

---

## Original Article

# Of context, interaction and temporality: Historical institutionalism and Turkey's approach to the ENP and the UfM

H. Tolga Bolukbasi\* and Saime Ozcurumez

Department of Political Science, Bilkent University, 06800, Ankara, Turkey.

E-mails: bolukbasi@bilkent.edu.tr; saime@bilkent.edu.tr

\*Corresponding author.

**Abstract** Why is Turkey's approach to EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) more cautious now after a period of active cooperation in their shared neighbourhood? How can such reversal be explained despite parallels in the interests of the EU and Turkey in their shared neighbourhood and complementarities in their policy instruments used to advance these interests? This article evaluates the explanatory power of rational choice, sociological and historical institutionalism in comparative politics in addressing these questions. On the basis of qualitative case study evidence including interviews with key stakeholders, it concludes that historical institutionalism, with its emphasis on context, interaction and temporality, is better equipped than rational choice and sociological institutionalisms at accounting for Turkey's changing foreign policy choices concerning the ENP and the UfM.

*Comparative European Politics* (2011) 9, 524–542. doi:10.1057/cep.2011.15

**Keywords:** historical institutionalism; context; temporality; European Neighbourhood Policy; Union for the Mediterranean; Turkey

---

## Introduction

Despite a consensus on the mantra that 'institutions matter', there has been a *battle royale* in comparative politics concerning epistemology and ontology among institutionalisms. Recently scholars plead for a truce suggesting that we should enquire 'how they complement one another, where they contradict one another, and what they contribute to our knowledge of political social reality' (Schmidt, 2010, p. 48). This study addresses the puzzle as to why Turkish foreign policymakers' approach the European Union's (EU) two external relations instruments – the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the



Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) – addressing their shared neighbourhood rather cautiously in the current period after Turkey had been actively pursuing an agenda of cooperation with the EU on this front until 2007. Such policy choice is puzzling because foreign policy interests of Turkey and the EU in the region in the 2000s continue to run in parallel with complementarities in policy instruments. Then why did Turkey change course with respect to her approach to EU's new instruments even after a period of active cooperation?

This article aims to evaluate the relative explanatory powers of rational choice institutionalism, sociological institutionalism and historical institutionalism (henceforth RCI, SI and HI, respectively) through a case study of Turkey's changing approach to the ENP and the UfM. It adopts the 'zero-order competitive' research design proposed by Jupille *et al* (2003) whereby each theory is evaluated 'against a null model of random effects without controlling for the variables in the other theory' in order to learn 'something about the scope ... of each theory's predictions, where the overlap occurs, and thus where they are observationally equivalent or distinct'. It does so as this design has the greatest potential for advancing competitive dialogue in cases where the explanatory factors employed by each theory are largely uncorrelated (Jupille *et al*, 2003, pp. 25–29). Since each variant of institutionalism has its own set of priors, conceptions of institutions and actors, and explanatory principles, the 'zero-order competitive' research design is the most suitable for a 'discriminating test' of these variants. Therefore this study aims to start a debate by making extrapolations from three competing institutionalisms for the case at hand. Through a competitive test, it shows that RCI and SI fail to predict Turkey's changing approach towards these policies and concludes that it can best be accounted for by HI relying on historically oriented methods. It demonstrates how the interaction between institutions representing stability and not-so-stagnant contexts in real time explains outcomes as much as institutions *per se*. At the same time, this is a case where temporality, another HI insight, plays a central role. We cast our arguments, however, without prejudging the fact that other variants of institutionalism may be better equipped for entertaining certain types of substantive research questions than others.

This study addresses the puzzle why Turkey's approach to the ENP and the UfM changed from supportive to cautious in 2007 after President Sarkozy's invitation to Turkey to join the 'Mediterranean Union' (MU) (subsequently renamed UfM) instead of membership to the EU. It reveals that in the first period (1999–2007), policymakers, operating within the parameters of the institution of Westernization, linked their supportive stance for the UfM to serving the goal of full membership to the EU given the positive context. In the second period, however, informed by the same institution, they have opted for a reserved attitude as the new negative context meant that behaving otherwise would only impair Turkey's full membership prospects. Thus the



main argument of this study is that context, interaction and temporality – best captured by HI – structures Turkey’s shifting approach to the ENP and the UfM.

Designed as a case study, this article relies on qualitative case study methods. In addition to using historical methods, it relies on empirical evidence based on 85 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (leading figures from major political parties, business associations, labour unions, civil society groups, bureaucracy, and key experts in research institutions and observers in the media) on their approach (from 1999 to the current period) to Turkey–EU relations conducted in 2008.<sup>1</sup>

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The second section reviews the rationale, objectives and content of the EU’s new external relations instruments, which aim to instigate domestic change in the EU’s neighbourhood without promising accession. The third section summarizes the western orientation of Turkish foreign policy and shows that there exist parallels in foreign policy interests and complementarities in policy tools of Turkey and the EU in their shared neighbourhood. The fourth section shows that the expectations of RCI and SI in the direction that Turkey would act in parallel with the ENP and the UfM are not borne by the historical record. The fifth section examines the case through the lens of HI by demonstrating how context and temporality together with institutions determine outcomes. The last section concludes by specifying caveats to our conclusions.

### **EU’s New Instruments of External Relations: Europeanization without Accession**

The EU launched the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) in 1995 to introduce social, economic and political change in the Mediterranean followed by the European Security Strategy and the ENP, which aimed at remedying the weaknesses of the EMP in the wake of the fifth enlargement. Increasing emphasis on eastern partners in the ENP was counterbalanced with the re-launching of the EMP under the Barcelona Process: UfM in 2008. These new instruments of external relations were devised to maintain the EU’s claim for regional influence without over-expanding the capability-expectation gap in external relations. They aim at instigating domestic change (read, Europeanization writ large) in the EU’s neighbourhood without the usual carrot of membership. Despite the challenges they are facing, these policies have found their way into the Lisbon Treaty (Article 1 paragraph 10). In this section, we review the rationale, objectives and content of these policies so as to demonstrate in the following section the parallels between these and those of Turkish foreign policy.



The ENP was launched with the Commission's communication on 'Wider Europe' followed up by a 'Strategy Paper on the European Neighbourhood Policy' in 2004. The policy addresses countries of the Mediterranean and the eastern neighbours of the enlarged EU. Its overall objective is to reinforce 'prosperity, stability and security in the neighbourhood' by offering neighbours 'a privileged relationship, building upon mutual commitment to common values' of democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy and sustainable development. It aims to facilitate reform to remedy common challenges on 'prosperity gaps, migration, crime, environmental issues, public health, extremism and terrorism'.<sup>2</sup> The ENP is 'membership neutral' as it forecloses the option of accession aiming at engendering Europeanization without accession – a framework that is more than cooperation but less than membership.

The UfM evolved into an EU foreign policy tool after MU, its initial incarnation, faced mixed reactions from member states. It involves the 27 EU members and 16 partners in the Southern Mediterranean and the Middle East. It emphasizes governance, visibility and implementation of projects with a set of priorities addressing environment, transportation, education and business in the Mediterranean. It also aims at providing a platform for bringing together Israel, Palestine and Syria for resolving conflicts in the region. This instrument, too, envisions Europeanization in the Mediterranean without EU accession through establishing 'special relationships'. Although the Paris Summit concluded that the UfM 'will be independent from the EU enlargement policy, accession negotiations and the pre-accession process',<sup>3</sup> many observers claimed that it was invented to preclude membership to Turkey (Emerson and Tocci, 2007; Balfour and Schmidt, 2008).

### **Turkish Foreign Policy: Westernization, the ENP and the UfM**

This section shows that, first, the main institution shaping Turkey's foreign policy choices remains Westernization anchoring Turkey to the West through full membership to the EU. Second, it demonstrates that foreign policies of Turkey and the EU were increasingly compatible until about 2007 due to their shared interests and policy instruments in their shared neighbourhood.

For more than half a century, Turkish foreign policymakers saw EU membership in its 'broader civilizational context, bringing Turkey closer to Western civilization in line with the republican ideals of modernization and Westernization' (Eralp, 2009, p. 152) with foreign policies anchored in 'Western orientation' (Bilgin, 2009). The ruling political elite – left, right and centre – have come to view EU membership as a vehicle 'for becoming part of the European civilization which Atatürk espoused',<sup>4</sup> a 'concrete expression



of the project of modernization Ataturk introduced',<sup>5</sup> 'a civilization project, a peace project, a project of justice',<sup>6</sup> 'the grandest project of our foreign policy',<sup>7</sup> and 'a project our state is committed to'.<sup>8</sup> Thus EU membership 'features prominently in the official and embedded "state policy" that hardly any government may dare change' (Esen and Bolukbasi, 2008, p. 177). Such strong views on Westernization-cum-full EU membership mean not only that policymakers categorically rule out any alternative to full membership, but also that it has come to constitute an 'institution', that is 'sets of regularized practices with a rule-like quality' (Hall and Thelen, 2009, p. 9), in Turkey's foreign relations.

In line with 'regularized practices' of Westernization, Turkey's foreign policy interests in her neighbourhood and the instruments used to advance those interests have increasingly become parallel to those of the EU especially since the early 2000s. While keeping its western orientation there were signs that the geographical focus of Turkish foreign policy was beginning to expand already in the early 1980s when Turkey began to interact more intensively with her neighbourhood. Since then Turkey's relations with her neighbours had been influenced by the maxim of 'zero problems with neighbours'. In the 2000s, Turkey's focus on the neighbourhood was accentuated by a new policy idea – 'strategic depth' (Davutoglu, 2001) – through which Turkey's foreign policy became more proactive towards her neighbourhood.

In terms of Turkey's changing foreign policy interests in her neighbourhood, such renewed focus on Turkey's (mostly southern and eastern) neighbours was so frequently underscored that many claimed, either with anxiety or exultation, that Turkish foreign policy was in a process of re-orientation. Many saw this as a 'tilting' of Turkey's 'foreign policy axis' towards the Middle East at the expense of its Westernization bias. Most of the politicians, policymakers and experts interviewed, however, affirm the continuity in Westernization as an ordering principle of Turkish foreign policy. As former President Demirel summarizes, Turkey's foreign policy interests in her neighbourhood lie in 'establishing a circle of stability and prosperity around Turkey' where 'democracy, pluralism, rule of law, and market economy would prevail'.<sup>9</sup> Referring to parallels in Turkish and EU foreign policy interests, President Gul emphasizes that 'peace and stability' in the region were the 'common concerns' of Turkey and the EU and that based on 'common interests', Turkey, 'as a candidate country at a very special geographic location will constitute an asset in the implementation of the EU's neighbourhood policy'.<sup>10</sup> Referring to Turkey's neighbourhood, a high ranking diplomat adds that Turkey 'in common with the EU, pursues the goals of stability, security and, of course, prosperity in this region'.<sup>11</sup> Turkey's official position presented in the detailed screening process in 2006 resonated these views: Turkey 'is determined to contribute actively to the promotion of democracy, stability, prosperity and



security in this region and beyond' and 'sees the ENP as an element of stability and prosperity'.<sup>12</sup> As they both aimed at becoming 'soft power' in their neighbourhood (Benli Altunisik, 2008 for Turkey and Sjursen, 2006 for the EU), Turkey's approach to the ENP and the EMP had remained rather supportive in the post-Helsinki period. Such support was also manifest in the increasing alignment with CFSP declarations as reflected in the regular Progress Reports only until 2007 after when alignment declines.

In terms of the policy instruments, Turkey had been increasingly relying on a toolkit that is complementary to those used within the context of the ENP and the UfM until 2007. In fact, Turkey's official position towards EU's new instruments had been until then that she 'appreciates the ENP as a tool' (ibid.). Similar to the EU's toolkit, Turkey relied on instruments therein promoting domestic political and economic reform: first, with a view to enhancing prosperity in the region Turkey had been promoting goods market integration with her neighbours, which is reflected in almost a seven-fold increase in the volume of trade with these partners between 1995 and 2007 (Kirisci, 2009). Second, as part of her efforts at increasing stability and security in the neighbourhood, Turkey facilitated resolution of regional conflicts in the Middle East by encouraging Syrian-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. Turkey also pursued a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council, and upon election, President Gul stated that 'Turkey will continue assuming an influential role in the resolution of the problems to restore peace, stability and tranquility in our region' (Hurriyet Daily News, 18 November 2008). In addition, Turkey plays a leading role in international institutions addressing her neighbourhood such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the Organization for Islamic Conference. Turkey has also been taking steps towards rapprochement with Armenia and resolving the Cyprus issue. Moreover, Turkey extends democratic assistance through TIKA (Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency) to countries in her neighbourhood. It is in this context that Turkey's proactive engagement with her neighbourhood in parallel to EU's engagement with this region may be interpreted as a strategic move aimed at advancing Turkey's goals of full membership in the EU through pursuing goals and using instruments complementary to those of the EU.

Owing to reasons discussed below, however, there was a reversal of thinking among policymakers from 2007 onwards. Foreign policy actors started to view the ENP and the UfM as initiatives potentially relegating Turkey to the ranks of 'less than membership'. The tipping point in 2007 was Sarkozy's proposal that Turkey should become a member of the MU as he did 'not believe that Turkey belongs in Europe' and wished instead 'to offer Turkey ... a true partnership with Europe, it is not integration with Europe' (Agence France Press, 20 September 2007).



## Variants of Institutionalisms and Turkey's Approach to the ENP and the UfM

Three institutionalist approaches, RCI, SI and HI, crystallized around the mid-1990s (Hall and Taylor, 1996). While these approaches agree on the view that institutions matter, they differ with respect to their priors, views on the nature of institutions and actors, and explanatory principles. This section extrapolates the RCI and SI arguments to the case of Turkey's approach to the ENP and the UfM.<sup>13</sup> As there exists no application of RCI or SI to the case under study, it largely reconstructs how these would approach the research question and make *ex ante* predictions accordingly. It shows that while emphasizing different logics of action, RCI and SI would arrive at similar conclusions that Turkey would emphatically support the ENP and the UfM.

### RCI and Turkey's approach to the ENP and the UfM

RCI focuses on how rational actors, pursuing their interests based on exogenously determined preferences within incentive structures (read, institutions), follow a 'logic of instrumentality' or 'logic of calculation'. RCI scholars would begin with the axiom that actors rationally pursue their self-interests and derive a testable hypothesis that can then be used to help explain and/or predict specific outcomes. Strategic interaction would take place under institutional constraints defining the incentive structure within which actors operate. Any foreign policy decision, therefore, would be explained by 'calculating' the costs and benefits of expected outcomes within a decision-making context constraining foreign policy behaviour. As policy preferences and interests are exogenously given, RCI would study the incentive structure foreign policymakers find themselves in. Given Turkey's revealed preferences for membership to the EU, policymakers would have to solve the equation of how to maximize foreign policy interests conditional upon the incentive structure of Westernization. Such maximization process would involve a calculation whereby expected gains from partnership with the ENP and the UfM would be measured against the expected costs associated with that decision.

Neo-liberalism and neo-realism, which rely on the premises of RCI, would expect Turkey to cooperate with the EU should expected gains of doing so exceed potential costs. For neo-realists, states engage in alliances only to ameliorate their individual positions by counterbalancing threats from other states. Therefore Turkey would own the ENP and the UfM if doing so would serve maximizing power and/or security. For neo-liberals, Turkey would participate in cooperative schemes as doing so would bring, for example, economic gains as a result of trade liberalization and (regional) integration in





a world of complex interdependence. Hence Turkey would see these policies as institutional solutions for reaping the benefits of expanding markets in the region without having to bear unilaterally the political costs of market making. Among the imputed opportunity costs of non-alignment with the ENP and the UfM, first, Turkey would need to bear the social, economic and political costs of pursuing her objectives in the neighbourhood as a single actor. Acting as a model for liberal democracy promoting peace, stability and prosperity by acting as donor and investor may result in overburdening Turkey. Second, Turkey would forego a larger policy package involving a more diverse set of instruments otherwise unavailable. Third, Turkey would have passed a critical opportunity to act with the EU on an important foreign policy initiative, which covers a region where she also has interests. Hence the balance sheet of the potential gains and opportunity costs points to acting in parallel with the ENP and the UfM, which contradicts the current state of affairs after 2007.

### **SI and Turkey's approach to the ENP and the UfM**

SI sees institutions as 'socially constituted' and 'culturally framed' with agents acting according to a 'logic of appropriateness' and 'senses of identity' emphasizing 'rule-governed action' that follows from culturally-specific norms (March and Olsen, 1998). Norms, according to SI, 'constitute the identity of the actors: they do not constrain their behaviour, but also constitute their worldview and preferences' (Sjursen, 2002, p. 492). SI would expect that Turkey's approach to the ENP and the UfM would be determined by the legitimacy and appropriateness of Turkey's decisions as a 'good citizen' of the international community rather than by any utilitarian conception of self-interest. SI would view Westernization-*cum*-full membership as an institution that would constitute a normative and cognitive framework shaping Turkey's identity and interests through socialization and internalization. Normatively, 'socialization' would ensure that the values and norms representing the ENP and the UfM (liberal democracy, prosperity, stability) would be 'internalized' by Turkey. Therefore Turkish foreign policymakers would behave according to their 'ethical-political' sense of duty and obligation as structured by the relationship between Turkey and the EU, which would be defined on the basis of Westernization (Sjursen, 2002, p. 502). Cognitively, Westernization-*cum*-full membership would provide a 'cognitive script' or 'model' (informing foreign policy ideas of 'zero problems with neighbours' and 'strategic depth') determining Turkey's foreign policy direction. Turkey would conform to the ENP and the UfM as they would constitute institutionally prescribed behaviour because they correspond to a 'routine' in Turkish foreign policy. Accordingly Turkey's approach to the ENP and the UfM would be studied as a case of





how an institution ‘constructs or constitutes what states want or ... what they are’ (Finnemore, 1996, p. 338).

Given these two mechanisms, SI would predict that, first, ‘when preferences are sufficiently homogenous’ such as in the case of Turkey’s foreign policy goals and those of the EU as reflected in the ENP and the UfM, it would be ‘in one’s self interest to get along rather than be seen as a deviant’ (Rhodes *et al*, 2008, p. xvi). Given the parallels in policy preferences in their shared neighbourhood, Turkey would conform to the institutionally stipulated action of cooperation which is ‘culturally necessary and “appropriate”’ (Finnemore, 1996, p. 338). Second, as the Westernization process would be institutionalized even further through the accession process, Turkey would be morally committed to the *acquis* (Chapter 31 under ‘political cooperation’) in conformity with her newly acquired norm-based identity. Moreover, as SI sees foreign policy as being about ‘defining rather than defending national interests’ (Finnemore, 1998, p. ix), scholars would explore how interests are constructed through a process of social interaction. Policymakers interact with their environment whereby shared norms, experiences and discourses help define mutual interests. In this environment, states are seen as ‘a community of rule followers and role players’ whose identities ‘are molded by social interaction and experience’ (March and Olsen, 1998, p. 952). Therefore SI would expect Turkey to act in parallel with the ENP and the UfM even after 2007 because it would expect continuity in cooperative behaviour.

## HI: Turkey’s Approach to the ENP and the UfM

The foregoing discussion suggests that RCI and SI would yield predictions that contradict the empirical record since 2007. This section traces the historical process through the lens of HI, which directs our attention to the interplay of institutions and contexts determining temporally specific outcomes. It demonstrates that the case at hand, which involves historical processes and strong contextual effects, is best handled by HI (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002; Steinmo, 2008).

### Context and interaction

A major distinguishing feature of HI is that it ‘analyze[s] macro contexts and hypothesize[s] about the combined effects of institutions and processes rather than examining just one institution or process at a time’ (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002, p. 696). In order to build credible causal explanations, scholars in HI tradition invite us to be ‘attentive to the interaction between causal



mechanisms and the context in which they operate' (Faletti and Lynch, 2009, p. 1144). They draw our attention to the interplay of institutions operating in, and shaped by, overarching contexts by explicitly specifying the places and dates that they focus on. They spell out clearly the mechanisms of interaction between institutions and the contexts they are embedded in. They pay particular attention to the 'scope conditions' in a given empirical terrain showing how it is the interaction between the mechanisms and the context that determines outcomes. It is thus their sensitivity to conditional variables that affords HI its comparative advantage in showing how the impact of institutions is heavily mediated by the context they are embedded in.

In determining what aspects of a particular context would be relevant to the outcome scholars' research strategy relies on tracing the historical process. We observe that while EU–Turkey relations have always been characterized by ebbs and flows, an 'exogenous shock' around 2007 soured the relations by redefining the context within which Turkish foreign policymakers make their choices regarding the ENP and the UfM. This 'tipping point' was Sarkozy's proposal for the MU/UfM. By offering membership in the UfM as a gambit, Sarkozy was trying to shift Turkey from the ranks of a candidate for full membership down to a member of a framework of regional cooperation – or so was the perception of Turkish policymakers. The message, as put by Emerson and Tocci (2007, p. 3), was taken as 'Dear Turkey, I do not want you in the European Union, but why not instead join us as a major player in the Mediterranean Union'. It sounded as 'the most credible' version of the otherwise implicit vows by Merkel and other European leaders who wanted to deny Turkey full membership by offering instead a 'special relationship' or 'privileged partnership'.<sup>14</sup> By marking the beginning of a new context this exogenous shock changed the background conditions (that is context) in which the relationship between the institution of Westernization and Turkey's approach to the ENP and the UfM was reconfigured. Sarkozy's proposal played a central role in defining this new context (despite a reserved attitude by the Commission) as Turkish policymakers still believed that 'individual EU countries continue to maintain high national profiles in the region than the sum of countries that the EU purports to be' (Ulgen, 2009, p. 21). This is an example of how the starting point of a new context was marked by 'decisions made by political actors, often with proper names' (Faletti and Lynch, 2009, p. 1155). Such change in the contextual conditions represents an example of 'major historical disjunctures in noninstitutional background variables', which would 'affect change in the dependent variable' (Lieberman, 2001, p. 1022).<sup>15</sup>

Such contextual change occurred against a background of institutional continuity in the institution of Westernization-*cum*-full membership defining mainstream politics.<sup>16</sup> Thus the change in the outcome (Turkey's caution



towards the ENP and the UfM) was a result of an exogenous shock (Sarkozy's proposal) marking the end of one context and beginning of another. Hence change in the outcome resides not in the relationship between Westernization and Turkish foreign policy approach towards the ENP and the UfM, but in the contextual variables that are extraneous to both the institution of Westernization and the outcome: the implications of the ENP and the UfM for Turkish foreign policymakers were different in the context of constructive interaction (pre-2007) than that of the negative one (post-2007). Thus the present study shows how 'depending on the nature and attributes of ... contexts, the same causal mechanism could result in different outcomes' as conceived in the HI tradition (Faletti and Lynch, 2009, p. 1161).

### Temporality

A second feature that distinguishes HI's research strategies from those of other institutionalisms is that scholars '*take time seriously*, specifying sequences and tracing transformations and processes of varying scale and temporality' (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002, pp. 695–696). While HI is 'institutionalist', it is the qualifying adjective that differentiates these works from others across the fence. History enters into the HI narratives through several ways.

#### *Establishing causality*

Timescapes are of crucial relevance to HI within which 'causal mechanisms' are studied (Faletti and Lynch, 2009, p. 1145). Once an association is identified between variables, theoretically grounded assertions of causal relationships necessitate the specification of the temporal order of cause (input) and effect (output) as they unfold over time. As applied to the case at hand, one reason why researchers focus on the sequence of historical events is to identify the temporal order of the input (Turkey's long-established orientation of Westernization), the output (Turkey's approach to the ENP and the UfM) and the exogenous variable that marks the beginning of a new context (Sarkozy's UfM proposal ruling out Turkish membership prospects). The temporal order of the input, output and the contextual change is as follows: As an institutional feature of Turkish foreign policy, Westernization precedes all other variables concerned and remains stable throughout the period under study (1999 – present). Around 2007 the context within which Turkey's foreign policy behaviour regarding the EU are taken changes with Sarkozy offering Turkey a seat in the UfM instead of the EU. It is only after this turning point, do we observe a change in Turkey's behaviour towards the ENP and the UfM.

These observations on the sequencing of the input, the contextual change and the output, therefore, lead us to concur with Faletti and Lynch (2009, p. 1161)



that ‘the causal mechanisms by themselves do not cause outcomes to occur; rather, the interaction between causal mechanisms and context does’. This means that the institution of Westernization-*cum*-full membership in the context preceding Sarkozy’s intervention (between 1999 and 2007) lead Turkish foreign policymakers to support the EU’s initiatives in their shared neighbourhood. However, the same institution leads to a cautious approach to the ENP and the UfM after the exogenous shock changing the parameters within which foreign policymakers make their decisions after 2007. In this way, analysing the sequences of events helps us interpret the variation in the output (from support to caution towards EU’s neighbourhood policies) as resulting from the interaction of the institution (Westernization) and the context (which is characterized by a change from one of supporting Turkey’s full membership to another of relegating her to the ranks of less than full membership). Therefore, the sequence of events shows that, it is the interaction of the institution of Westernization with the new context that produced a different outcome than any other that would materialize in an alternative context.

### *Path dependence*

Agents in HI accounts follow a ‘logic of path dependence’ – ‘dynamics of self-reinforcing or positive feedback processes in a political system’ that ‘reinforce the recurrence of a particular pattern in the future’ (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002, p. 699). Once in motion, these feedback mechanisms create self-reinforcing dynamics in the sense that once actors have followed a particular path, it becomes difficult to reverse it as previously available alternative paths become unavailable. Historical institutionalists study timing and sequence as self-reinforcing processes precisely because these processes, by ‘playing out over time in political and social life, transform the consequences of later development’ creating irreversibilities (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002, p. 701).

As argued above, because Turkish foreign policymakers equate acting in parallel with the ENP and the UfM as accepting an option less than full membership in the present context, they would feel compelled to do otherwise given the structuring impact of the institution of Westernization-*cum*-full membership. In doing so, they follow a ‘logic of path dependence’ – once they had followed an institutionalized path of Westernization-*cum*-full membership, it becomes difficult to deviate from it when alternative paths emerge. In fact, opting for these alternative paths might have seemed even more attractive for policymakers as expected gains of doing so would have exceed potential risks. Moreover, this scenario may have been more compatible with foreign policymakers’ new policy ideas of ‘strategic depth’ adding to potential gains even more. However, as the present case study demonstrates, although acting together with the ENP and the UfM may jibe better with these new ideas, for



policymakers, doing so in the current context would amount to a path departure from the main orientation of Westernization. Unless the conditions specified in the concluding section materialize, the current consensus among stakeholders implies that the new ideas of ‘strategic depth’ (*read*, a de-emphasis on Westernization) would not be strong enough to derail the institutionalized trajectory of Turkish foreign policy towards full membership.

Path dependence works through two mechanisms: first, through a functional mechanism where once Westernization-*cum*-full membership is in place, ‘actors adapt their strategies in ways that reflect but also reinforce the “logic” of the system’ (Thelen, 1999, p. 392). The self-reinforcing positive feedback mechanisms led all stakeholders categorically adapting their strategies towards supporting EU membership after 1999. Politicians do so, for example, as their support for EU membership not only appeals to masses and broadens electoral base in domestic political competition but also helps establish credibility in the eyes of foreign audiences (Esen and Bolukbasi, 2008). Second, through a distributionary mechanism, institutions ‘reflect, ... reproduce and magnify particular patterns of power distribution in politics’ and their ‘policy feedbacks actively facilitate the organization and empowerment of certain groups while actively disarticulating and marginalizing others’ (Thelen, 1999, p. 394). Thus as the EU has a ‘make-or-break effect’ on Turkish politics, the power of actors who support EU membership are more likely to increase in political competition. Moreover, even those who are known for their euro-sceptic attitudes moderate their discourses on EU membership as their attitudes would determine whether they would be considered mainstream or marginal. As a result of these feedback mechanisms, preferences of actors were realigned so as to constitute an unequivocal consensus on full membership and therefore any other type of relationship between Turkey and the EU has been viewed as a deviation from the full membership path. Since the ENP and the UfM, as of 2007, represented a departure from this long-established path as such, any approval by domestic actors of this option was foreclosed from the beginning.<sup>17</sup>

### **Incremental changes and threshold effects**

HI aims not only at establishing the specific timing of particular outcomes, but also identifying the structural preconditions for these outcomes to occur. Scholars analyse outcomes in a longer time frame because some processes may occur only incrementally and/or be subject to threshold effects whose impact may materialize only in the longer run. Thus, historical institutionalists study long-term dynamics in order not to miss dimensions, which may seem insignificant in the short term yet whose impact on a particular outcome may



be visible only subsequently. Thus, as Pierson (2004, p. 2) argues we should be 'shifting from snapshots to moving pictures', which means 'systematically situating particular moments (including the present) in a temporal sequence of events and processes stretching over extended periods', or in other words, placing 'politics in time'.

This study aimed at first identifying the specific timing of particular outcomes by shedding empirical light on the incremental dynamics of the more-than-half-a-century of relations between Turkey and the EU. The way Turkish policymakers interpret the ENP and the UfM can only be explained by inquiring into the *incremental dynamics* of the relationship between Turkey and the EU. An analysis of the history of the relationship clearly points to the fact that except for the 1960s during which the seeds of the relationship had been sown and a brief period after 1999 when candidacy status was offered to Turkey, the EC/EU had displayed an ambivalent attitude to Turkey. After the launching of accession negotiations in 2005, the relations had grown sourer as Turkey became an 'easy target' for misgivings in the wake of and after the fifth enlargement (Eralp, 2009). In fact, given member state governments' 'strong preferences against Turkish membership', which 'could have stopped the process at every stage', the decision to open accession negotiations was 'puzzling' for many (Schimmelfennig, 2009, pp. 415 and 429). While the average processing time for application for membership has gone down to as short as 5 years as in the case of the fifth enlargement, the Turkish saga of more than half a century of sitting in the waiting room exasperated policymakers.<sup>18</sup> Therefore the trajectory of the relationship between Turkey and the EU incrementally accumulated a negative view, which compelled stakeholders to treat initiatives concerning Turkey with caution.

Second, this study also aimed at identifying the structural preconditions for the reconfiguration of the relationship between Westernization and Turkey's approach to the ENP and the UfM through analysing the outcome within a longer time frame. When Sarkozy proposed Turkey membership in the MU/UfM, such exogenous shock could have been read by Turkish foreign policymakers as yet another hurdle in the long history between Turkey and the EU. After all, some stakeholders reported in the interviews that they had been accustomed to by now to 'moving targets' on this journey to the extent that this is perceived as 'business as usual'.<sup>19</sup> However, reactions were different this time. First, as it was heavyweight France that was tabling this proposal, and second, as the initiative represented the ultimate concretization of otherwise vague proposals of 'special relationship' or 'privileged partnership', it was viewed by stakeholders as the last straw on the camel's back.<sup>20</sup> Such shock that marked the beginning of a new context represented a 'tipping point' where 'the cumulative cause finally passes a threshold and leads to a rapid change in the outcome' (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007, p. 351). It is passing



through this threshold that led to a change in the context of EU–Turkey relations whose interaction with the institution of Westernization resulted in Turkey’s cautious approach to the ENP and the UfM. In a nutshell, therefore, by tracing the incremental dynamics of the long-term relationship between the EU and Turkey and identifying instances of threshold effects therein this study points to the independent causal power of extraneous influences on Turkey’s approach to the ENP and the UfM.

## Conclusions and Caveats

This article addressed the puzzle as to why Turkish foreign policymakers approach the ENP and the UfM rather cautiously from 2007 onwards despite explicit parallels in the interests of the EU and Turkey in their shared neighbourhood and complementarities in their policy instruments used to advance these interests. After having shown that RCI and SI would expect scenarios that are not borne by empirical evidence, it shows that Turkey’s approach to the ENP and the UfM can best be explained by HI drawing attention to four main issues. First, HI compels us to analyse the dynamic interaction of the institution of Westernization with the changing context of EU–Turkey relations. Second, it encourages us to search for the self-reinforcing positive feedback mechanisms where the institution of Westernization-*cum*-full membership caused path dependence even when more attractive alternatives emerge. Third, it points to the significance of incremental processes, which imparted on policymakers a sceptical view of EU’s moves influencing their decisions. Fourth, it emphasizes that identifying tipping points with threshold effects, such as Sarkozy’s proposal in 2007, is central to analysing long-term historical processes. These insights from HI, therefore, explain Turkey’s changing approach towards the ENP and the UfM by highlighting the fact that Turkish policymakers would like to see themselves as a ‘host’ of the policies addressing their neighbourhood they share with the EU (their perception before 2007) as opposed to a ‘guest’ sitting on the other side of the fence (as was the case after 2007).

On the basis of the evidence from this case study, we concur with all stripes of institutionalists that institutions do matter in determining social and political outcomes; they do so, however, only through their interaction with the context and this is where we differ from those that overlook this point. Outcomes will partly bear the imprints of institutions as long as they indeed remain regularized as in the case of Westernization leading policymakers follow their paths.

While scholars of HI would refrain from predicting outcomes (Steinmo, 2008), two caveats, the first one concerning external and the second domestic





factors, are in order which may lead to path departure. First, this study suggests that a potential change in the context towards a positive mood and interaction between Turkey and the EU would highly likely result in Turkey acting in parallel with the ENP and the UfM. Conversely, should the current context of negative mood and interaction persist, Turkish policymakers may permanently dissociate themselves from pursuing the objectives of the ENP and the UfM together with the EU. The interaction of this new context with the existing institution of Westernization may produce an even irremediable strain on EU–Turkey relations.

Second, this study assumes that Turkey’s foreign policy would remain to be firmly locked-in into the track to EU membership. In an alternative scenario, rising to power of programmatic ideas such as ‘strategic depth’ may incrementally cause path departure from the Westernization institution. Such process may amount to what Streeck and Thelen (2005) refer to as institutional change through ‘layering’. By setting in motion new dynamics, these ideas, while not directly denting the existing institution of Westernization, may ‘actively crowd out or supplant by default the old system as the domain of the latter progressively shrinks relative to that of the former’ (Streeck and Thelen, 2005, p. 24). Such process may transform Turkey’s current cautious approach into a permanent disengagement from cooperating with the EU on the ENP and the UfM, and Turkish foreign policymakers may pursue a key role in the region entirely independent of the EU. Whichever of these scenarios unfolds in the medium term, therefore, it will shape not only Turkey’s approach to the policy instruments of the ENP and the UfM but also the future between the EU and Turkey – a future afflicted by a strained history and an unaccommodating context.

## About the Authors

**H. Tolga Bolukbasi** is professor of political science at Bilkent University. His current research interests include institutionalisms, Europeanization of political economies, and comparative welfare states and labour markets. He has published articles in journals such as *Journal of European Public Policy*, *European Political Science* and *Current Politics and Economics of Europe*.

**Saima Ozcurumez** is professor of political science at Bilkent University. Her research interests include comparative politics of immigration, asylum, gender, health and diversity in Europe and North America. She published in *European Political Science*, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* and co-edited *Of Rights and Social Closure and Theory, Empirics and Politics of Asylum, Statelessness and Migration* (in Turkish).



## Notes

- 1 General findings on stakeholder attitudes towards Turkey–EU relations were presented in Esen and Bolukbasi (2008).
- 2 [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/faq\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/faq_en.htm) (accessed 14 November 2009).
- 3 [www.euractiv.com](http://www.euractiv.com), 14 July 2008 (accessed 11 November 2009).
- 4 Interview with Onur Oymen, Deputy Chairman of the Republican People's Party (RPP), Member of Parliament (MP) and former Undersecretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6 June 2008.
- 5 Interview with Cemil Cicek, Deputy Prime Minister and former Minister of Justice, former Minister of State, Justice and Development Party (JDP) MP, 29 May 2008.
- 6 Interview with Suleyman Demirel, Former President, former Prime Minister, and former True Path Party MP, 10 July 2008.
- 7 Interview with Mevlut Cavusoglu, Chairman of the European Council Parliamentarians Assembly, JDP's Deputy Coordinator for Foreign Relations, 20 June 2008.
- 8 Interview with Sevket Bulent Yahnici, Former Deputy Chairman of the Nationalist Action Party (NAP), former chief of cabinet of Devlet Bahceli, and former Nationalist Action Party MP, 7 June 2008.
- 9 Interview with Suleyman Demirel (see endnote 6).
- 10 Interview with Abdullah Gul, President, Former Member of Parliament, former Prime Minister, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and former JDP MP, 1 July 2008.
- 11 Interview with Zergun Koruturk, Deputy Undersecretary for European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27 June 2008.
- 12 Presentation by Turkey on the 'Participation in CFSP/ESDP', Chapter 31 Detailed Screening Process, October 2006.
- 13 For earlier accounts from the EU's perspective drawing on RCI and SI for explaining enlargement in general, see Schimmelfennig (1999). For a similar account focusing on Turkey's accession, see Camyar (2009).
- 14 Interview with Oguz Oyan, Member of RPP Party Assembly, 28 May 2008. Other key politicians who emphasize similar points include Onur Oymen (see endnote 4), Cemil Cicek (see endnote 5), Suat Kiniklioglu, Speaker of Parliamentary Commission on Foreign Relations, Deputy Chief of Foreign Relations of JDP, 5 June 2008; Mehmet Dulger, former Chairman of Parliamentary Commission on Foreign Relations, former JDP MP, 6 June 2008; Yasar Yakis, Chairman of Parliamentary Commission on EU Harmonization, Co-president of EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Commission, former Foreign Minister, Deputy Chairman of JDP Responsible for Foreign Relations, 23 May 2008.
- 15 *Nota bene* the difference in terminology in characterizing moments of change between those in contextual variables ('historical disjunctures in noninstitutional background variables') and others in institutions themselves ('critical junctures'), which represent situations of 'relatively long periods of path-dependent institutional stability and reproduction that are punctuated occasionally by brief phases of institutional flux' (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007, p. 341).
- 16 Policymakers' statements like 'no one can dare to state that s/he is against the EU' were frequent in the interviews including those with Cemil Cicek (see endnote 5), Oguz Oyan (see endnote 14), Onur Oymen (see endnote 4) and Sevket Bulent Yahnici (see endnote 8).
- 17 There is a united front against any proposal for less than full membership among the stakeholders interviewed. For example, Cicek scorns: the EU is 'deceiving Turkey with an indecent proposal' to use her as a 'concubine rather than an official spouse' (see endnote 5).
- 18 In fact, 73 out of 85 stakeholders interviewed refer to 'double standards' or 'hypocrisy' in portraying the EU's attitudes to Turkey.

- 19 Interviews with Yasar Yakis (see endnote 14), Onur Oymen (see endnote 4), Oguz Oyan (see endnote 14), Ali Bayramoglu, JDP MP and former Chairman of MUSIAD (The Association of Independent Industrialists and Businessmen), 3 June 2008.
- 20 Moreover this proposal was made just after the EU had refused to open a chapter in June 2007 due to French opposition and before France demanded the exclusion of the term 'accession' in the paragraph concerning Turkey from the Presidency Conclusions in December 2007. These actions enraged even TUSIAD (The Association of Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen), an ardent supporter of Turkish accession. (Interview with Zafer Yenil, TUSIAD's Secretary General, 4 June 2008).

## References

- Balfour, R. and Schmidt, D. (2008) Union for the Mediterranean, disunity for the EU. *EPC Policy Brief*, February.
- Benli Altunisik, M. (2008) The possibilities and limits of Turkey's soft power in the Middle East. *Insight Turkey* 10(2): 41–54.
- Bilgin, P. (2009) Securing Turkey through western-oriented foreign policy. *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40: 105–126.
- Camyar, I. (2009) On temporal determinants of European Union enlargement: The case of Turkey's accession. *Comparative European Politics* 7(2): 233–254.
- Capoccia, G. and Kelemen, R.D. (2007) The study of critical junctures: Theory, narrative, and counterfactuals in historical institutionalism. *World Politics* 59: 341–369.
- Davutoglu, A. (2001) *Stratejik Derinlik*. Kure: Istanbul.
- Emerson, M. and Tocci, N. (2007) A little clarification, please, on the 'Union for the Mediterranean'. CEPS Commentary, 8 June.
- Eralp, A. (2009) The role of temporality and interaction in the Turkey–EU relationship. *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40: 149–170.
- Esen, A.T. and Bolukbasi, H.T. (2008) Attitudes of key stakeholders in Turkey towards EU–Turkey relations. In: N. Tocci (ed.) *Talking Turkey in Europe*. Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, pp. 175–197.
- Faletti, T.G. and Lynch, J.F. (2009) Context and causal mechanisms in political analysis. *Comparative Political Studies* 42(9): 1143–1166.
- Finnemore, M. (1996) Norms, culture, and world politics: Insights from sociology's institutionalisms. *International Organization* 50(2): 325–347.
- Finnemore, M. (1998) *National Interests in International Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Hall, P. and Taylor, R. (1996) Political science and the three new institutionalisms. *Political Studies* 44(5): 952–973.
- Hall, P. and Thelen, K. (2009) Institutional change in varieties of capitalism. *Socio-Economic Review* 7: 7–34.
- Jupille, J., Caporaso, J.A. and Checkel, J.T. (2003) Integrating institutions: Rationalism, constructivism, and the study of the European Union. *Comparative Political Studies* 36(6): 7–40.
- Kirisci, K. (2009) The transformation of Turkish foreign policy: The rise of the trading state. *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40: 29–58.
- Lieberman, E.S. (2001) Causal inference in historical institutional analysis: A specification of periodization strategies. *Comparative Political Studies* 34(9): 1011–1035.



- March, J.G. and Olsen, J.P. (1998) The institutional dynamics of international political orders. *International Organization* 52(4): 943–969.
- Pierson, P. (2004) *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Pierson, P. and Skocpol, T. (2002) Historical institutionalism in contemporary political science. In: I. Katznelson and H.V. Milner (eds.) *Political Science: State of the Discipline*. New York: W.W. Norton, pp. 693–721.
- Schimmelfennig, F. (1999) The Double Puzzle of EU Enlargement. Oslo, Norway: ARENA. Working Papers no.15.
- Schimmelfennig, F. (2009) Entrapped again: The way to EU membership negotiations with Turkey. *International Politics* 46(4): 413–431.
- Schmidt, V.A. (2010) Reconciling ideas and institutions through discursive institutionalism. In: D. Beland and R.H. Cox (eds.) *Ideas and Politics in Social Science Research*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 47–64.
- Sjursen, H. (2002) Why expand? The question of legitimacy and justification in the EU's enlargement policy. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40(3): 491–513.
- Sjursen, H. (2006) The EU as a 'normative' power: How can this be? *Journal of European Public Policy* 13(2): 235–251.
- Steinmo, S. (2008) Historical institutionalism. In: D. della Porta and M. Keating (eds.) *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 118–138.
- Streeck, W. and Thelen, K. (eds.) (2005) Introduction: Institutional change in advanced political economies. *Beyond Continuity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–39.
- Thelen, K. (1999) Historical institutionalism in comparative politics. *Annual Review of Political Science* 2: 369–404.
- Ulgen, S. (2009) Turkey's route to the EU may be via the Middle East. *Europe's World* 11(Spring): 19–22.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.