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Turkey and Non-Membership of the European Union: Issues, Prospects, and Challenges

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Abstract:
This paper on "Turkey and Non-membership of the European Union" explores the issues, prospects, and challenges that seem intractable in Turkey's accession to European Union (EU). The paper adopted secondary sources (books, journal articles, internet materials, dailies, monographs, etc.) for data collection. The findings were analyzed using content analysis while anchoring on the integration theory, which served as its theoretical framework of analysis. It was discovered that religion and cultural identity, weak economy, demographic nature, and other reasons constitute the principal challenges impeding Turkey's membership application into the EU. The paper also revealed that Turkey is a member of NATO and its geographical location and military strength appears to favour NATO's interest in the Middle East.
Nevertheless, her illegal occupation of Northern Cyprus has strongly complicated negotiations for her membership in the EU. Findings revealed further that the uncontrollable and controversial issues had negatively impacted Turkey and the European Union in areas like political, security, economic, social, and humanitarian needs of the people. Therefore, this study regrettably observed that the relationship between Turkey and the EU appears to remain a distant prospect in the unknown future. This is why the paper recommends that the EU should adopt the modernisation of Ankara's agreement and a gradual integration model as a mechanism to enhance a better working relationship with Turkey even if both parties later fail to marry together.

Keywords: Non-membership, European Union, gradual integration, issues

1. Introduction

Turkey, officially known as the Republic of "Türkiye", is a country that occupies a special geographical spot. Turkey is a giant peninsula that connects the continents of Europe and Asia (Yapp, 2022). It is surrounded on three sides by the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Aegean Sea. Istanbul is the largest city in Turkey and is characterised by a mountainous presence. Studies show that Turkey has been an associate member of the European Union (EU) since 1963 and an official applicant to European Union membership for many decades. Lippert (2021:267) added, "Turkey has always been a special as well as difficult case in the situation of EU enlargement." On 14th April, 1987, Turkey applied to officially join what was then the European Economic Community (EEC), and in 1999 it was declared eligible to join the EU. Turkey's involvement with European integration dates back to 1959 and includes the Ankara Association Agreement (1963) for the progressive establishment of a Customs Union (ultimately set up in 1995) (Tocci, 2014).

The Republic of Türkiye has remained closely aligned with the West from the time when it became an independent country in 1923. It adhered to the Council of Europe in 1949, became a full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in 1952, and an associate member of the Western European Union (WEU) in 1992 (Littoz-Monnet and Penas, n.d). Tocci (2014:1) recalled that:

> Turkey appears to be one of the essential countries for the European Union. The importance of Turkey for Europe is firmly established by history dating back to Ottoman times. This could be through war, diplomacy, commerce, art, cuisine, or intermarriage. As a result, Turkey seems to be an integral part of Europe's history. For many centuries, the relationship between the two was characterised by cooperation and convergence – for instance, the deep economic, cultural, artistic, and societal exchanges between the Ottoman Empire and European powers and city-states in the fifteenth through to the seventeenth centuries.

Thus, the principal aim of the Turkish foreign policy is to integrate Turkey into the European Union. For many decades Turkey's efforts to join the family of the European Union appeared unsuccessful. Regrettably, such membership is considered a strategic objective lying within the external challenges ahead of the Turkish foreign policy. Therefore, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmad Dawood Oglu, believes that joining the European Union is a strategic priority that cannot be renounced (Alahmed *et al.*, 2015).

In 1989, the European Commission rejected Turkey's application for membership because of severe democratic deficiencies. However, the door to Turkey's EU entry was not shut. Modebadze and Sayin (2015:1-2) hinted that:

Turkey has made significant efforts over the previous years to carry out democratic reforms to fulfill the EU's Copenhagen Criteria. The Turkish government has demonstrated a firm willingness to continue with reform efforts and accelerate the democratization process of the country. However, Turkey's democratic reform is still an ongoing process, and before being integrated into the EU, it must carry out the reforms effectively.

Similarly, Alahmed *et al.* (2015) stated, "The government of Turkey has announced its eagerness to continue the reforms until all objectives are achieved, especially that which concerns democracy and human rights."

However, Jansiz *et al.* (2016) believe that the main obstacle to Turkey's path to membership in the EU is a tie to the cultural and Islamic identity of Turkey. This explains why Modebadze and Sayin (2015:2) reported that:

The Turkish government was disappointed when most of the European community members rejected full membership in Turkey. Incidentally, there seems to be a common discrimination in Europe that Turkish membership can result in a series of social problems. Therefore, European politicians think that Turkish membership in the EU will bring about the emergence of economic and social problems and will place a heavy burden on the EU budget.

Lamentably, a study shows that Turkey's EU accession process began in 2005, but the process is going very slowly. After the opening of accession negotiations in 2005, the momentum in Turkey's accession process was lost. "Turkey's accession negotiations proceeded at a snail's pace in their early years and stalled altogether between 2010 and 2013. By mid-2014, a mere 14 out of 35 chapters had been opened, and only one chapter (science and research) provisionally closed" (Tocci, 2014:2). However, questions that beg for immediate answers are:

- Which theoretical framework can effectively explain Turkey's non-membership of the European Union?
- What are the fundamental reasons affecting Turkey's membership in the European Union?
- What are the impacts of Turkey's non-membership of the European Union?

The first section of this article deals with the abstract and introduction. The second section examines the clarification of concepts and theoretical framework, while the third section highlights the fundamental factors affecting Turkey's membership in European Union. The fourth section hints at the impacts of Turkey's non-membership of the European Union, while concluding remarks and references constitute the fifth and the last section of this article.

2. Clarification of Concepts

2.1. European Union

The European Union (EU) is a political and economic organisation made up of 27 member countries that are geographically located within the continent (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union). The Union promotes democratic values, establishes a liberal market for free movement of goods and services, and observes similar policies on trade, agriculture, fisheries, and regional development. Gomez-Diaz (2009:623) added that:

European Union is an international organisation comprised of independent nations that share their sovereignty to be stronger and have a greater global influence. The EU was created by the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and was put into operation by 12 countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom) on 1st November, 1993.

The objective was to form a continent united by common institutions, progressively harmonize national economies, establish a greater common market, and gradually coordinate social policy. The 27 members have a total population of 495 million people and a land extension of 4.2 million sq. km. Also, the Union reserves the right to determine membership qualification, acceptance, or rejection of membership application. The following countries constitute the current EU member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.

2.2. Non-membership

Non-membership refers to someone who is not a member of a particular club or organisation, according to the Longman dictionary. The Macmillan dictionary defines non-membership as someone who does not belong to a group or organisation. The EU is an international organisation comprised of 27 members located within the continent (Europe). However, Turkey is geographically located in Europe but is not a member of the EU. Therefore, Turkey is a non-member of the EU. Consequently, the projection is that if Turkey's application seeking to join the EU is approved and accepted, it will change her status from non-member to a full-fledged member of the Union.

2.3. Issues

The Longman dictionary defines an issue as a subject or problem that is often discussed or argued about, especially a social or political matter that affects the interests of a lot of people. The increasing friction between the EU and Turkey has attracted many scholarly debates. The issue of Turkey's accession to EU membership appears to be on a deadlock surrounded by intractable controversies. Toygur (2022) noted that if the EU is serious about its concerns over democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in Turkey, EU policymakers need to find alternative ways to address these issues. The issues of concern are religion and cultural identity, weak economy, demographic nature, illegal occupation of Northern Cyprus, and other reasons that constitute the principal challenges undermining Turkey's membership application.

2.4. Prospects

Cambridge dictionary defines prospect as the possibility that something good might happen in the future. Modebadze and Sayin (2015) stated that the Turkish government had engaged in political reforms to accelerate the country's democratization process. The Turkish government is hopeful that all Copenhagen criteria could be achieved, and joining the Union is strategic and possible. On the other hand, Toygur (2022) argued, "The prospects of Turkey joining the EU have been dim for a long time." And therefore, he further asserts, "In practice, Ankara has no credible prospect of membership in the near future, if ever. Today, Turkey comes nowhere near fulfilling the EU's accession eligibility rules, known as the Copenhagen criteria."

Meanwhile, the Copenhagen criteria stipulate, "Candidate countries have institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, and human rights as well as a well-functioning market economy." However, since the Council of the EU concluded in 2018 that "no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing," the accession negotiations have effectively been at a standstill (Toygur, 2022).

2.5. Challenges

Challenges refer to difficult tasks or problems- something hard to do. Turkey has overt different cultural, religious, and identity structures from the EU members, which has become a problem that has created a gap in the homogeneous culture of the EU. Europeans are concerned that Turkey's entrance into the EU will spoil the homogeneous Christian culture among the existing member states. Aydin and Erhan (2004, in Jansiz, 2016:5) revealed that the statement made by Helmut Kohl, the former German Chancellor: "Europe is a Christian club" and as such has considered the entrance of countries with different social and religious identities into the EU as an obstacle to the realisation of this collective European identity. Zanganeh (2010:205) hinted that Islamic Turkey, which was always thinking of joining the EU, had this concerned that the chance of joining the EU would be reduced for Ankara by the inclusion of Christianity as the official religion of Europe. Other challenges are the weak economy, demographic nature, illegal occupation of Northern Cyprus, and Copenhagen criteria constitute an opposing bloc against Turkey's membership in the Union. Jansiz (2016) further said that Europeans believe that Turkey joining the Union will engender disunity and possible disintegration of the Union. Thus, these issues have caused these countries to seek obstacles to stop Turkey's application for full membership in the EU.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Integration Theory

There are some academic debates and various schools of thought regarding the recommended methods and approaches to international integration. As a result, the federalist, communications analysis, and neo-functionalist schools of thought were recognised in this study. Integration is conceived in legal and institutional terms by the federalist school (Clark & Sohn, 1966). According to federalist scholars, integration is a result rather than a process. It refers to a political union between formerly autonomous countries, such as the United States and Switzerland. They advocate for implementing federalism on a regional and global scale and hold the anarchic nation-state system accountable for most wars. They refute claims that global federalism is both unrealistic and utopian (Couloumbis and Wolfe, 1986:306). They believe that with enough discussion and education, many people will be persuaded that a rational plan for humankind's regulation and government should be implemented. According to federalist experts, the transition to a mutually acceptable type of federalism should be preceded by a large-scale world assembly akin to the one that gave rise to the United Nations.

Karl W. Deutsch and his associates led the second school of thought. They use a communication strategy. The communication strategy, according to Deutsch, aims to assess the integration process by observing existing international activities such as trade, visitors, letters, and immigrants. They claimed that such an exchange might lead to the formation of security communities or integrated socio-political systems. Deutsch distinguished two types of security communities: amalgamated and pluralist. Both of these security communities are distinguished by the absence of intra-community conflicts. This variant of integration theorists opined that because it has a single federal government exercising central political power over a continent-sized region, the United States is a good example of an amalgamated security community. Pluralist security communities, on the other hand, lack a central political authority. However, the national groups that make up these communities do not intend to battle one another and do not reinforce their borders as a result. Larger locations, such as the North American continent and Western Europe, are frequently home to pluralist security communities. According to the communications school of thought, integration can be viewed as both a process leading to political unification and the end product of those processes – amalgamated and pluralist security communities.

The third school of thinking, led by Ernst Haas, is known as neo-functionalism (Couloumbis & Wolfe, 1986). According to functionalist thinkers, integration is both a process and a result. In order to assess integration development,

they emphasise cooperative decision-making procedures and elite attitudes. According to Couloumbis and Wolfe (1986:307), the school of thought concentrated on formal institutions to establish the extent to which functions are carried out by national as opposed to international (integrated) agencies. In addition, they measure the degree to which elites in different nations have nationalist or internationalist orientations using systematic survey procedures (questionnaires and interviews).

3.2. Application of Theory

For the purpose of this research, integration, whether process or outcome, should be purely voluntary. Myron Weiner (1965, in Eme and Onyishi, 2014:10) defined integration as "the process of bringing together culturally and socially distinct groups into a political union." This definition assumes the existence of an ethnically pluralist society in which each group has its own language and other self-aware cultural characteristics. As a result of its integrative power to accept the complex political life of multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic nations like Turkey and other European countries, Federalism has emerged as one of the most desired political unions.

For instance, Turkey has a different cultural, religious, and identity structure from the EU members, which looks like it has created a gap in the homogeneous culture of the EU. Studies showed that about 98% of Turks are Muslims, the state kept religion under tight control in mosques, schools, and universities, and Sharia is the basis of both legislation and social organisation. According to federalist scholars, the appeal of federalism is "bounded by its perceived integrative tendency, which makes it capable of serving heterogeneous societies". As a result of this discussion and enlightenment, these thinkers claimed that federalism is appropriate at the regional level. It means that consensual conversation and instruction can lead to effective integration for both the European Union and Turkey. In other words, Turkey might become a member of the European Union by studying and accepting the Union's uniform culture. An in-depth debate aimed at changing Turks' thoughts and persuading them to embrace the European cultural values that bind them together to counteract the influence of military officers who still wield authoritarian power over the state. Thus, some Turkish jurists and human rights advocates see the European Union as a motivator to promote democracy in Turkey, arguing that without the EU's push, enlightenment, and influence, democracy in Turkey will erode (Naji, 2012).

On the other hand, the communications analysts argued that promoting activities like exchanging goods and services, immigration, location, tourists, and others could eventually lead to the integration of the socio-political system. Therefore, the unique location of Turkey, partially in Asia and partly in Europe, can help facilitate international transactions and guarantee the security of the European countries. According to Agrawal (2021), Turkey's total trade with the EU member states has expanded by more than fourfold, reaching €132.4 billion in 2020. Turkey's largest commercial partner and source of foreign direct investment are the European Union (65.5 percent annually between 2008 and 2017). Turkey, in the meantime, is the EU's sixth-largest trading partner, accounting for 3.6 percent of the EU's total global trade in 2020 (Agrawal, 2021). In doing so, it has worked tirelessly to join the European Union (Khammash, 2010). The Turkish economy would be restored if it joined the European Union. Goods would be tax-free, allowing producers to focus on the fields where Turkey excels, such as textiles, clothing, business, and transportation services, as well as agricultural products, which account for more than half of Turkey's exports. Turkey has a large and active market in terms of economics, as it has a large population and hence a large market for Turkish products, with a market value of over $200 billion USD.

Furthermore, Turkey would be a hotspot for foreign finance and investment. Turkey is capable of hosting three to four billion dollars in annual foreign capital to improve agriculture, manufacturing, services, and infrastructure. In view of the Communications Analysts, therefore, this feature, together with the Union's market in the Middle East, would be an economic benefit to the Union (Maqlad, 2010).

According to the communications school of thought, integration is both a process that leads to political unification and the end product of that process: amalgamated and pluralist security communities. Alahmed *et al.* (2015:477) noted that integrating Turkey into the Union would strengthen the Union militarily, providing the necessary number of forces to be sent to other parts of the region to maintain peace. In times of crisis, Europe would be active and play a role in those areas. This is particularly true at a time when the Turkish army, behind the American force, is NATO's second-largest. At the security and military levels, the two sides' relations might evolve to the point where they create a strategic partnership and a fundamental organic union in terms of military and civil operations in conflict zones, including the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Middle East.

4. Fundamental Factors Affecting Turkey's Membership in the European Union

The Turkish foreign policy's principal objective is to ensure Turkey's integration into the European Union. For many decades Turkey has had an unsuccessful attempt to join the Union. Modebadze and Sayin (2015) mentioned that for various reasons (economic, political, and social), European leaders appeared to have blocked the attempts of Turkey to join the EU. There is widespread belief among citizens of European countries and across Europe that Turkish membership will threaten the stability and security of EU member states.

4.1. The Cultural and Islamic Identity of Turkey

Historically, findings show that about 98% of the Turkish population is Muslim, and according to the US Department of State (2004), the majority of them are members of the "Sunni" denomination or sect. The knowledge of Turkish Islamic cultural identity is likely to be considered one of the dominant obstacles to Turkey's membership in the EU. Such an identity is faced with much criticism in many European countries. Modebadze and Sayin (2015:5) added, "Opponents to Turkish membership think there is a cultural gap between the European Union and Turkey. There is a

never-ending debate in Europe about Turkey's Europeanness." Many people doubt Turkey is a European country and argue that Turkey should not be admitted into the EU because "they lack a Christian identity" (Cameron, 2004). Citizens across Europe believe that the EU is a confederation of Christian nations. Consequently, an Islamic country should not be accepted as a member of the Union. Alahmed *et al.* (2015:478) cited some examples thus:

> The former British Foreign Minister, Jack Straw, emphasised that the biggest obstacle before Turkey to join the EU was Islam and that the Union had no desire to accept a country whose population is mostly Muslim. Also, the former French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, considers Europe is a Christian castle; there is no desire to accept Turkey as a member of that castle and the European Union's reluctance to accept Turkey is due to Islam.

Related to the above, literature revealed that in 1977 a member of the German Christian Democratic Party, Marantz, affirmed that the European Union was in a state of civilization process in which there was no space for Turkey. Also, the conservative Christian Social Union Party declared that accepting a country with no similar religion or mutual values with the EU is unimaginable (Al-Bursan, 2010). Therefore, the conservative Germans, led by the Chancellor Angela Merkel, strongly opposed joining Turkey to the Union (Alahmed *et al.*, 2015).

The frequent conflict in the Middle East triggered the Europeans to think that the accession of Turkey into the EU would generate religious extremism and fundamentalism (Clesse, 2004). The scholar maintained that Turkey is too different. It has a different culture, religion, and identity structure from the EU members and this dilemma has created a gap in the homogeneous culture of the EU. Huntington emphasises that Poland, Slovenia, and Lithuania will become a member except for Turkey. It is because the EU culturally believes it does not belong to its club (Jansiz *et al.*, 2016). According to Huntington, the cultural factor is the main obstacle to Turkey's membership in the EU. He considered Turkey's entrance into the EU as a "mixture of civilizations" and a source of damage to the homogeneity and purity of Western values, which can alter the balance of power to the detriment of the West (Basiri and Mousavi, 2010:45-84).

Jansiz *et al.* (2016:6) posited that France, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Britain are strong opponents to Turkey's application for EU membership. The Czech Republic president strongly criticised Turkey's regional policies and accused Turkey of acting like one of ISIS's allies instead of being NATO's ally. He also disagreed with Turkey's membership with the European Union in exchange for Turkey's help with the refugee crisis in Europe. In view of this, the former British Prime Minister, David Cameron, pointed out that Turkey does not have a chance to join the European Union in the coming decades. He added that the activists, demanding the withdrawal of England from the EU who said Turkey would soon join this Union, to be ridiculous and rejected them. He further said that the current progress of Turkey in the direction of Ankara to join the EU shows that this country will not be able to join the Union until the year 3000 (BBC News of 22nd May, 2016). Notably, some of the members of the European Union articulate their keen disagreement with Turkey's membership in the EU, and some of these disagreements are fundamental. Country members of the EU are skeptical that Turkey's membership acceptance will cause unintended dangerous consequences to this regional organisation and, in the long term, will lead to deviance from the foundational objectives and the ultimate disintegration of the Union. Thus, this issue has engendered these countries to search for diplomatic ways to impede Turkey's full membership in the European Union.

Similarly, Gerhards and Hans (2011:13) further maintained, "Many EU citizens feel that the cultural differences between Turkey and the EU are too significant to allow Turkey to join the EU at all. This is because it will increase immigration and engender threat to their own national culture." Other studies showed that a threat that European integration poses to national culture can make people Eurosceptics (Carey, 2002; McLaren, 2002; Rippl *et al.*, 2005). In a related study, Hooghe and Marks (2005) posited that cultural variables have an even stronger influence on general attitudes towards European integration than do economic considerations. De Vreese *et al.* (2008) wrote about the Netherlands, saying, "Cultural soft predictors outweigh hard economic predictors." Gerhards and Hans (2011:14) demonstrate, "Non-Muslims feel that Islamic religious values are fundamentally opposed to their own values, such as gender equality, and that Muslims pose a threat to the secular nature of European societies, for instance, by women wearing a Muslim headscarf or parents not sending their girls to co-ed schools." Therefore, the current study identified Islamic religion and its associated cultural identity or practice as the core factors impeding Turkish application and desire to be a member of the European Union.

4.2. The Demographic Nature of Turkey

Extant literature revealed that European leaders were troubled that Turkey's unlimited increasing population could change the balance of power in the European Union. For example, even though Germany, with 82 million inhabitants, appeared to be the leading country in the EU, its population is aging and declining due to birth regulation. Similarly, it has been argued that if Turkey gets accepted into European Union,

- It would be the second biggest country (and possibly become the largest with its much higher birth rate in the long term) in the EU and
- It would significantly alter the balance of power in the European Union (Rosenberg, 2014; Modebadze and Sayin, 2015:3)

The implication is that Turkey would produce the highest number of representatives in the Union because the Union constitution allocates more seats to country A or B, dependent on the number of populations. Thus, if Turkey secures EU membership would have more seats in the Union than Spain, Portugal, or France. In another study, Al-Sammak (2014; in Alahmed *et al.*, 2015:478) postulated, "Turkish language would become an official language in the meetings and documents of the European Union."

In addition, the Turkish invasion of Europe is another fundamental concern hindering the admission of Turkey into Europe. It is imperative to note that some citizens of EU member states categorised Turkey as one or more of Asian rather than a core European country. According to this school of thought, millions of Turkey's citizens will migrate to Europe. Thus, immigrants from Turkey will compete for already scarcely available jobs with citizens of other European countries and basically increase the unemployment rate in those countries. Based on this perception, unemployment is most likely to create social problems and unrest within individual countries.

4.3. Weak-Economy

Another fundamental issue is the manifestation of economic volatility in Turkey. There is a widespread view in Europe that Turkey is relatively economically weak and could be a heavy burden for the European Union. Turkey has been perceived by Europeans generally as the "sick man of Europe" (Modebadze & Sayin, 2015).

Turkey's economic structure has many weaknesses compared with other European states. It is against this background that the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) noted that Turkey's admission into the EU will cost $28m for the EU (Soltani, 2005; in Jansiz et al., 2016:4).

Therefore, it seems that the snail level of economic development, high unemployment, and poor standard of living in Turkey posed a threat to its membership in the Union. Turkey most likely presumed that joining the Union would entail an economic miracle for her crumbling economy. Hence the Europeans believed that Turkey was too poor and this would cost much money to revamp the economy. This explains why Modebadze and Sayin (2015) espoused that the number of skeptics who oppose Turkish membership in the European Union has not been reduced regardless of the improvement in the economy.

4.4. Turkish Illegal Occupation of Northern Cyprus

Scholars have argued that the Cyprus problem is in danger of becoming the longest outstanding unresolved problem in the world. The Cyprus issue, which began in 1974, constitutes one of the challenges that encountered Turkey in its relations with the European Union (Ahmed et al., 2015). It is on record that the Turkish invasion and illegal occupation of Northern Cyprus were launched on 20th July, 1974 as a result of the military coup staged by the Cypriot National Guard against president Makarios 2. Turkey invoked its role as a guarantor under the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee in justification for occupying Northern Cyprus. Turkey occupied 37 percent of the Island territory through forceful means, resulting in the widespread displacement of about 160,000 ethnic nationals of Cyprus from the Island.

Consequently, the operation led to the disintegration between Turkish Cypriot north and Greek Cypriot south. By 1983, a de-facto independent Turkey Republic of Northern Cyprus was declared; thus, Turkey is the country that recognizes it. On the other hand, the United Nations and other international communities recognise the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus according to the terms of its independence in 1960. The perception of the international community is that the territory occupied by the Turkey Republic of Northern Cyprus is considered illegal under international law, amounting to illegal occupation of European Union territory since Cyprus became a member of the Union and has been recognised as a territory of the Republic of Cyprus.

In view of the above, Quigley (2010:164) decried, "The international community found this declaration invalid; on the ground that Turkey had occupied territory belonging to Cyprus and that the putative state was, therefore, an infringement on Cypriot sovereignty." Similarly, Ker-Lindsay et al. (2011:15) lamented that the action of Turkey is "classified as illegal under international law, violating the charter of the United Nations and the occupation of the northern part leads automatically to an illegal occupation of EU territory since Cyprus' accession." Also, Vassiliou (2004:6) noted that Turkey is applying to join the Union of 27 members. However, at the same time refuses to recognise one of the 27 country's sovereignty. This fact alone would be sufficient to kill Turkey's application to join the Union. Therefore, he argued further that Turkey, after May 2004, will have to recognise the Republic of Cyprus, re-open its Embassy and downgrade its representation in the so-called 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus'.

Furthermore, they realise that it is not possible to persist with their application while forcefully occupying North Cyprus – i.e., part of the territory of the Union. Jansiz et al. (2016) argued that "Turkey is not willing to give up Turkish Northern Cyprus, and this has become the subject of dispute between Turkey and the EU." Therefore, it is evident that continual Turkish occupation of an illegal territory seems to have truncated the accession process of its application to formally join the EU.

4.5. Other Factors

Existing literature identified other factors provided by the EU member states for delaying the integration of Turkey into the European Union. They are:

- Issues on the absence of a strong democratic structure,
- Human rights violations, and
- Close relationship with totalitarian countries,
- Kurds crisis, and
- Recognition of Cyprus.

It has been reported that in 1980, the military illegally seized power from the civilian government, a crackdown on individual freedoms, and suspension of the constitution in Turkey. This is in agreement with the study of Aydin and Langley (2021:4). They stated, "Over the last several decades, Turkey has been confronted with the antidemocratic practices of its government." Although Turkey had several decisive steps in the name of democratization, they were taken principally to facilitate the accession to European Union; however, these were not sustained. Turkish Prime Minister Recep

Tayyip Erdoğan turned Turkey into a one-man administration after the failed coup attempt on 15th July, 2016. His responses appeared to be a widespread violation of human rights. Aydin and Langley (2021) further stressed, "Among the repercussions of the actions taken were the imprisonments of hundreds of thousands of people, the shuttering of media, the dismissal of public employees, the dismissal of academics, and the misuse of the criminal justice system to victimize its citizens. Other adverse effects encompassed widespread violations of human rights, the abuse and mistreatment of prisoners, false imprisonment, torture, and the absence of the right to a fair trial."

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2021) expresses concern that anti-terrorism laws are being used extensively to silence Turkish human rights defenders and disrupt their legitimate work of defending human rights. It added that:

> In Turkey, human rights lawyers are particularly targeted for their work representing human rights defenders, victims of human rights violations, victims of police violence and torture, and many people who simply express dissenting opinions. Turkey is violating some of the pillars of international human rights law – freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the right to lawfully practice one's own profession – by repeatedly depriving human rights defenders and lawyers of their freedom.

Similarly, Amnesty International (2017) reported that the failed coup attempt motivated the Turkish Government to declare a three-month State of Emergency that was later extended to 2 years.

The aftermath is that more than 125,000 public employees were dismissed from their jobs.
- More than 3000 foundations and institutions were shut down,
- Media and trade unions were shuttered, and
- An estimated 600,000 people were put under investigation.

In addition, numerous human rights were truncated. For example:
- The right to a fair trial,
- Freedom of expression, and
- Humane treatment in prisons.

Indeed, many human rights organisations like the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations, Freedom House, and Amnesty International reported numerous gruesome acts of torture, false imprisonment, and the mal-treatment of men, women, and children, respectively (Aydin & Avincan, 2020; Girdap, 2020). Thus, the Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) called for the protection of an estimated 16,000 and 20,000 women. Some of these women were pregnant.

A total of 700 children were held in pre-detention custody or prisons in Turkey (Stockholm Center for Freedom, 2017). In addition, pregnant women were exposed to unhealthy conditions in the prisons, where the lack of medical equipment and staff makes them vulnerable to serious health risks, such as birth complications and death (Amnesty International, 2018).

However, Turkey still maintains some practices that EU member states view as undemocratic or authoritarian—for instance, prohibiting minorities from getting a primary education in their mother tongue. Moreover, the country's largest minority – the Kurds, which comprise about 15% of the population, have no right to self-determination even though Turkey has signed the ICCPR. In March 2017, the United Nations accused the Turkish government of "massive destruction, killings, and numerous other serious human rights violations" against the ethnic Kurdish minority (United Nations News Service, 10th March 2017). Therefore, the suppression of the Kurds and other human rights violations by the Turkish army and government constituted a part of the issues which militate against its membership application in the EU.

Another problem that seems to be very big to the Europeans is the geographical location of Turkey. As noted earlier in this study, many parts of Turkey lie in Asia, while the City of Istanbul and a handful of other territories fall under Europe. Moreover, Turkey is a neighbour to the Middle East countries, which are considered totalitarian in nature and a source of political and security tensions, especially Iran and Syria. So, most EU members feel that if Turkey joins the Union, European borders will be extended to the Middle East with all its political and security complications (Alahmed et al., 2015).

5. Impacts of Turkey's Non-membership in the European Union

The issue at hand is: when will the EU marry or integrate Turkey into the long-awaited Union? In fact, the debate on the nature, role, and character of both the EU and Turkey has remained intractable. Several studies have suggested that Turkey's membership in the European Union is a strategic step as it is significant in the long run. Al-Azzawi (2012) and Alahmed et al. (2015) contended that one major concern of Turkey's foreign policy is to enhance its chances of protecting and defending its territory against the threats of surrounding neighbours. Turkey is aware of the conceptions of the surrounding enemies that seek to deconstruct and divide Turkey. Such consciousness drives Turkey strongly toward Europe to secure itself and strengthen its defense capacity. Thus, non-membership of the union seems that Turkey's dream of ending problems with its neighbours and building a good relationship with all will be challenging.

On the other side, Nugent (2007) provided that Turkey's key strategic geo-political position and military capacity can significantly contribute to the European security and defense policy. Turkey is located physically close to and has considerable influence in the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Indeed, Turkey shares borders with several states that are located on Europe's edges in the southern Caucasus (Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan) and in the Middle East (Iran, Iraq, and Syria). Alahmed et al. (2015) rightly observed that Turkey's strong military strength could be deployed to provide peacekeeping in these conflict-prone countries. This is possible because the Turkish army appears to be the biggest one in NATO after the American army. Thus far, the integration of Turkey into the Union is most likely to enhance the relationship between
- The EU and its near neighbourhood and,

- More broadly, the West and countries currently on the margins of Western influence.

Hence, it might be difficult for the EU to build bridges with the Islamic World, export democratic values to these countries, and manage the growing tension (illegal migration and terrorism) arising from them that serve as a threat to Europe.

Alahmed *et al.* (2015) hinted that both the European Union and Turkey would gain many significant strategic advantages from each other. This implies that the interests are mutual between the two sides, and both can equally lose when they fail to marry together. Specifically, Turkey's non-membership will increase the unemployment and poverty levels in the country. On the other hand, Turkey has a good labour market, with about 60 percent of its population being within the workforce age of thirty-five, accompanied by high birth rates. Economically, this means that the Turkish population could provide the EU with a younger working force. Therefore, joining the European Union would revive the Turkish economy. However, being engaged without the possibility of getting married produces the tendency for the Turkish economy to slag behind (Paul, 2015). Alahmed *et al.* (2015) added that such membership would grant Turkey a progressive status at the international level.

Furthermore, as a result, it would establish its influence inside the Union. Due to the large population of Turkey (exceeding 75 million), Turkey would be considered the second big member state after Germany. This status would increase the representation of the Turks in the European Parliament and influence its policies and decisions.

6. Concluding Remark

It would be unfair for anyone to conclude that Turkey has not made any significant effort toward joining the European Union. Paul (2015) emphasised that the EU engagement with Turkey seems to be a forever relationship with many reservations that would never see Turkey be married to the EU. According to Turkey expert Nathalie Tocci (2014), it is a relationship "characterised by cooperation and convergence" and by "cyclical ups and downs." This remains the case today. Looking beyond the membership process, Turkey remains a country of vital importance for the EU with a significant level of interdependence in many areas, including trade, foreign and security policy, migration, energy, etc. When the EU faces crises in its eastern and southern neighbourhoods, a reliable and predictable Turkey, with which it can cooperate in the black sea and Middle East neighbourhoods, is crucial.

Thus, the paper recommends the idea of a gradual integration process to be initiated within the possible time. A gradual integration model would not only help Turkey prepare politically but would also keep a good working relationship between Turkey and the EU. Also, this will enable those member states that are opposed to Turkish membership

- To change their perception,
- To build trust and confidence in the Republic of Türkiye as a European entity and thereby accept her long-awaited 'marriage' application

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