application of democratic conditionality toward Turkiye has failed on two fronts: Turkiye has not complied with the Copenhagen criteria, and the EU has upheld the standstill in negotiations.

From a constructivist perspective, actors' identities and interests are influenced by their social and cultural environments, and reality is socially produced. This viewpoint places a strong emphasis on how rhetoric, norms, and identities influence how states and non-state actors interact and behave. The Gezi Park protests were a significant social and political event in Turkiye, which can be understood through the constructivist lens. However, Turkiye's government failed to address socioeconomic issues and the growing anger in Turkish society, they swiftly expanded into a larger anti-government movement. The Gezi Park protests can be seen as a manifestation of the social and political construction of reality. Beyond environmental concerns, the protests also represented a larger social unrest against the authoritarianism of the administration. A variety of groups came together to oppose the government's policies during the protests, including socialists, secularists, and environmentalists. One major reason for the protests' escalation was the government's failure to confront societal issues. The people were further alienated and became increasingly irate and frustrated as a result of the government's harsh response to the first environmental protests, which included the use of water cannons and tear gas.

This response demonstrated the government's dedication to authoritarian governance and disregard for popular opinion.

The 2017 constitutional referendum and the state of emergency status issued by decree following the 2016 coup attempt are manifestations of the social and political construction of reality. During this time, the government was in charge through decrees that had legal force behind them, bypassing the parliament and giving the executive unchecked authority. In what was clearly a deliberate attempt to preserve control over the state, the government chose to rule by decree rather than by sitting in parliament. This action was taken to counter the coup attempt as well as to reorganize the political system to support the ruling AKP. The government's rhetoric emphasized the need for stability and security, while the opposition argued for the protection of democratic institutions and human rights. The dominant discourse and norms surrounding the coup attempt and its aftermath created a context in which the government's actions were seen as necessary and justified. The social and political background also influenced the identities and interests of the actors involved in the state of emergency declaration and the constitutional changes. While the opposition was portrayed as a threat to national security, the government's measures were regarded as a defense of the state and the country. The discourse and norms surrounding the events shaped the identities and interests of the actors, further eroding democratic institutions and widening the political rift.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

To become a part of the EU is a political legacy entrusted since the country transformed into a republic under the leadership of Turkiye's first president. Since the Republic of Turkiye was founded in 1923, this mandate has been continuously passed down to subsequent leaders to align with European modernism. Modernity is European, and civilization is also European; there is no better model of social and national life than European modernism and civilization. Joining the EU is a manifestation of the state political mandate held by every leader of this country until Turkiye applied for full membership in 1987. The process from application to accession negotiations was a lengthy and turbulent journey until accession talks could commence in October 2005.

Turkiye's acceptance of accession negotiations received diverse perspectives from existing member states, especially considering Turkiye's history of territorial disputes with its neighbor Greece, despite Greece gaining membership status earlier. Under President Erdogan and the AKP's leadership, at the beginning of the AKP's governance, accelerating programs to become an EU member were among the party's primary agendas to gain public favor, leading the party to dominate Turkish politics for over two decades. However, over the past decade, there has been a noticeable degradation in the values and principles of democracy demonstrated by Turkiye, which no longer reflects a commitment to prioritize EU membership as a governmental agenda.

Since 2010, the Turkish government's non-compliance with the agreements outlined in the Copenhagen criteria has prevented the EU's democratic conditionality from persuading Turkiye to strengthen and uphold democratic principles and values in national governance, ensuring the rights and freedoms of every citizen, whether individual or group. This is despite the Copenhagen criteria being a consensus agreed upon by the current EU member states.

Many perspectives and pieces of literature argue that Turkiye's inability to join the EU and the resistance from within EU member states are rooted in societal constructs, religion, and culture that do not align with European values. Turkiye, despite being

geographically part of the European continent, is not considered a European country in terms of its societal norms and cultural practices.

Moreover, it is not just about institutional Europe, many argue that a fundamental misunderstanding of democratic values and principles between Europe and Turkiye has led to the suspension of Turkiye's accession process for several decades. This contrasts sharply with other countries that have faced fewer significant obstacles in their accession negotiations.

The bitter fruit became evident when the European Council decided to call a halt, given the democracy indices and violations of individual/group freedoms by the government. There were two triggering incidents that influenced the EU's decision on the standstill. These incidents were deemed primary factors due to their large scale and significance to the European community. The 2016 attempted coup, which involved human rights violations triggered by the government's response to the alleged coup perpetrators, was one such incident. Three years prior, the Gezi Park protests had compelled the EU to issue a resolution reminding Turkiye that honoring democratic institutions is a paramount principle in responding to demonstrators. These facts are supported by numerous studies and literature discussing empirical evidence that democratic backsliding was a primary factor causing Turkiye's accession negotiations to face a standstill in 2018. At the end, Turkiye's membership status has not experienced any forward or backward steps from either side up to this point.

APPENDIX

Khairunnas, a master student of Political Sciences

Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia, Faculty of Social Science.

Supervisor: Nia Deliana, Ph.d

Topic of thesis: Turkiye's standstill accession negotiation and Democratic Backsliding

Transcript of questions created and presented to collect data regarding the research topic of Turkiye's accession negotiation to become an EU member.

Transcript of Questions to collect data:

1. As stated in the Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process - Council conclusions from General Secretariat of the Council, Council of the European Union on June 26, 2018 No.10555/18 was the standstill in Turkiye's EU accession negotiations caused by serious backsliding in the areas of democracy, rule of law, fundamental rights and the independence of judiciary in Turkiye? If yes or no, why?
2. What specific backsliding events did the council conclusion refer to when declaring serious backsliding as mentioned in the document?
3. What steps will Turkiye take to resume these accession negotiations and achieve full membership?
4. What is your best suggestion for harmonizing the relationship between the EU and Turkiye while accommodating the interests of both parties?

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