

Türkiye–France Relations: Identity, Politics, And European Integration*

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Abstract

Turkish modernization, which turned towards the West from the late Ottoman period onwards, reflects Türkiye's desire to become part of the European political and cultural structure, a country historically often positioned as the "other" by European societies. When France-Türkiye relations are evaluated historically, the positive relations established during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent are noteworthy, but in subsequent periods, relations have mostly followed a problematic and turbulent course. France, positioning itself as one of the leading actors in the European Union, has attempted to play a decisive and guiding role in Türkiye's relations with the European Union. This study will examine the extent to which the perception of Turkish identity has influenced the attitude of France, one of the countries that has shown the strongest opposition to Türkiye's EU membership process. Furthermore, the role of Türkiye's religious and cultural structure, as well as historical and political factors such as the Armenian question and the Cyprus problem, in France-Türkiye and Türkiye-European Union relations will be discussed.

Keywords: Türkiye–France relations; European integration; identity; European Union

Introduction

France holds a significant place in Türkiye-European Union relations. As a key player within the Union, France consistently raises various issues concerning Türkiye's full membership process. This study begins with a brief history of Türkiye-EU relations. The importance of the Ankara Agreement for both sides is highlighted. Türkiye's application for membership to the European Community in 1987 and its consequences are examined. The 1999 Helsinki Summit is described as historically significant for Türkiye, and the events and problems that arose during this period are explained. Having begun negotiations in 2005, Türkiye must overcome problems that have taken on different dimensions on its path to EU membership. While Türkiye may not face significant economic challenges, it is confronted with situations it cannot change. Chief among these is the issue of identity. For centuries, Türkiye has fought against Europe with its Turkish identity, and the perception of Turks by Europeans has been one of 'threat'. Over the last two centuries, Türkiye has integrated with European civilization and developed reforms accordingly. The influence of religion and culture is also a source of problems for Europe. The European Union, a Christian structure, is hesitant to include Muslim Türkiye. The Armenian issue, which France has seriously addressed, has become a hurdle to overcome in EU relations. Finally, in the study dealing with the Cyprus issue, it can be said that France has strongly opposed Greece and the Greek Cypriot administration.

An Historical Overview of Türkiye–European Union Relations

Türkiye-European Union relations represent a long, complex, and distinctive historical process that has developed through several institutional, political, and economic stages. The symbolic words of then-Prime Minister İsmet İnönü at the signing ceremony of the Ankara Agreement in 1963, “This Agreement binds Türkiye and Europe forever and ever,” reflected Türkiye’s long-term aspiration to become part of the European integration process. This aspiration appeared to gain concrete momentum at the Copenhagen Summit in December 2002, when the European Union declared that, in line with the Commission’s report and recommendations to be prepared in December 2004, accession negotiations with Türkiye would begin “without delay” if Türkiye fulfilled the Copenhagen political criteria. With this decision, Türkiye reached an important stage in its more than forty-year journey toward EU membership. (Karluk and Tonus, 2005:1)

Signing of the Ankara Agreement (1959) and the Additional Protocol (1970)

Following the Second World War, Türkiye positioned itself within the Western bloc, particularly in response to the Soviet threat. After joining NATO, Türkiye took an important step toward closer relations with Western European institutions by applying to the European Economic Community. The historical development of Türkiye-European Union relations is therefore not only long-standing but also exceptional in terms of its political and institutional character. The first official document regulating relations between Türkiye and the Community was the Ankara Agreement. Türkiye applied for association with the EEC on July 31, 1959. Greece’s earlier application to the Community on July 15, 1959, also played an important role in accelerating Türkiye’s own application process. (Çayhan and Ateşoğlu Güney, 1996:98).

The Ankara Agreement envisaged a gradual process in Türkiye’s relations with the Community. During the Preparatory Period, Türkiye did not undertake major obligations toward the Community. However, the Additional Protocol, which initiated the Transition Period, introduced a more binding phase in the relationship. When the Additional Protocol was ratified in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, members of the Justice Party and the Republican Trust Party supported it, while members of the Republican People’s Party and the Democratic Party opposed it. The main reason for this opposition was the concern that Türkiye would not be able to meet the economic obligations required during the Transition Period (Çayhan and Ateşoğlu Güney, 1996:99).

By the late 1970s, the economic and political difficulties faced by Türkiye created serious concerns about the sustainability of its obligations toward the Community. In 1978, the Ecevit government proposed freezing Türkiye’s obligations for a period of five years and requested a new arrangement in relations with the Community. Türkiye’s demands included benefiting from preferences granted to third countries for agricultural products, removing restrictions on textiles, implementing the right of free movement, and receiving financial assistance amounting to 8 billion dollars. However, in May 1979, the Community accepted only the five-year immunity period among these demands (Çayhan and Ateşoğlu Güney, 1996:101).

Türkiye’s Application to the Community for Full Membership (1987) and the Customs Union (1995)

Türkiye’s objective of full membership became more urgent with Greece’s accession to the Community in 1981, since a possible Greek veto could create obstacles for Türkiye’s future membership prospects. For this reason, Türkiye announced that it would apply to the EC in the early months of 1980. However, the military coup of September 12, 1980 brought Türkiye-Community relations to a standstill. Relations began to improve after the 1983 elections, especially with the announcement of a timetable for the return to democratic rule. Türkiye formally applied to the European Community on April 14, 1987. This application was made in accordance with Article 98 of the Rome Treaty and Article 237 of the Paris Treaty. Importantly, Türkiye applied not merely as an “associate member,” but as a “European State.” (Güran, 2000:196)

The Commission responded to Türkiye’s full membership application in December 1989. According to the Commission’s report, the Community was not ready to accept a new member until it had completed its own internal integration process. The report also emphasized several structural issues concerning Türkiye, including its demographic structure, economic conditions, and inequalities in income distribution. (Dura and Atik, 2007)

One of the most important turning points in Türkiye-EU relations was the establishment of the Customs Union. After a difficult negotiation process, the Customs Union between Türkiye and the EU was established through Türkiye-EU Association Council Decision No. 1/95, adopted on March 6, 1995. With this decision, the 22-year transition period came to an end, and the final phase of the association process began. The Customs Union officially entered into force on January 1, 1996.

Türkiye's position within the Customs Union has been highly distinctive because Türkiye became the only country in the Union that was part of the Customs Union without being a full member. Although Türkiye does not participate in the formation of EU foreign trade policies, including customs legislation, preferential trade agreements with third countries, other agreements, decisions, and embargoes, it is nevertheless obliged to comply with decisions taken by the EU in these areas. This asymmetrical structure has been one of the most debated aspects of the Customs Union. Its positive and negative effects on Türkiye have remained a subject of discussion for many years (Dura and Atik, 2000:227). Since the EU had already completed its obligations, Türkiye became primarily responsible for fulfilling the requirements of the agreements as of 1996.

Helsinki Summit and Türkiye's Candidate Status

The collapse of the Soviet Union transformed the European political landscape and created new enlargement dynamics for the European Union. The emergence of many new states in Eastern Europe, the Black Sea region, and the Caucasus, together with their demands to join the Community, became one of the main topics of the Copenhagen Summit held on June 21-22, 1993. At this summit, the membership criteria for candidate countries were determined. Later, in 1997, the Commission published its enlargement strategy report, "Agenda 2000." However, this report did not include a clear opinion on Türkiye's membership. Instead, it emphasized that relations between Türkiye and the European Union should continue to develop within the framework of the Customs Union.

Türkiye was invited to an information meeting in Amsterdam on June 27, 1997, together with ten Central and Eastern European countries. However, EU officials did not interpret this invitation as a step that would move Türkiye from the status of "applicant country" to that of "candidate country." (Karluk and Tonus, 1999: 245-346) The Luxembourg Summit of December 12-13, 1997 was a major disappointment for Türkiye's full membership expectations. The summit decision stated that Türkiye was eligible for membership, but it also emphasized that Türkiye had to resolve the Cyprus and Aegean issues, accept minority rights, and recognize the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Türkiye strongly reacted to the Luxembourg decisions and described the EU's position as "biased and discriminatory." Although Türkiye declared that it would continue to pursue full membership, it also underlined that the future of relations depended on the EU fulfilling its own obligations. Following Türkiye's reaction, the European Union adopted a relatively softer approach at the 1998 Cardiff and 1999 Cologne Summits. The decisive development came at the Helsinki Summit of December 10-11, 1999, where Türkiye was officially declared a candidate country. The summit also stated that Türkiye would be treated on an equal footing with other candidate countries, and the preparation of an Accession Partnership Document was foreseen within this framework. (Durak and Atik, 2003:368)

Türkiye's Full Membership Negotiations (2005)

Türkiye gained a clearer perspective for the opening of full membership negotiations at the Copenhagen Summit held on December 12-13, 2002. At this summit, it was decided that Türkiye's progress in meeting the Copenhagen political criteria would be evaluated in 2004. It was also stated that if the Council issued a positive decision at the December 2004 Summit, negotiations would begin without delay. Türkiye's reform process after 2002 produced significant results at the Brussels Summit of December 16-17, 2004, where it was announced that full membership negotiations with Türkiye would begin on October 3, 2005.

The opening of membership negotiations was a highly significant development for Türkiye in both political and economic terms. Nevertheless, the process also revealed the persistence of opposition among some EU member states. During both the Helsinki Summit and the decision-making process concerning the start of full membership negotiations, Türkiye faced opposition from France, Austria, Greece, and the Republic of Cyprus. The reasons behind this opposition, including political, historical, identity-based, and strategic factors, will be discussed in later chapters.

A Historical Analysis of Türkiye–France Relations

According to Turkish history, the Anatolian Turks originated from the same roots as the European Huns from the north and northwest of China. They were displaced from their homeland due to drought during the 5th and 6th centuries. The Turks regard Attila, the Hun ruler, as a national hero. Attila launched attacks on European tribes in the 5th century, defeating and displacing many European tribes, including France, thus shaping the map of Europe as we know it today. Therefore, Attila is known by Europeans as "God's Scourge." He is depicted negatively in many novels, poems, and paintings (Kafesoğlu, 1995: 74-80).

After the Turks' acceptance of Islam, their perspective towards Europe changed, and they attempted to conquer lands inhabited by non-Muslims and convert their populations to Islam. The Byzantine Empire, which faced the

Turks in the Battle of Manzikert in 1071, suffered a defeat, paving the way for the Turks' expansion into Anatolia. The first major clash between Christian Europe and Muslim Turks in this period began with the Crusades in France in 1095. In the successive Crusades that followed until 1270, Europeans were unable to stop the Turkish advance. These wars sowed the seeds of animosity between the two religions. (Maalouf, 1984:3-18)

Throughout the 16th century, the Turkish advance in Europe continued, and the Balkans, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova began to fall under Ottoman rule. In 1526, the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent defeated Hungary, which had received European support, at the Battle of Mohács, leading Europeans to believe that the end of Christianity in Europe was approaching. The failure of the Sieges of Vienna in 1529 and 1683 changed the course of history for the Ottoman Empire, as the final siege in 1683 was a major offensive by the Ottoman Empire against Europe (Stoye, 2007:3-6). During these periods, Turks and Europeans also engaged in cultural exchanges in areas such as architecture, literature, fashion, and marriages. Although Islamic scientific culture dominated Turkish culture until the end of the 18th century, Western scientific and technological knowledge began to permeate it from this period onwards. This is evident in military, educational, and administrative fields (Günergün, 2007:192).

Among the reasons for France's positive attitude towards Türkiye's application for membership in the European Economic Community, it is possible to mention Türkiye's actions in resolving the Algerian issue. In 1958, the United Nations General Assembly was considering a resolution granting Algeria the right to self-determination. The French were making great efforts to prevent this resolution from passing. When the vote was taken, the votes for and against were equal, and the decision did not pass. Türkiye abstained from voting. Had it voted in favor, the bill would have been accepted. Türkiye's stance in this vote deeply offended Algerians, and it can be considered one of the reasons why France temporarily showed a positive attitude towards Türkiye's application for association with the EEC. (Öymen, 2003: 124)

The Council of Ministers, composed of the foreign ministers of the 6 countries forming the common market (France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg), held discussions in Brussels on September 11, 1959, regarding Türkiye's application for membership. In the speech of the then French finance minister, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, France's positive attitude is evident: "My government has no objection to the commencement of negotiations with Türkiye. I believe that a decision taken in this direction will also show that the common market cannot be a closed community dealing only with its own problems. Thus, it will be understood that it also aims to extend a helping hand to less developed countries. The community should take its first step to help countries that approach it with a liberal view..." (Birand, 2005: 32).

Identity-Based Challenges in Türkiye–France Relations

Before addressing the identity problem, it's useful to make some definitions regarding France's governance structure. Paul Delouvier describes France as a land of secrets. Pierre Hassner says France consists of two elements: republican virtues, a revolutionary tradition, and a system born of secrecy and hierarchical understanding. Therefore, it is quite difficult to dismantle the temples of secrets in France. It can be said that France has a strong military structure at its root. As General De Gaulle stated in his "Memoirs of the Savanna": "For 14 centuries, military power has been the second nature of France." According to the General, the *raison d'être* of the state has been to protect and defend nationalist sentiments. Every state can maintain its existence through this defense. Regimes in France have been nourished by this philosophy. For De Gaulle, the army has a separate place and priority. The army is one of the three inviolable foundations: the state, the army, and justice. Unlike the United States, the army has a separate importance in France, and France, with its centralized structure, is decentralized. In an interview, De Gaulle defined his own concept of honor through the lens of Latin understanding. Despite the tyrannical regimes in Latin states, General De Gaulle, speaking of thousands of commonalities, instinctively or consciously, with everything Latin, stated: "In our understanding of right, duty, and honor, there exists the idea of creating a world power from the Latins that we think, want, and that belong to us."

As General De Gaulle said, certain "concepts of honor" exist in French culture. These "honor"-based concepts have even influenced French business life. A scientific study by Philippe d'Iribarne shows that in the US, job qualifications are the determining factor in hiring, but only those who meet the job description are hired. In France, the obligation to fulfill the job qualifications becomes a matter of "honor." Proving one's worth is a matter of "honor" for the hired individual.

This subconscious approach, formed within French culture, is significant in expressing the French sense of grandeur. Because France, without considering its military capacity or economic structure, had the audacity to declare, through General De Gaulle, that "France is the second greatest power after the USA." This ego of superiority, ingrained in the national culture, has also had negative consequences for France. The influence of this

superiority complex can be seen in the formation process of the European Union, both in the admission of new members and in the policies of the Union. (Özdemir, 2008: 1)

Having come together to establish peace in Europe, the new name of the union became the 'European Union' with the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, and they reached a consensus that a cultural unification should also take place. Türkiye, on the other hand, has ruled the European continent for five hundred years in its historical process and contributed to the formation of Europe in terms of culture and identity. With its efforts towards Westernization and modernization in the last two hundred years, Türkiye has also been greatly influenced by Europe in completing its own identity. In this case, Türkiye and Europe are mutually constitutive others. (Delanty, 2005).

Today in Türkiye, the cultural dimension, a consequence of the economic and political aspects of the European Union's formation, is rarely discussed. When considering Türkiye's EU membership issue, cultural differences are more prominent than economic and political problems. In the Ankara Agreement signed in 1963 between the then European Economic Community and Türkiye, Commission President Walter Hallstein stated that Türkiye was part of Europe. However, this led people to question whether Türkiye was geographically and culturally part of Europe. For many Europeans, Türkiye is not culturally European because, according to them, Türkiye does not carry a Judeo-Christian cultural tradition. (Canan Balkır, Türkiye and the European Identity Issue) We can understand the historical process in which Turks have always been a threat to Europe from the previous section. Türkiye, always the "other," has made more intense efforts to bridge this cultural distance since the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye.

Türkiye's membership has always generated significant debate, especially for France and Germany. France has been more prominent in opposing Türkiye's membership because it sees itself as the original founder of the European Union. According to the French, Germany played a larger role in the establishment of the EU. France played a leading role in Germany's integration into the West after World War II. From Germany's perspective, it cannot be said that it always expresses its anti-Türkiye stance in harsh terms, given that it hosts many Turkish workers. France uses this argument very effectively in both domestic and foreign policy. In French domestic politics, anti-Turkish and anti-Türkiye sentiment is always used as election propaganda. It can be said that it is quite difficult for a new member to be admitted to the EU without consulting France. France, which tries to show the whole world that it has a secular system of government, brings up the religious and cultural dimensions when Türkiye's membership is on the agenda, which is prominent in anti-Turkish attitudes and in the perception of Türkiye as the "other". The fact that the main issue in recent French elections has been Türkiye's EU membership and that anti-Turkish parties and leaders have won the elections proves how much public opinion has been directed towards anti-Turkish sentiment. In other words, this situation has a feedback effect, and it can be observed that both politicians and the public mutually reinforce their anti-Turkish sentiment. It is very thought-provoking that even scholars working on Türkiye harbor such prejudices (Ayhan, 2012:268).

European identity is a matter of shared geography, history, culture, and religion, produced over centuries, and it is a supranational identity. Due to the dominance of national identities, the European Union has still struggled to create a common European identity. Although more than half of Europe is a member of the EU, we cannot say that they sing the European anthem with great pride. It can be said that the formation of an American identity is difficult to achieve in Europe. Especially large countries like France, with their historical past and traditional structures, find it difficult to accept this. Although the European Union strives to create a European identity - European Day, European anthem, European flag, etc. - achieving this integration is seen as a very long process (Fukuyama, 2006:17).

Similar debates about European identity were seen when the European Union signed the Athens Treaty with Greece for full membership. The Greek people, who define themselves as heirs to Hellenic culture, claimed that they were not European. However, Europeans also did not see Greece as European because of its Orthodox faith. The government of the time supported the Europeanization process of the European Union because Greece was seeking to become a strong actor in Europe within this process.

Cultural and Religious Dimensions of Türkiye–France Relations

Although France possesses significant knowledge of its relations with Muslims due to its occupation of many North African countries in the 19th and 20th centuries, Muslim immigrants in France are relatively recent. The 1950s and 60s were the period when the main wave of Muslim immigration began, particularly with the migration of temporary farmers from North African countries such as Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia to France, which further accelerated this process. Even in the early 1970s, the French viewed Muslims with a highly orientalist eye, judging by their colorful clothing, diverse fruits, and spicy foods. In later periods, especially in the 80s and 90s, the image of Muslims living in France shifted more towards "barbarism" and "the other," and this "understanding" was further reinforced by the large increase in the immigrant population, particularly the families of temporary workers who brought their families to France. North African Muslims have been victims of general prejudice, labeled as

"arrogant" and "intolerant." Moreover, the struggle of opposition groups against oppressive governments in North Africa has been linked to terrorism and Islamist ideals. Wherever the issue of immigration is discussed, the words "Muslims" and "integration" are always mentioned together (Brown, 2004).

In France, within a secular structure, it can be said that the Muslim community is increasingly becoming part of the French community. This is reflected in the rise of both Muslim leaders and French far-right politicians. For example, the Vanguard Nationalist party created a poster suggesting that France would become Muslim by 2020. With an estimated 5 million Muslims, France is considered the second largest religion after Catholicism. The fertility rate of women from Muslim countries is still above the national average in France. Over the last 20-30 years, there has been a gradual increase in Muslim votes in France. It can be said that in recent years, French politicians have made some promises to win Muslim votes, but it is difficult to say that there has been a decrease in anti-Turkish sentiment because the majority of Muslims living in France are of African origin. (Laurence, Jonathan, 2006)

The Muslim population in France is heterogeneous, in contrast to the Turkish Muslim population in Germany. However, there are approximately 400,000 Muslims of Turkish origin living in France, including those from North African countries such as Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, as well as from Middle Eastern countries such as Lebanon, and West African countries such as Ivory Coast, Senegal, Niger, Chad, Congo, and Ghana. These people, mostly from countries that were former French colonies, brought with them feelings of resentment and hatred resulting from the torture and mistreatment they suffered at the hands of the French during the colonial period. In addition, it is necessary to emphasize the existence of problems arising from friction between the two cultures during the long adaptation process, since they come from very different cultures.

Dr. Djelloul Seddiki, the head of the Al-Ghazali Institute affiliated with the Great Mosque of Paris, and also a writer and academic, states that Türkiye's policies in recent years have deeply affected Muslims of Arab origin in France. Arab Muslims support Türkiye's EU membership and believe that, in the event of full membership, Türkiye will protect the rights of Muslims living in Europe. In other words, French citizens of Arab origin want Türkiye to become an EU member, believing that it will bring significant benefits to them. (Ayhan and Dalar, 2001:121)

Indeed, many French citizens of Arab origin interviewed in Paris closely follow Türkiye's domestic and foreign policies. Türkiye's policies regarding Israel and Palestine, in particular, have increased their interest in Türkiye. This situation has led some French people to worry that Türkiye could exert influence over the Muslim population in Europe. Seddiki, stating that Muslims in France support Türkiye's EU membership, personally supports Türkiye's return to good relations with the Middle East and Muslim countries, as it was during the Ottoman era. He expressed optimism about Türkiye forming a strong union with Muslim countries in the region. Seddiki stated that the only country that would fear and be apprehensive about Türkiye's entry into the EU is France, and especially Sarkozy, emphasizing that right-wingers in France generally do not want Türkiye to join the EU. While expressing that Türkiye's inclusion in the EU would be very good, Dr. Seddiki said it would be excellent for all Muslim communities living within European borders, but he favors Türkiye developing its relations with Muslim countries in the region. He added that Türkiye would create a very strong structure and cooperation in the Middle East, and that he personally believes Türkiye is the strongest country in that region. (Ayhan and Dalar, 2001:121)

The French are concerned that if Türkiye becomes a full member of the European Union, they will experience cultural erosion due to the wave of migration from Türkiye. Therefore, it can be said that cultural problems outweigh economic problems.

During the drafting of the European constitution, there were debates about whether or not to include a reference to religion. Some bureaucrats explicitly wanted the Judeo-Christian tradition to be included. Others demanded that the European Union be defined as a community of Christian values. Such a definition in the constitution could have been a complete veto against Türkiye's full membership. However, it would not be normal for an EU founded on universal values to make such a reference. This approach contradicted the EU's founding articles, which advocate pluralism and diversity. (E.J. Zürcher, H. Van der, 2007:44). In France, when asked about Türkiye's membership in the European Union, people first mention cultural reasons, not economic or political ones. This clearly shows that culture is the first element that comes to mind.

One of the tests Europe faced regarding the issue of religion in relation to Muslims was the events in Bosnia. The European Union was late in intervening in the war. This, of course, did not escape the notice of the Eastern world. This also created an identity problem: the question of whether Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim communities could coexist within the same country. Europe's answer to this question was no. This was the final step in a process that began with the conquest of Spain. This drama in Sarajevo was an indicator of Europe's failure in the area of multiculturalism. The European Union will have difficulty succeeding unless it aims for a multicultural structure. (Delanty G, 2005:197-198) By including Türkiye, the European Union would improve its image in the Muslim world and pave the way for the end of the idea of a clash of civilizations.

The Armenian Question as a Historical and Political Issue

The Armenian question, which includes the opening of borders with Armenia as well as the Armenian genocide allegations, is increasingly becoming a hurdle for Türkiye, especially during the EU membership process.

The Armenian question holds a separate place in France. France had supported Armenians during the Ottoman Empire and made promises to them after World War I. However, after the struggle against the occupying forces in Türkiye, France quickly reached an agreement with the Ankara government and withdrew from Türkiye, failing to fulfill its promises to the Armenians. Nevertheless, French public opinion had convinced itself that Armenians were being persecuted in Anatolia. During this period, Armenian churches stated that the Christian world, especially Western states including France, did not support this situation. It can be said that France felt a sense of guilt regarding the Armenian question (Laçiner, 2004: 71-72).

After World War I, a significant Armenian migration to France can be mentioned. The Armenians who migrated here, due to their knowledge of French and their trade, quickly rose in French society, making it easy for them to bring the Armenian question to the forefront and keep it on the agenda. Today, Armenians are mentioned in many areas, from media to politics. In the 1970s, France's inaction in the face of terrorist attacks against Turkish diplomats strained relations with Türkiye. Turkish diplomats were most frequently attacked in France. These events increased feelings of animosity between Türkiye and France. In the 1980s, Armenians supported the PKK terrorist organization, and France became a country harboring supporters of terrorism.

When Türkiye's candidacy for the European Union was being discussed, Armenians used this situation to demand recognition of the Armenian Genocide. (Bilal, 2000:380)

On November 8, 2000, the French Senate recognized the Armenian Genocide. Following this, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on November 15, 2000, stating that it "invites the recognition of the genocide suffered by the Armenian minority before the establishment of the modern Turkish state." A parliamentary report from the same date mentions the importance of Türkiye developing good relations with all its neighbors, and calls for the lifting of the embargo against Armenia and the resumption of diplomatic and trade relations with Armenia. Another report from 2004 calls not only on the Turkish government but also on the EU Commission and the EU Council to recognize the "genocide" and open its border with Armenia as soon as possible. Thus, the Commission and the Council, which have the authority to make binding decisions regarding candidate countries, were warned to take action on this matter (Arslan, 2010:250). It can be said that the European Parliament has frequently raised this issue.

The report dated September 25, 2006, entitled "The Parliament's Position on Türkiye's EU Candidacy," states that Türkiye's unjust and unjustified embargo against Armenia is still in effect. It is noted that this situation not only prevents Türkiye from fulfilling the accession conditions but also threatens stability in the region. The resolution adopted by the Parliament on October 18, 2007, regarding Türkiye-EU relations, expressed regret over Türkiye's continued "economic embargo," its keeping its borders closed, and its threats to its neighbors with military operations. While it is true that the border between Türkiye and Armenia has been closed by Türkiye, characterizing this as an "economic embargo" is incorrect. Furthermore, Türkiye is not threatening its neighbors; rather, it is fighting terrorism. However, considering that this resolution, clearly determined by a few individuals and imposed on others, aims at "manipulation" and "pressure" through political mechanisms, the accuracy of its content is irrelevant.

French socialist Pierre Moscovici, while noting that Türkiye has not yet met the Copenhagen criteria, also objected to the imposition of new conditions, stating that it should be treated equally with other candidate countries. Austrian socialist Hannes Swoboda argued that Türkiye's membership is in the EU's interest, and also stated that he supports adding a statement to the decision that Turkish authorities should explicitly acknowledge the Armenian "genocide." Daniel Marc Cohn-Bendit, a member of the Greens and also the European Free Alliance, said that accepting Türkiye as a candidate was a very correct decision, adding that it is very important for Türkiye to recognize the "genocide," that Türkiye should confront its past, and that the Parliament should discuss the issue of genocide. (THE "ARMENIAN ISSUE" IN EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Deniz ALTINBAŞ). Türkiye's refusal to open its border crossing with Armenia and establish diplomatic relations is being used by the Armenian lobby within the EU. Armenia frequently brings Türkiye's obstacles to the EU platform and requests that the EU pressure Türkiye. However, these efforts by Armenia and Armenian groups in France have not always yielded results within the EU because the relationship between the EU and Türkiye operates with stronger dynamics. Nevertheless, it is thought that France always keeps the possibility of utilizing these factors as much as possible when Türkiye's EU membership is at stake (Laçiner, 2004:73).

The Cyprus Question in Türkiye–France Relations

Following the July 15, 1974 coup against the Sampson government in Cyprus, France's stance on Türkiye's Peace Operation in Cyprus was to inform Türkiye, both directly and on behalf of the EEC, which held the rotating presidency at the time, that a ceasefire should be initiated and a constitutional order should be urgently restored. Foreign Minister Sauvagnargues believed that the Cyprus problem was the first time the EEC had acted collectively and effectively in the political sphere. The declaration of the Turkish Cypriot Federated State on February 13, 1975, and the granting of authority to President Rauf Denktaş by the Turkish Cypriot Constituent Assembly on September 22, 1975, to declare independence unilaterally if necessary, further intensified France's reaction. President Giscard d'Estaing, during a visit to Greece in September 1975, stated that "...no right can be gained through faits accomplis..." On the same date, French President Giscard d'Estaing stated that France would protect Greece against Türkiye if necessary. Harsh comments in the French press, along with Greek and Armenian opinions, negatively influenced French public opinion against Türkiye. (Soysal, 1984: 1022)

France virtually erased Türkiye from its books due to the Cyprus operation. While the reasons for this may include personal ties between French President Giscard d'Estaing and Greek leader Karamanlis, it could also be due to Türkiye moving away from the French axis and closer to America, because France wanted Türkiye to be under its control due to the relations inherited from the Ottoman Empire. In addition, the Greek and Armenian influence in the French press was quite high at that time, making it difficult for Türkiye to explain itself. (BATU, 1995: 35)

The Cyprus issue is the obstacle that France will put forward for Türkiye's EU membership. The European Union, stating that Türkiye should find a solution to the Cyprus problem, has actually made this problem more difficult and intractable by admitting the Republic of Cyprus to the EU. Because the Republic of Cyprus, along with Greece, has gained significant veto power over Türkiye. The Republic of Cyprus and Greece have largely used France to negatively impact relations between the European Union and Türkiye. The Greek Cypriot administration is not seeking a solution to the problem, and both the Greek Cypriot administration and France are well aware that reaching the end of the established path will strengthen Türkiye's hand in its relations with the EU. The EU has not provided a satisfactory explanation as to why Cyprus should be admitted to full membership only after recognizing the representation of the Greek Cypriot side, without a solution to the Cyprus problem. (Topur, 2002:371).

Conclusion

Türkiye–France relations have become increasingly contentious since Türkiye's application for membership in the European Union. France has opposed Türkiye's full membership by referring to several factors, including Türkiye's economic structure, population size, the Armenian question, and the Cyprus issue. However, beyond these political and economic concerns, the question of identity appears to be one of the most significant factors shaping France's position. Türkiye's Muslim and Turkish identity has often been perceived as a source of anxiety within French and broader European debates on EU enlargement.

France's opposition to Türkiye's EU membership can also be understood within the context of geopolitical interests. A strong Türkiye located in Anatolia and active in the Middle East may be regarded by France as a challenge to its regional and international influence. At the same time, France seeks to benefit from Türkiye's large market while maintaining political reservations about its full integration into the EU. The Armenian question has also been used in French domestic politics and as a diplomatic instrument in relations with Türkiye. Nevertheless, considering Türkiye's demographic, economic, and strategic importance, relations with Türkiye remain highly significant for France.

Since 1959, identity has been one of the central issues in Türkiye–EU relations. Although Türkiye's recognition as a candidate country in 1999 was expected to reduce these debates, questions of culture, religion, and civilization continued to influence the accession process. While the European Union has attempted to construct a supranational identity based on shared values and standards, Türkiye has sought to become part of this European framework despite its historically complex relationship with Europe. Therefore, Türkiye should continue to strengthen its cultural presence in France and across Europe in order to improve its image. At the same time, Türkiye's commitment to EU standards should not be seen merely as a way to satisfy European expectations, but also as an important process for its own political, institutional, and social development.

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