



FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS HUMANAS Y SOCIALES

THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. THE MEDITERRANEAN DIMENSION

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5º Double Degree in Law and International Relations (E5 A)

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Madrid

March 2025

Abstract

The historical process of European integration can be analysed through the lens of its Mediterranean dimension, focusing on the cases of Greece, Cyprus, and Turkey. Through a comparative approach, the study explores the historical, political, and symbolic factors that led to the successful integration of Greece and Cyprus into the EU, and the stalled candidacy of Turkey. The research applies major theories of EUropean integration - federalism, neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism, constructivism, and postfunctionalism - to analyse both structural dynamics and identity-based resistance. A central focus is places on Turkey's case, where democratic backsliding, growing Islamisation, and cultural divergence have challenged the idea of a cohesive European identity. The EU's political conditionality, especially the Copenhagen Criteria, plays a crucial role, but the case of Turkey reveals that accession also depends on public perception, symbolic boundaries, and mutual political will. Meanwhile, the success of Greece and Cyprus reflects not only legal or economic alignment but also their cultural and geopolitical positioning as "European enough." Ultimately, this dissertation argues that the Mediterranean is not merely a geographic region but a space where the EU negotiates its borders, values and identity. The contrast between these three countries highlights the complexity of EU enlargement and the symbolic frontier that the Mediterranean represents.

Key words

European integration, Mediterranean dimension, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, EU enlargement and Islamisation.

Resumen

El proceso histórico de integración europea puede analizarse desde la perspectiva de su dimensión mediterránea, centrándose en los casos de Grecia, Chipre y Turquía. A través de un enfoque comparado, el estudio explora los factores históricos, políticos y simbólicos que llevaron a la integración editorial de Grecia y Chipre en la Unión Europea, y a la candidatura estancada de Turquía. La investigación aplica las principales teorías de la integración europea - federalismo, neofuncionalismo o, intergubernalismo, constructivismo y postfuncionalismo- para analizar tanto las dinámicas estructurales como las resistencias basadas en la identidad. Se presta especial atención al caso de Turquía, donde la regresión democrática, el creciente proceso de islamización y la divergencia cultural han cuestionado la idea de una identidad europea cohesionada. La condicionalidad política de la UE, especialmente los Criterios de Copenhague, desempeña un papel crucial, pero el caso de Turquía revela que la adhesión también depende de la percepción pública, las fronteras simbólicas y la voluntad política mutua. Mientras tanto, el éxito de Grecia y Chipre refleja no solo la alienación jurídica o económica, sino también su posicionamiento cultural y geopolítico como “suficientemente europeos”. En última instancia, esta tesis sostiene que el Mediterráneo no es solo una región geográfica, sino un espacio donde la UE negocia sus fronteras, valores e identidad. El contraste entre estos tres países pone en manifiesto la complejidad de la ampliación europea y la frontera simbólica que representa el Mediterráneo.

Palabras clave

Integración europea, dimensión mediterránea, Grecia, Chipre, Turquía, ampliación de la UE e islamización.

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
CIFE	Centre international de formation européenne
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
EEC	European Economic Community
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
EURATOM	European Atomic Energy Community
EUROSTAT	Statistical Office of the European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PPS	Purchasing Power Standards
TRNC	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
UN	United Nations

CHAPTER I

1.1 INTRODUCTION

European integration represents one of the most significant political and economic processes of the 20th century. Since the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, this supranational project has evolved significantly, consolidating into what is now the European Union. This process has not only redefined the internal political dynamics of its member states but has also projected a unique model of cooperation in an increasingly globalised world.

In this context, the Mediterranean region has occupied a central place in the agenda of European integration. From the accession of Southern European countries like Greece, Spain, Portugal and Cyprus to the complex attempts to include Turkey, the Mediterranean has witnessed a unique interaction between Europe's geopolitical, cultural, and economic dimensions. Through this lens, it represents not just a physical border but also a space for dialogue, tension, and potential integration.

The objective of this study is to analyse the history of European integration from its origins to the present, with a special focus on its Mediterranean dimension. More precisely, it will compare the successful integration of Greece and Cyprus with Turkey's stalled accession, analysing the legal, political, and economic factors that determined these outcomes.

This dissertation is divided as follows. First, I will outline the motivations and objectives of this study, as well as the key questions it seeks to answer. Subsequently, it will explain the main theories and debates surrounding European integration. The theoretical framework will present a normative analysis that contextualises the legal and political aspects of this process. The analysis section will then delve into the case studies, evaluating the factors that have facilitated or hindered integration in the Mediterranean. Finally, the conclusions and a future perspective on the role of the Mediterranean in European integration will be presented.

In this way, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding of the dynamics that have defined the relationship between Europe and its Mediterranean neighbours, highlighting their relevance in the contemporary debate on the enlargement and the future of the European Union.

1.2 PURPOSE AND MOTIVES

The purpose of this study is to analyse how European integration has evolved since its inception and how this evolution has impacted the relationship between the European Union (EU) and the countries of the Mediterranean region. This approach aims not only to understand the historical and political factors that have facilitated or hindered integration but also to reflect on the current dynamics shaping relations between Europe and its southern neighbours.

One of the main motives that drives this research is the geostrategic importance of the Mediterranean in the European context. This region has not only been important for the civilisations but also a space for trade, cultural exchange, and conflict throughout history. Today, the Mediterranean represents a bridge between Europe, Africa, and Asia, playing a crucial role in issues such as migration, energy security, and economic relations.

Another key motive is the need to explore the lessons learned from successful integration processes, such as those of Greece and Cyprus, in contrast to the challenges faced by Turkey. These cases illustrate how the EU's values and principles, along with its political and cultural limitations, have shaped its capacity to integrate new members in diverse contexts.

Finally, this study is undertaken at a time when the EU faces both internal and external challenges, such as geopolitical tensions and migration crises, which underline the importance of its policy towards the Mediterranean. Analysing these aspects will not only enhance the understanding of the history of European integration but also provide a critical perspective on the future of the EU in its Mediterranean dimension.

1.3 RESEARCH, AIMS AND QUESTIONS

To achieve this, The project will seek to:

1. Examine the most significant historical and political milestone in the development of European integration, from its origin to the present.
2. Evaluate how the European Union has managed its relations with Mediterranean countries, considering both successful and failed accession processes.
3. Analyse the political, economic, and cultural factors that have facilitated or hindered the integration of Mediterranean countries into the European Union.
4. Reflect on the contemporary implications of European integration in the Mediterranean region, particularly regarding current challenges such as migration, security, and geopolitical tensions.

To fulfill these objectives, this dissertation will address the following key questions:

1. What have been the main milestones and stages in the history of European integration?
2. What role has the Mediterranean region played in the process of European integration?
3. What were the key factors that enabled the successful integration of Greece and Cyprus into the European Union?
4. What obstacles have prevented Turkey's accession to the European Union?
5. How does the Mediterranean dimension influence the European Unions current policies and strategies?
6. What future perspectives can be proposed regarding the relationship between Europe and the Mediterranean region?

1.5 METHODOLOGY

This study follows a qualitative and analytical approach, combining documentary research, normative analysis and substantive. It focuses on examining the history of European integration, with a particular emphasis on its Mediterranean dimension, paying capital special attention to the cases of Greece, Cyprus, and Turkey.

To achieve this, three main methodological strategies followed; first and foremost, a broad review of primary and secondary sources has been conducted. This includes European treaties, EU legislation, institutional reports, and academic studies on European integration and Euro-Mediterranean relations. The primary objective is to provide a historical context for the integration process, identify key milestones, and analyse how the Mediterranean region has influence its development.

Moreover, official EU documents, such as the Treaties of Rome, Maastricht, and Lisbon, have been consulted, alongside reports from the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Barcelona Process. Additionally, academic research research and scientific publications from experts in the field have been incorporated to ensure a comprehensive and well-supported analysis.

Furthermore, this research relies on various theories of European integration to interpret the accession and exclusion processes in the Mediterranean region. The study considers different perspectives, including neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism, and constructivism, which help analyse the political, economic, and social dynamics that have shaped the success of failure of accession attempts.

In addition, a legal analysis has been carried out based on Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union and the Copenhagen Criteria, assessing how these requirements have conditioned the accession process of Greece, Cyprus, and Turkey. This theoretical and legal framework provides a structured approach to examining EU enlargement decisions, helping to identify key factors influencing the integration process.

Finally, in order to deepen the understanding of the Mediterranean dimension of European integration, three case studies have been selected: Greece and Cyprus, as examples of successful integration, and Turkey, whose accession process has been marked by significant political and cultural obstacles.

By employing a comparative analysis, this study evaluates the differences in the accession processes of these countries, identifying the factors that have facilitated or hindered their EU integration. Key variables such as institutional stability, alignment with European democratic values, economic impact, and geopolitical considerations have been analysed.

CHAPTER II: STATE OF ART AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION.

European integration refers to the process through which European nations have progressively sought to create a unified and cooperative framework to address political, economic, and social challenges. At its core, this concept embodies the idea of transferring certain sovereign powers from individual nation-states to supranational institutions to foster stability, peace, and shared prosperity in the region (Haas, 2004).

The origins of European integration can be traced back to the aftermath of World War II, when European leaders recognised the need to prevent future conflicts and rebuild their economies. The establishment of the European Coalition and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 marked a pivotal moment, as it laid the foundation for a new form of collaboration centred on shared resources. The initiative evolved into broader structures, including the European Economic Community (EEC) with the 1957 Treaty of Rome, eventually leading to the creation of the European Union (EU) under the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 (Moreno Justo & Núñez Peñas, 2017).

European integration encompasses a wide range of dimensions, from economic to political and social. Economically, it involves the establishment of a single market, characterised by the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. Politically, it includes the creation of common

policies and institutions, such as the European Parliament and the European Commission, that aim to harmonise decision-making across member states. Socially, integration has fostered cultural exchange and the promotion of shared values, including democracy, human rights, and the rule of law (Patel, 2013).

While the concept of integration often evokes positive connotations of unity and cooperation, it has also been a source of debate and contention. Different member states and regions have experienced the benefits and challenges of integration unevenly, leading to varying levels of support for the process. Additionally, tensions between national sovereignty and supranational authority continue to shape discussions about the future direction of European integration (Patel, 2013).

By examining the definition and historical context of European integration, this research establishes a foundation for understanding its evolution and the specific role of the Mediterranean region within this broader framework.

2.2 THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW

The process of European integration stands as one of the most remarkable political and economic achievements of the 20th and 21st centuries. Born out of the ashes of two devastating world wars, the integration project sought to ensure lasting peace, promote economic growth, and foster unity across a historically fragmented continent. From its earliest steps in sectoral integration to its contemporary challenges, European integration has profoundly shaped the trajectory of the continent (Patel 2013).

In this context, the devastation of World War II served as the catalyst for European integration. Visionary leaders such as Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Konrad Adenauer, and Alcide De Gasperi championed the idea that cooperation among European nations could prevent future conflicts and secure economic stability. As a result, this vision culminated in the 1950 Schuman Declaration, which proposed the pooling of coal and steel resources, the essential materials of war, under a supranational authority (Patel, 2013).

Subsequently, in 1951, the Treaty of Paris established the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), comprising France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. The ECSC was not merely an economic arrangement but also a political framework designed to reduce tensions between historic rivals France and Germany. By creating shared governance over vital industries, it laid the foundation for broader integration and marked the first significant step in European unification (Patel, 2013).

Building on the success of the ECSC, the six founding members signed the Treaty of Rome in 1957, creating the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM). The EEC's objective was ambitious: to establish a common market by eliminating trade barriers and promoting the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people (Patel, 2013).

During the 1970s, European integration entered a significant phase, marked by enlargement and political development. In 1973, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Denmark joined the EEC, expanding its membership to nine countries. Moreover, this period also saw efforts to strengthen the Community's political dimension, including the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979 (Varsori et al, 2011).

Despite these development, however, economic challenges, such as the oil crises of the 1970s, affected the EEC. Nevertheless, it began to emerge as a global actor, using its collective economic weight to negotiate international trade agreements and provide development aid. As a consequence, the Community showcased its growing influence as an integrated economic bloc. Yet, it is important to note that enlargement at this stage was still an ad hoc process, as Article 237 of the Treaty of Rome did not provide a clear framework for accession criteria. Making the process highly politicised (Varsori et al, 2011).

A crucial turning point in European integration occurred with the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. This treaty formally established the European Union and expanded the scope of integration into new areas. Notably, the treaty introduced the concept of European citizenship, allowing citizens to move and reside freely within the EU. Perhaps the most ambitious goal of the Maastricht Treaty was the creation of a single currency, the euro, which came into circulation in 2002. By fostering deeper economic integration and policy coordination, the euro aimed to enhance stability and prosperity. Additionally, the treaty also extended the EU's competencies into foreign policy, security, and justice, reflecting the aspiration for a more unified political entity (, 2019).

However, the Maastricht Treaty also exposed tensions between depending and widening European integration, particularly in the post-Cold war context. They emphasise that the EU embarked on a high-risk strategy of monetary union and rapid enlargement, despite the institutional and economic weaknesses of some candidate countries. Following the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Iron Curtain opened a new chapter in European integration. Former Eastern Bloc countries, eager to solidify their transition to democracy and market economies, sought membership in the EU. Between 2004 and 2013, the EU experienced its largest enlargement, welcoming 13 new members, including Poland, Hungary, the Baltic states, and Romania. This expansion represented a

historic reunification of Europe, bridging the East-West divide that had persisted during the Cold War (, 2019).

Nevertheless, the period also brought significant challenges. The 2008 financial crises exposed economic vulnerabilities within the EU, particularly in the eurozone, leading to austerity measures and social unrest in several member states. Additionally, migration pressures and the rise of Euroscepticism culminated in the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU in 2016, a watershed moment that raised questions about the limits of integration (Ludlow, 2019).

While much of the EU's early focus was on its core members and Eastern expansion, the Mediterranean dimension of European integration became a key priority in the mid-1990s. They became key priority due to the end of the Cold War made the Mediterranean countries gained prominence due to their geographic proximity and the shared challenges they posed, such as migration, security and trade. Also, we have the fear of instability in the South, which the growing irregular migration flows from North Africa created a sense of insecurity among Southern European members such as Spain and Italy. After all, the Barcelona Process, launched in 1995, aimed to foster stability and prosperity in the region through economic cooperation and political dialogue (, 2019).

Specifically, the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (EMFTA) was a central goal, reflecting the EU's belief that economic interdependence could promote peace and development. This initiative later evolved through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Union for the Mediterranean, which sought to address issues such as migration, environmental sustainability, and regional conflicts. However, persistent political tensions and limited South-South integration among Mediterranean countries have hindered the realisation of a cohesive Euro-Mediterranean region. One notable example of this effort was the EU-Tunisia Association Agreement signed in 1995 and entered into force in 1998. It aimed progressively establish a free trade area between the EU and Tunisia over a twelve-year period (Karamouzi, 2020).

Moreover, the EU enlargement has functioned as an external policy tool, often used to enhance security and stability in candidate countries. Such as, the cases of Bulgaria and Romania, which joined the EU conditioned on deep reforms in areas such as judicial independence, anti-corruption measures and minority rights. . However, this approach has been inconsistent, particularly in the Mediterranean, where geopolitical tensions have complicated the integration process (Karamouzi, 2020).

2.3 DEFINITION OF THE COPENHAGEN CRITERIA

The enlargement of the European Union (EU) has historically been a dual process: on the one hand, a strategic geopolitical tool to stabilise and integrate the European continent, and on the other, a normative project rooted in shared political, legal and economic values. As the EU expanded eastward after the Cold War, the need for a clear and consistent accession framework became evident. This need culminated in the formal establishment of the Copenhagen Criteria at the European Council summit of June 1993 (Jano, 2024).

These criteria articulated, for the first time, a set of objective conditions that candidate countries must fulfill to qualify for EU membership. This represented a fundamental shift in the Union's enlargement philosophy, from a discretionary, interest-driven process to one grounded in rules-based conditionality and shared principles. Enlargement was no longer merely about expanding influence; it was also about preserving the integrity of the EU's legal and political order (Jano, 2024).

The Copenhagen Criteria are generally grouped into three essential categories:

1. Political criteria: the existence of stable institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities. These criteria reflect the EU's foundational identity as a community of liberal democracies.
2. Economic criteria: a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. These requirements are meant to ensure that new members can fully participate in and contribute to the internal market without destabilising it.
3. Institutional capacity (acquis criterion): the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including full implementation of the *acquis communautaire*- the body of EU laws, norms and policies. This ensures legal and administrative harmonisation across member states (Jano, 2024).

An additional, though less formalised, requirement is the EU's absorption capacity: its institutional and political ability to integrate new members while maintaining internal cohesion and the momentum of integration (Jano, 2024).

Together, these criteria serve not only as benchmarks for accession but also as tools of transformation. Candidate countries must undergo substantial reforms to align with EU standards, making the criteria both a technical filter and a political roadmap.

2.4 THEORIES OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The study of European integration offers a diverse range of theoretical perspectives to understand the processes and challenges behind the unification of Europe. These theories are particularly insightful when analysing the integration of Mediterranean countries like Greece, Cyprus, and Turkey into the European Union (EU). Each framework gives light on the unique dynamics, drivers, and obstacles that have shaped the integration journey, especially in the Mediterranean context. Below, the major theories of European integration are examined and linked to the Mediterranean dimension, a key focus of this research.

Federalism and the Mediterranean

Federalism sees the EU as a multilevel system in which power is distributed between the different actors at all levels. One of the goals of federalism is to have a single political and economic system that does not observe the boundaries of nations. In the Mediterranean region, federalist objectives have existed as both a dream and challenge. Political systems, cultural identities, and economies are all so varied within the region that it makes the implementation of federalist principles problematic. For instance, Turkey's political and cultural peculiarities has often been in contradiction with federalist aspirations, barring the country from fully integrating into the EU. Despite the fact that federalism calls for cooperative governance, the Mediterranean region exhibits the intricacies of trying to facilitate a single federal model in a neglected and overly diverse environment (Spinelli & Rossi, 2016).

Functionalism: Sectoral Cooperation in the Mediterranean

Functionalism emphasises the importance of practical cooperation in specific sectors as a foundation for broader integration. This approach has been evident in the EU's engagement with Mediterranean countries through initiatives like the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean. These programs prioritise economic and trade cooperation to foster stability and interdependence in the region. By addressing common challenges such as trade barriers, environmental issues, and energy security, functionalism creates pathways for gradual integration. However, the sectoral focus often limits the scope of integration, as it does not directly tackle political or cultural divides that characterise the Mediterranean (Mitrany, 1966).

Neofunctionalism and Spillover Effects in the South

Neofunctionalism builds on functionalism by emphasising spillover effects, where initial integration in one sector creates pressures for deeper cooperation in others. This theory has been instrumental

in the integration of Greece and Cyprus into the EU. Their initial economic integration through the European Economic Community (EEC) eventually led to political and social alignment with EU norms. However, Turkey's stalled accession highlights the limits of spillover effects when cultural, religious, and geopolitical barriers exist. For instance, despite economic ties and candidate status, Turkey's divergence from EU values on issues like democracy and human rights has hindered further integration (Hass, 2004).

Intergovernmentalism: National Interests in Mediterranean Integration

Intergovernmentalism has highlighted the major role of member state governments in driving the process of integration. National governments, it argues, would remain preoccupied with the sovereignty and would make decisions on integration based on national interests. The Mediterranean is best able to illustrate this theory since the integration of Greece and Cyprus was largely to foster their strategic geographical positioning along the interests of great EU powers. On the other hand, the refusal to admit Turkey into the club shows how national issues like migration and security can trump collective aspirations. It underscores the degree of tension that exists between national priorities and supranational goals in the process of integrating the Mediterranean into a European Union framework (Hoffmann, 1966).

Liberal Intergovernmentalism: Bargaining in the Mediterranean

Liberal intergovernmentalism refines intergovernmentalism by focusing on the interplay between domestic interests and strategic bargaining among states. Greece's accession to the EU serves as a prime example. Domestic economic reforms, coupled with strategic agreements among EU member states, facilitated its entry into the union. Similarly, Cyprus leveraged its historical ties with Greece and its geopolitical importance to gain membership. In contrast, Turkey's lack of progress reflects the absence of consensus among EU states. Diverging national preferences and unresolved bargaining issues, such as migration control and cultural alignment, have hindered Turkey's integration prospects (Maravcsik, 1998).

Constructivism

Constructivism emphasises the role of shared norms, values, and identities in shaping integration. This perspective is particularly relevant in the Mediterranean, where cultural and religious differences often challenge the construction of a unified European identity. While Greece and Cyprus successfully aligned their national identities with European norms, Turkey's cultural and

religious distinctiveness has made its integration more contentious. The Mediterranean illustrates how identity politics can influence the boundaries of European integration, as perceptions of cultural compatibility play a significant role in determining membership prospects (Checkel, 2005).

Postfunctionalism: Euroscepticism and Mediterranean Dynamics

Postfunctionalism focuses on how public opinion, identity politics, and Euroscepticism shape integration. This theory is particularly relevant in the context of migration crises, where Mediterranean countries often serve as entry points for migrants into the EU. Public resistance to migration and enlargement, especially regarding Turkey's membership, reflects the growing influence of postfunctional dynamics. Rising Euroscepticism has constrained policymakers, limiting their ability to pursue deeper integration in politically sensitive areas. The migration debate underscores the tension between the EU's ideals of solidarity and the realities of public opposition, which are especially pronounced in the Mediterranean region (Schimmelfenning, 2014).

These theories collectively provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the history of European integration, particularly in the Mediterranean context. Neofunctionalism explains the progressive deepening of integration through economic spillovers, as seen in Greece and Cyprus. Intergovernmentalism and liberal intergovernmentalism highlight the pivotal role of national interests and strategic Bargaining in shaping integration outcomes. Constructivism and Postfunctionalism address the challenges of identity politics and public opinion, which have become increasingly relevant in contemporary EU dynamics (Schimmelfenning, 2014).

CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS

3.1 GREECE

3.1.1 Historical Context

Greece's integration into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1981 marked a significant milestone in both European integration and the country's political and economic transformation. Therefore, this chapter examines Greece's accession process from various perspectives, including historical, political, economic, and strategic factors (Verney, 2002).

The historical process of Greece's integration into the European Union is complex and shaped by a combination of political and economic factors. Greece's path toward European integration can be traced back to the post-World War II period, when the country firmly aligned itself with the Western bloc. This early alignment was largely influenced by the Greek Civil War, which took place between 1946 and 1949 and was fought between communist and nationalist forces. Consequently, the victory of the nationalist side ensured Greece's place as a Western-aligned state during the Cold War (Verney, 2002).

Furthermore, the United States played a crucial role in shaping Greece's post-war trajectory by providing economic and military assistance through the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. This support not only facilitated Greece's recovery from war-related devastation but also ensured that it remained outside Soviet influence (Verney, 2002).

In the 1950s, as Western Europe was undergoing major economic and political transformations, two important economic blocs emerged. On the one hand, the European Economic Community, founded by six countries through the Treaty of Rome in 1957, aimed to create a common market that would facilitate economic integration among its members. On the other hand, the European Free Trade Association was established by other Western European states that sought economic cooperation without deep political integration. These included countries like the United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, and Portugal. However, Greece, along with Spain and Turkey, found itself excluded from both the EEC and EFTA. In the case of Greece, this exclusion was due to a combination of factors: its relatively underdeveloped economy, concerns over political instability, and later the establishment of a military dictatorship in 1967, which froze any progress toward European integration. This period of diplomatic and economic isolation created

a significant gap between these countries and the rest of Western Europe in terms of integration and development (Burgos, 1981).

Given Greece's geostrategic importance during the Cold War, the United States exerted pressure on Western European nations to strengthen economic ties with Greece and Turkey. Nevertheless, Greece's economic situation at the time was not strong enough to allow for immediate membership in the European Economic Community (Burgos, 1981).

In response to this situation, the Treaty of Rome's Article 238 allowed for the partial integration of third countries through agreements, providing a framework for gradual economic integration before full membership. Based on this provision, Greece signed the Association Agreement with the European Economic Community in Athens on July 9, 1961, which came into effect on November 1, 1962. Happily, this agreement was designed to prepare Greece for potential full membership by establishing a customs union and implementing a series of economic measures aimed at facilitating its integration into the Community. Specifically, it outlined the gradual reduction of tariffs to promote trade between Greece and EEC countries, the harmonisation of key policies to align Greece with EEC economic standards, and the creation of a financial aid mechanism to support Greece's economic development. Additionally, it established different tariff reduction schedules for agricultural and industrial products and included provisions allowing Greece to impose temporary tariffs to protect its domestic industries. To oversee the implementation of the agreement, an Association Council was created to monitor progress and ensure compliance (Burgos, 1981).

From the outset, Greece began implementing measures to progressively reduce tariffs and align itself with the EEC's common external tariff. However, despite these initial steps, the process faced significant challenges. The economic gap between Greece and the original EEC members remained substantial, and progress was slow. Indeed, the structural weaknesses of the Greek economy made it difficult for the country to fully integrate into the European framework as quickly as initially anticipated (Fernandez Soriano, 2020).

Nevertheless, the most significant disruption to Greece's integration process occurred in April 1967, when a military junta seized power in the country and established an authoritarian regime known as "the Regime of the Colonels." This coup d'état led to the partial suspension of the Association Agreement by European institutions, which froze financial assistance and other forms

of cooperation while maintaining the core economic aspects of the agreement, such as tariff reductions. The political shift in Greece created a difficult situation for the European Economic Community, as it had to balance its economic commitments with its democratic principles. While the financial and trade-related components of the agreement remained in place, political cooperation between Greece and the EEC was significantly reduced (Karamouzi, 2019).

However, in 1974 Greece's democracy got restored which marked a decisive turning point in the country's European aspirations. After the fall of the military regime, Greece accelerated its European agenda under the leadership of Konstantinos Karamanlis, the head of the Nea Dimokratia (New Democracy Party) and a key figure in the country's democratic transition. Karamanlis viewed full EEC membership as both a political and economic necessity. On the one hand, he saw it as a means to stabilise and consolidate democracy in Greece, while on the other, he regarded it as a way to secure essential European economic support for the country's development. The economic and political challenges Greece faced in the aftermath of the dictatorship made EEC membership an even more urgent objective, as it was seen as a way to strengthen the country's institutions and promote long-term economic stability (Karamaouzi, 2019).

As a result, Greece officially applied for EEC membership on June 12, 1975. However, the request was initially met with skepticism from some EEC members, who expressed concerns about Greece's economic weaknesses and structural difficulties. Many feared that Greece's integration could pose challenges for the Community, as the country's economy was still relatively underdeveloped compared to other EEC members. Nonetheless, after long and complex negotiations, the application was ultimately accepted. The negotiation process lasted several years and faced multiple obstacles, particularly regarding the economic conditions required by the Community and the structural reforms Greece needed to implement to meet EEC standards. The European Economic Community imposed a series of economic requirements that Greece had to fulfil before it could be granted full membership (Karamaouzi, 2019).

Despite these concerns, Greece's accession was eventually supported for both political and symbolic reasons. Following the fall of the military junta in 1974, Greece had restored democracy and was seen as a country returning to the European democratic fold. Accepting Greece into the EEC was a way to consolidate its democratic transition, reinforce political stability in Southern Europe, and send a message of support to other countries undergoing similar transitions, such as Spain and Portugal. Therefore, the decision to accept Greece was not solely economic but also

driven by the EEC's broader commitment to democratic values and regional stability (Sanz Yagüe, 2017).

Finally, on January 1, 1981, Greece officially joined the European Economic Community. This event was widely regarded as a success for both Greece and Europe, as it demonstrated the EEC's capacity to integrate countries with different levels of economic development and contributed significantly to Greece's political and economic modernisation. The accession was seen as a validation of Greece's commitment to European integration and a sign of the EEC's willingness to expand its membership beyond its original core states (Sanz Yague, 2017).

3.1.2 Integration Difficulties

The difficulties will be analysed deeply as even though it was an early adhesion, it was not straightforward; Greece's economy was considerably weaker than those of existing member states. It is characterised by a low per capita GDP, a predominantly agricultural economic structure, and an underdeveloped industrial sector (Verney, 2002). Unlike the highly industrialised economies of the EEC, Greece lacked a robust manufacturing base, making it difficult to compete on equal terms within the Community. The EEC recognised these disparities and acknowledged that Greece would require accelerated economic development to ensure successful integration. This economic gap was one of the main concerns during negotiations, as Greece's structural weaknesses, including high levels of corruption, tax evasion, and an inefficient public administration, raised doubts about its ability to meet the Community's economic and regulatory standards. To address these concerns, financial assistance mechanisms were put in place, including loans and development funds aimed at modernising key sectors of the Greek economy (Burgos, 1981). Also, it's important to highlight that the economic situation with the Accession Treaty's Protocol Number 19 allocated financial assistance of \$125 million over five years to support economic development projects, helping Greece bridge the gap with more advanced EEC economies. These measures aimed to ensure that Greece could sustain its integration into the Community without causing major disruptions to the economic stability of the existing member states (Sanz-Yagüe, 2017).

The political instability further complicated Greece's integration process. As seen early the 1967 coup led to a suspending democracy and leading the EEC to freeze its cooperation with Greece (Burgos, 1981). Since democracy was a fundamental requirement for European integration,

as implicitly reflected in the Treaty of Rome (1957), which emphasised the promotion of peace, liberty, and political and economic cooperation among like-minded democratic states—countries under authoritarian regimes, such as Greece during the military junta, were considered incompatible with the foundational values of the European Economic Community. Since democracy was a fundamental requirement for European integration, Greece's path toward full membership was halted until the restoration of democratic governance in 1974. Due to this, European leaders viewed Greece's transition to democracy as a crucial step in aligning with the EEC's core values of governance, rule of law, and human rights. The EEC saw Greece's accession as an opportunity to consolidate democratic stability in Southern Europe, preventing any potential political regression or external influence from non-democratic regimes (Sanz-Yagüe, 2017).

Geopolitical factors also played a decisive role in Greece's integration. Positioned at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East, and the Balkans, Greece's strategic importance was heightened by Cold War dynamics. As a NATO member, Greece was seen as a key Western ally in an unstable region, surrounded by communist states and Turkey, whose geopolitical orientation remained uncertain. European leaders, under pressure from the United States, considered Greece's accession a means of securing political stability in the Mediterranean and reinforcing the Western bloc's presence in the region. Strengthening Greece's ties with Western Europe was perceived as a way to counterbalance Soviet-aligned forces in the Balkans and ensure long-term political stability in Southern Europe (Karamouzi, 2019).

Finally, another complicated situation was that the negotiations also revealed a divergence in expectations regarding the scope and depth of the reforms Greece needed to implement before full accession. While Greece sought to ease some of the economic requirements to avoid domestic opposition, particularly from the agricultural and labor sectors, the EEC insisted on ambitious reforms to guarantee economic and political sustainability (Burgos, 1981). This tension reflected broader European concerns about the long-term viability of Greece's integration and its potential impact on the Community's economic cohesion. Nevertheless, the political imperative of consolidating democracy and maintaining regional stability held away these concerns, leading to the successful conclusion (Verney, 2002).

3.1.3 Theoretical Application

Greece's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1981 represents a significant case study of successful integration. Despite initial skepticism regarding Greece's economic preparedness, European leaders ultimately prioritised its strategic importance, democratic consolidation, and broader political interests within the Cold War context. To fully appreciate the intricacies and dynamics of Greece's accession, it is essential to examine the process through different theoretical framework.

To start, functionalism (Mitrany, 1966) offers an initial framework for understanding Greece's economic integration through practical sectoral agreements on trade, agriculture, and energy. While this laid foundational economic ties, Greece's integration process clearly illustrates the limitations of Functionalism, as the political disruption caused by the military dictatorship highlighted the necessity of stable political structures to maintain integration momentum.

Neofunctionalism in contrast (Haas, 1958) provides deeper insight into Greece's integration, emphasising *spillover effects* from economic cooperation into political and institutional alignment. The restoration of democracy significantly strengthened incentives for deeper integration, making Greece's accession politically viable despite lingering economic reservations. As a result, the later adoption of the euro further validated neofunctionalism's predictions regarding progressive integration driven by economic interdependence.

Intergovernmentalism (Hoffmann) work explain Greece's accession to the EEC as a result of *state-to-state diplomacy*, where national governments, rather than supranational institutions, determined the outcome. Member states engaged in direct negotiations, balancing Greece's democratic transition against economic concerns. While some countries feared the economic burden of integrating a weaker economy, geopolitical interests and regional stability ultimately prevailed. The process was shaped by national interests, with key European leaders, particularly from France and Germany, playing a decisive role in securing Greece's membership. This highlights the predominance of intergovernmental bargaining over supranational influence in Greece's integration into the EEC.

Liberal intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik, 1998) provides a complementary perspective to neofunctionalism by emphasising that Greece's accession to the EEC was the result of rational, interest-driven negotiations between sovereign states. From Greece's perspective, joining the EEC

was a strategic move aimed at strengthening its newly restored democracy, securing economic support, and integrating into a stable political and economic framework. European leaders, in turn, saw Greece's accession as an opportunity to reinforce democratic governance in Southern Europe and expand their political influence in a strategically important region.

Finally, constructivist theories would point out that (Checkel, 1999) Greece's accession to the EEC not just as a strategic or economic decision, but as a matter of identity and shared values. Greek political elites framed membership as a symbolic return to Europe, emphasising Greece's historical role as the cradle of democracy. This narrative helped justify accession beyond economic or political arguments, presenting it as a natural and rightful reintegration into the European community. By appealing to cultural and historical ties, Greece strengthened its case for membership despite economic concerns. This constructivist approach also shaped public and elite perceptions, fostering a sense of belonging within Europe. Even during later economic difficulties, this identity-based justification helped maintain Greece's commitment to European integration, illustrating how ideas and historical narratives influence political outcomes in addition to material interests.

All in all, Greece's accession faced significant challenges following its integration, including economic crises and difficulties in adapting to EU regulations. Its inclusion in the European bloc demonstrated that integration was not just an economic project but rather also a mechanism for political stability and geopolitical security.

3.2 CYPRUS

3.2.1 Historical Context

Much like Greece's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC), Cyprus' path to European Union (EU) membership was shaped by its unique geopolitical and historical context. Cyprus gained independence from British rule in 1960, yet the island soon became a focal point of ethnic tensions between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. As a result, this conflict escalated into a division following the 1974 Greek-backed coup and Turkey's military intervention, which led to the island's partition into the internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus in the south and the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in the north (Ushakova, 2005).

Greece's accession to the EEC in 1981 had profound consequences for both its own foreign policy and the broader regional dynamics. On one hand, it strengthened Greece's diplomatic position within Europe, enabling it to advocate more forcefully for Cypriot interests in European institutions. On the other hand, it added a layer of complexity to EU-Turkey relations, as the EEC now had a member state directly involved in the Cyprus dispute. This dynamic would later resurface during Cyprus' own accession negotiations, where Greece leveraged its position to support the Republic of Cyprus's entry into the EU despite the island's ongoing division. Thus, Greece's EEC membership not only marked its return to democratic Europe but also embedded the unresolved Cyprus question into the fabric of European integration (Ushakova, 2005).

Despite its internal division, the Republic of Cyprus actively pursued closer ties with Europe. In 1973, it signed an Association Agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC), laying the foundation for deeper economic and political integration (Drevet & Theophanous, 2012). However, the formal EU accession efforts began only after repeated United Nations-led reunification initiatives failed. Therefore, in July 1990, President George Vassiliou formally submitted Cyprus' application for full EEC membership, arguing that European integration would enhance the island's security and support efforts toward reunification (Ushakova, 2005, p. 234).

Initially, the EU tied Cyprus' membership to a resolution of the Cyprus Problem—a term that refers to the protracted conflict resulting from the island's division. However, by the mid-1990s, this requirement was dropped, largely due to shifting geopolitical dynamics and Greece's strong diplomatic efforts. These shifting dynamics included the EU's growing strategic interest in expanding eastward to include post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The geopolitical momentum behind enlargement made the EU more flexible regarding conditionality, especially as it sought to maintain cohesion among existing member states. At the same time, Greece threatened to veto the accession of Eastern European candidates, such as Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, if Cyprus was excluded from the enlargement process. This assertive stance coincided with the EU's broader objective of stabilising the post-Cold War European order, promoting democratic governance, and extending its influence to the eastern and southern neighbourhoods. As a result, in 1995, the EU gave formal assurances to Greece that Cyprus would be part of the next enlargement wave, regardless of whether a reunification agreement had been reached. This led to the official start of Cyprus' accession talks in 1998, and

ultimately to its entry into the EU in 2004, despite the island remaining divided (Ushakova, 2005, p. 234).

Therefore, by the European Council of December 1999, despite the EU's stated preference for a unified Cyprus, the Republic of Cyprus was ultimately accepted as a future EU member without reunification being a prerequisite. This is due to the fact that it was a strategic compromise: Cyprus had met the EU's membership criteria, and the broader enlargement agenda was a priority, so the ongoing conflict would not be allowed to derail the process (Ushakova, 2005, p. 234).

On May 1, 2004, Cyprus officially joined the EU as part of the “*big bang*” enlargement, even though the island remained divided. Just days before accession, efforts to resolve the conflict through the United Nations' Annan Plan collapsed—while Turkish Cypriots voted in favor of reunification, 76% of Greek Cypriots rejected the plan, preferring to enter the EU as an independent entity. As a result, Cyprus acceded without a settlement, and EU law was suspended in the north pending future reunification (Kyris, 2013).

Cyprus quickly integrated into EU structures, joining the eurozone in 2008 and actively participating in the Union's political institutions, except for Schengen membership, partly due to the unresolved border issue (Drevet & Theophanous, 2012). Over the following decades, Cyprus benefited economically from access to the single market and EU funds, with GDP per capita rising significantly compared to pre-accession levels. According to Eurostat data, Cyprus's GDP per capita in purchasing power standards (PPS) was approximately 92% of the EU average in 2003, just before its accession to the European Union. By 2023, this figure had risen to around 100% of the EU average, indicating significant economic convergence with other member states. This improvement reflects the economic benefits Cyprus has gained from access to the EU's single market and structural funds over the past two decades (Eurostat, 2024). Thus, Cyprus' accession stands as a qualified success within the European integration process, achieved through a combination of strategic diplomacy, economic adaptation, and the EU's normative appeal. While the island remains divided, EU membership has provided Cyprus with economic stability and political leverage, reinforcing its position within Europe and shaping future reunification prospects.

3.2.2 The Role of Greece

As Cyprus' entry into the European cannot be fully understood without considering the broader geopolitical dynamics of the 1990s and early 2000s. Among the key actors, Greece played a decisive role, using its position as the only EU member directly involved in the Cyprus dispute to champion its accession. From the outset, Greek diplomacy strategically advocated for Cyprus, leveraging its influence within EU institutions to ensure that Cyprus remained a priority in the enlargement process. Greece sought to advance its own strategic interests by promoting stability in the Eastern Mediterranean and strengthening the Hellenic presence within European structures. Furthermore, Greece aimed to support its ethnic counterpart, the Greek Cypriots, by facilitating their integration into the EU, thereby providing them with economic and political advantages. This approach also served to counterbalance Turkey's influence in the region and to encourage a resolution to the Cyprus conflict within a European framework (Ushakova, 2005).

A decisive moment came in 1995, when Greece strategically linked Cyprus' accession to the EU's Customs Union agreement with Turkey. In exchange for dropping its veto on this agreement and other EU initiatives, as explained before, Greece secured a firm commitment that Cyprus would be included in the next round of enlargements. This linkage strategy proved highly effective—Athens made it clear that if Cyprus was excluded from the EU, it would block the accession of Central and Eastern European countries. As a result, by acting as a gatekeeper, Greece ensured that Cyprus' EU bid remained a priority and was not sidelined by political concerns over the island's division (Drevet & Theophanous, 2012).

By the late 1990s, as Greek-Turkish relations improved—partly due to international mediation and a 1999 rapprochement following mutual earthquake aid—Greece took an even bolder step. At the December 1999 Helsinki European Council, the EU formally invited Cyprus to join without requiring reunification, while simultaneously granting Turkey EU candidate status. This decision reflected a geopolitical balancing act: on one hand, it reassured Greece that Cyprus' membership was secured; on the other hand, it signaled to Turkey that constructive engagement with the EU would be rewarded. Greece's support for Turkey's candidacy marked a significant shift in its foreign policy, aiming to transform Greek-Turkish relations through European integration (Kyriz, 2013).

Additionally, the EU's enlargement strategy at the time played a crucial role in Cyprus' accession. The 2004 enlargement, the largest in EU history, aimed to stabilise post-Cold War

Europe, integrating former Eastern Bloc nations and reinforcing democratic governance. Cyprus, despite its unresolved conflict, was incorporated into this vision. They thought that excluding Cyprus could have set a precedent where unresolved disputes became obstacles to EU expansion, whereas including Cyprus indicated confidence that European integration could foster conflict resolution over time (Ushakova, 2005).

Beyond political strategy, geopolitical factors significantly influenced Cyprus' accession to the European Union (EU). Positioned at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, Cyprus holds strategic importance for trade, energy security, and regional stability. EU leaders recognised that integrating Cyprus into Western institutions would extend the Union's influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, a region critical for security and economic interests. The presence of British sovereign bases on the island further reinforced this alignment, as the United Kingdom viewed Cyprus' EU membership as a means to maintain NATO-friendly stability in the region. Moreover, Cyprus' accession sent a clear message to Turkey: demonstrating that adherence to democratic norms and regional cooperation would be rewarded, while confrontational behaviour could lead to diplomatic isolation, an issue that will be explored in the next chapter (Chatham House, 2018).

3.2.3 Problems and Challenges

Cyprus' accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004 was the culmination of decades of diplomatic efforts and geopolitical manoeuvring. As previously discussed, the island's integration was shaped by historical, economic, and political factors, including Greece's strong advocacy, the EU's enlargement strategy, and broader regional considerations.

While accession was seen as a significant achievement in European integration, it also introduced unique challenges, as Cyprus became the first and only EU member state with a de facto partitioned territory. The inability to extend EU authority across the entire island created legal, political, and economic complications that continue to shape Cyprus' role within the EU today.

Firstly, as nearly two decades after joining the EU, Cyprus remains the only member state with a de facto partitioned territory, where the authority of both the EU and the Cypriot government does not extend across the entire island. This situation has had far-reaching implications for economic integration, political stability, legal cohesion, and EU-Turkey relations. This situation is

described as a “legal anomaly within the Union”, where the EU is now responsible for managing the problems of a divided island, part of which is occupied by another country—a unique case in European history since the end of the Cold War (Ushakova, 2005, p. 230) .

The division of Cyprus has complicated economic integration within the EU. The internal market rules and freedoms cannot fully operate across the island, as the north remains outside the EU customs territory. However, to address this problem, the EU established the *Green Line Regulation*, which allows for limited movement of people, goods, and services across the buffer zone. But, trade through the Green Line remains modest, and the economic isolation of the north persists, alleviated primarily by Turkish financial support and EU aid programs targeted at Turkish Cypriot development (Kyriz, 2013).

The political consequences of Cyprus’ unresolved status have been equally significant. By joining the EU as a divided country, Cyprus transformed a national issue into a European one, forcing the Union to balance its commitment to Cyprus as a member state with its broader relationship with Turkey. Since 2004, Cyprus has gained a seat and veto power in EU decision-making, which it has sometimes used to block or delay aspects of EU–Turkey relations. For instance, Cyprus has opposed Turkey’s EU accession progress until Ankara fulfils its obligations, such as normalising diplomatic relations with Cyprus and allowing Cypriot ships and planes access to its ports and airspace, in accordance with Turkey’s EU customs union commitments (Ushakova, 2005). This dynamic has led to stalemates in Turkey’s accession process, illustrating how a localised conflict can escalate to the EU level and disrupt broader political agendas.

Moreover, Cyprus’ division has directly influenced the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The EU has had to take an active role in managing an internal border dispute within a member state. This has included funding confidence-building measures, supporting the UN peacekeeping mission on the island, and deploying the EU Border Assistance Mission to oversee Green Line crossings. These efforts demonstrate how the EU has engaged diplomatically and institutionally with the Cyprus issue, yet without achieving a definitive resolution (Chatham House, 2018).

In addition to its political and economic challenges, Cyprus’ division has hindered legal and social integration. Although Turkish Cypriots are legally EU citizens, as they hold citizenship of the Republic of Cyprus, they cannot fully exercise EU rights in northern Cyprus due to the suspension

of EU law (Drevet & Theophanous, 2012). Over time, this legal disparity has contributed to a widening socioeconomic gap between the two communities. Furthermore, the continued presence of Turkish troops in northern Cyprus and the absence of a comprehensive peace settlement remain inconsistent with EU values of rule of law and human rights. Property disputes and displacement claims from 1974 remain unresolved, further complicating legal harmonisation within an EU member state (Kyriz, 2013).

3.2.4 Theoretical application

Lastly, after analysing historically the situation and the challenges emerged, the analysis now will go deeply on the multiple theories of European integration that helps to explain Cyprus' successful accession and integration into the EU.

Firstly, from a neofunctionalist perspective, Cyprus' European integration can be seen as a gradual process driven by functional and economic linkages that expanded over time. Early economic ties, such as the 1970s trade agreements and the customs union (fully in place by 1988), began integrating Cyprus into the European economic space, laying a foundation for political integration. These economic links generated spillover effects: Cypriot industries and markets became oriented toward Europe, leading Cypriot elites and technocrats to seek the stability and benefits of full EU membership as a logical next step. Indeed, by the late 1990s Cyprus had aligned a large portion of its laws and standards with the EU *acquis* during the pre-accession process, illustrating Ernst Haas' idea that technical integration caused further integration (Sandholtz, 1998).

Neofunctionalism also highlights the role of supranational actors and norms in pushing integration forward. In Cyprus' case, the European Commission and European Parliament were generally supportive of its accession, viewing it as part of the EU's normative commitment to include European democracies and promote peace. This supportive stance created an elite socialisation environment. Over time, the supranational logic of integration began to override earlier hesitations about Cyprus' conflict. For example, the belief that EU membership could facilitate a solution to the Cyprus Problem (by embedding the dispute in a cooperative European framework) gained traction in Brussels. As a result, according to neofunctionalist logic, even though a political resolution did not precede membership, the functional benefits of accession, economic growth,

regulatory alignment, regional stability, were compelling enough to drive the process forward (Kyriss, 2013).

Secondly, intergovernmentalism would argue that Cyprus' accession exemplifies how interstate bargaining and geopolitical calculations can drive the integration process. As, the decision to admit Cyprus was ultimately made by EU member state leaders in the European Council, balancing Cyprus' candidacy against other strategic priorities. Therefore, intergovernmentalism underscores that this was not an automatic spillover but a deliberate political choice by sovereign states as key EU powers had to weigh the benefits of Cyprus' membership against potential risks.

Notably, as explained before, Greece's role was pivotal, as seen earlier. Acting as Cyprus' patron within the EU, Athens leveraged its veto power to ensure Cyprus' inclusion. This interstate dynamic – essentially a quid pro quo, aligns with intergovernmentalist predictions that powerful member states' interests (in this case, Greece's security interest in Cyprus and the EU's interest in a smooth enlargement) determined the outcome. As one analysis notes, the EU's 1999 Helsinki summit decision to proceed with Cyprus' entry even without reunification was fundamentally a geopolitical bargain, prioritising regional stability and EU expansion over the unresolved territorial conflict (Kyriss, 2013).

Thirdly, liberal intergovernmentalism, delves deeper into how domestic politics and interstate bargaining together produced Cyprus' accession. In the first stage – national preference formation – the Republic of Cyprus developed an overwhelming domestic consensus in favour of EU membership. Greek Cypriot leaders and the public saw EU accession as a means to enhance economic prosperity and, critically, to strengthen their position vis-à-vis Turkey in the longstanding conflict. By the 1990s, joining the EU was a top national priority across the political spectrum in Cyprus, reflecting both economic self-interest (access to the single market, development funds) and security considerations (the “European solution” to the Cyprus problem). Meanwhile, within the EU, other member states had their own preferences: Greece was strongly in favour as a matter of national solidarity and security; countries like the UK and France weighed Cyprus' strategic location and Commonwealth ties; others were initially hesitant due to the island's division but open to enlargement in principle (Moravcsik, 1998).

The second stage, interstate agreement, played out through a series of high-level deals. Greece negotiated hard to include Cyprus, at one point vetoing EU–Turkey trade agreements to

press the issue. So, the integration was the result of domestic imperatives aligning with interstate deals: Cypriot and Greek leaders pushed fervently from the inside, and EU states struck pragmatic agreements to accommodate Cyprus as part of a larger strategic expansion of the Union (Kyris, 2013).

Lastly, postfunctionalism would highlight how public opinion, identity, and politicisation can shape, and sometimes constrain, the integration process. The core insight of postfunctionalism is that European integration is not driven solely by elite bargaining or functional benefits; it is also deeply affected by questions of identity and the national political resonance of integration decisions. In the context of Cyprus, postfunctionalism is especially relevant to understanding the limitations and challenges that accompanied accession, despite its overall success. A striking example is the fate of the Annan Plan in 2004. That rejection, coming just a week before EU accession, vividly illustrates the postfunctionalist claim that *“integration steps that clash with popular identity narratives will face pushback”* (Wright, 2004).

Postfunctionalism also considers broader European identity politics in enlargement. In the case of Cyprus, European public opinion in existing member states was not a major obstacle – Cyprus was relatively small and culturally seen as part of Europe, so its accession did not trigger the kind of nationalist backlash seen in debates over Turkey’s potential membership (Hooghe, 2009). However, Cyprus’ accession did have postfunctionalist ripple effects: it later empowered Cyprus, as an EU member state, to leverage its position in the highly contentious issue of Turkey’s EU bid, a dynamic where identity and politics intersect. For instance, the unresolved conflict and continued Turkish military presence in northern Cyprus fuelled Eurosceptic arguments in Turkey and gave ammunition to those in Europe wary of Turkish accession, contributing to a broader politicisation of enlargement. Thus, postfunctionalism helps explain why Cyprus’ integration, though institutionally successful, did not automatically resolve the island’s identity-driven conflict. Instead, national loyalties and historical grievances constrained the unifying potential of EU membership, requiring ongoing political navigation (Usushkova, 2005).

3.3 TURKEY’S FAILED CANDIDACY

Turkey’s aspiration to join the European Union dates back several decades. As early as 1959, Turkey applied for association with the European Economic Community, signing the Ankara

Agreement in 1963. This agreement established a customs union and provided the prospect of eventual membership. However, it was not until 1999 that the EU granted Turkey the official status of a candidate country, recognising the progress made in political and economic reforms. Turkey's implementation of significant democratic reforms, such as the abolition of the death penalty in 2004 and improvements in the rights of the Kurdish minority, to align with European criteria

Between 1999 and 2005, there was a climate of relative optimism. Many believed that Turkey's integration could bring strategic and economic benefits to both sides. With over 80 million inhabitants, a dynamic economy, and a unique geographical position between Europe and the Middle East, Turkey represented a key strategic partner for the EU in areas such as trade, energy security, and migration control. From the Turkish perspective, full membership was seen as the culmination of the modernisation project initiated by Atatürk anchoring the country within the Western sphere, and as an opportunity for economic prosperity and democratic consolidation. Nevertheless, significant reservations and obstacles emerged, making Turkey's accession process one of the longest and most problematic in EU history. Despite initial efforts toward convergence, negotiations soon stalled, and over time, relations entered recurring crises.

Today, Turkey's EU integration process is widely regarded as a failure, as negotiations have frozen for years and Turkey's accession is considered highly unlikely in the short or medium term. Understanding this failure requires analysing multiple factors, including Turkey's democratic backsliding, Europe's geostrategic and cultural concerns, and the firm opposition of several influential EU member states. The following sections will examine these aspects in detail to explain why Turkey has not succeeded in joining the EU after decades of "knocking on Europe's door" (El Orden Mundial, 2023).

3.3.1 Challenges of Adhesion

1. POLITICAL SYSTEM

One of the main obstacles to Turkey's accession has been the evolution of its political system, particularly concerning democracy and fundamental rights. In order to join the EU, any candidate country must meet the Copenhagen political criteria, which require stable institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for minorities. While in the early 2000s Turkey implemented significant reforms in this directions - such as abolishing the death penalty,

banning police torture, and expanding cultural rights for the Kurdish minority. On the contrary, Turkey has experienced a sharp authoritarian turn in the last five years, moving away from European democratic standards (Remiro Brotons et al., 2005).

Under the leadership of then, Prime Minister and now-President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Turkish government has concentrated power and undermined institutional checks and balances. The controversial 2017 constitutional reform established a hyper-presidential system, eliminating the position of prime minister and significantly expanding Erdoğan's powers, without sufficient parliamentary or judicial oversight. This reform, coupled with the prolonged state emergency following the failed 2016 coup, consolidated a regime that analysts like Freedom House (2023) have described as an illiberal democracy, in which elections take place but fundamental freedoms are systematically violated (Freedom House, 2023).

Judicial independence and the separation of powers have been also severely weakened. The government has purged or co-opted much of the judiciary, especially after 2016, under the accusation that certain judges and prosecutors were infiltrated by Gülenists, who were allegedly involved in the coup attempts. At the same time, the executive branch has taken control of key institutions, such as the Council of Judges and Prosecutors, weakening the system of checks and balances (Remiro Brotons et al., 2005).

Press freedom and freedom of expression have suffered major setbacks too. Currently, Turkey ranks among the top countries in terms of the number of imprisoned journalists and ranks 165th out of 180 in the 2023 World Press Freedom Index (a position worse than any EU member state). Critical media outlets have been shut down or placed under government control, and opposition voices face frequent legal proceedings. Notable examples include the ongoing imprisonment of prominent journalists and pro-Kurdish opposition leaders, despite rulings from the European Court of Human Rights ordering their release. Similarly, civil society organisations and activists have been repressed, as seen in the violent response to the 2023 Gezi Park protests and the recent de facto ban on several NGOs independent media (Remiro Brotons et al., 2005).

These democratic backsliding trends have not gone unnoticed in Brussels. The European Union, through the European Commission's annual reports and European Parliament resolutions, has openly accused Turkey of violating the political criteria for accession. Already in 2016, following mass arrests after the coup attempt and other repressive measures, the European

Parliament voted in favour of “freezing” accession negotiations with Turkey. Although this resolution was symbolic and non-binding, it reflected a broad European consensus that Turkey’s political trajectory was incompatible with the EU’s fundamental values. The resolution did not lead to an actual suspension of negotiations because only the European Council, composed of the heads of state and government, has the legal authority to formally halt or terminate accession talks. At the time, member states were divided, with some unwilling to sever ties with Ankara due to strategic concerns such as migration control and regional security. By 2018, however, the European Council officially declared that negotiations were at a standstill due to the deterioration of the rule of law in Turkey. Since then, no new negotiation chapters have been opened or closed, and Turkey’s accession process is effectively blocked (El Orden Mundial, 2023).

Furthermore, in terms of human rights and minority protections, European concerns remain significant. International organisations continue to report human rights violations in Turkey, including mistreatment of detainees, internet censorship, and discrimination against vulnerable groups. In particular, the situation of the Kurdish minority remains problematic: many Kurdish leaders remain imprisoned, and the ongoing conflict in the country’s southeast against the PKK has intensified security measures that restrict civil liberties (El Orden Mundial, 2023).

Equally alarming is the rollback of women’s and LGBTI rights, exemplified by Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021 (an international treaty against gender-based violence) and the openly hostile rhetoric from high-ranking Turkish officials towards the LGBTI community. For the EU, all these issues constitute *de facto* violations of the values and standards that the Union upholds (El Orden Mundial, 2023)

In summary, Turkey’s current democratic and human rights deficiencies have created an almost insurmountable obstacle to its accession, as they directly contradict the fundamental principles that the EU requires from any aspiring member state. As long as Turkey continues on this authoritarian path, its chances of joining the Union remain extremely remote.

2. ECONOMIC FACTORS

Alongside political issues, there are also economic factors that have complicated Turkey’s integration into the EU. In theory, the Turkish economy has several advantages: it is the 19th largest in the world, with a large domestic market and a young population. Since 1995, Turkey has been

part of the customs union with the EU, which has exponentially increased bilateral trade and integrated Turkey into European supply chains. However, compliance with the Copenhagen economic criteria, which require the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to withstand competition in the single market, has been inconsistent. Although Turkey adopted many pro-market reforms in the 2000s and 2010s, in recent years its economy has shown signs of vulnerability and incompatibility with the prevailing economic policies of the EU (Remiro Brotóns et al., 2005).

One of the main concerns is macroeconomic instability. In recent years, Turkey has suffered from high inflation (exceeding 80% annually in 2022), abrupt currency devaluations (affecting the lira), and erratic monetary policies, which have undermined investor confidence. These fluctuations are partly attributed to political interference in the Central Bank and unorthodox economic measures promoted by Erdoğan himself. The EU views this situation with concern, as price stability and fiscal discipline are key parameters for economic convergence. In fact, experts point to the “lack of macroeconomic policies oriented towards stability” in Turkey as a major obstacle to deeper integration. Furthermore, despite the existing customs union, Ankara has repeatedly failed to comply with its obligations by imposing import restrictions on certain products or engaging in trade disputes that required arbitration. The European Commission has criticised these trade frictions and has conditioned any modernisation or expansion of the customs union on Turkey’s full compliance with its commitments (Remiro Brotóns et al., 2005).

At the same time, economic concerns among EU Member States regarding Turkish accession remain significant. With over 84 million inhabitants, Turkey would become the second most populous country in the Union (only behind Germany), which would significantly reshape the distribution of power in European institutions, particularly in the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. Some Member States fear that Turkey’s entry could divert large amounts of cohesion and agricultural funds towards Anatolia, given the significant regional economic disparities. Since Turkey’s per capita income is considerably lower than the EU average, its accession would require substantial European financial aid to ensure economic convergence (Remiro Brotóns et al., 2005).

Moreover, in countries like France, Austria, and Germany, fears have grown over a potential “influx” of low-cost Turkish labor taking advantage of the free movement of workers. If Turkey were to join, its citizens would eventually gain the right to work in any EU country, and certain segments of European public opinion have expressed concerns about this prospect, particularly in contexts of domestic unemployment. These fears were already evident during the 2005 negotiations,

when Austria even proposed allowing Turkey access to the market for goods and services but not to the free movement of people, reflecting concerns about labor migration (Remiro Brotóns et al., 2005).

Another sensitive economic issue is the EU's capacity to absorb Turkey. The country's scale and economic structure pose an unprecedented integration challenge. For this reason, when the EU decided to open accession negotiations in 2005, certain Member States insisted on including a clause stating that the process was "open-ended and with no guaranteed outcome", making Turkey's membership conditional, among other factors, on the EU's ability to assimilate a country of such size. Since then, the so-called "enlargement fatigue" has intensified across Europe. Following the large waves of enlargement from 2004 to 2007, which brought 12 Central and Eastern European countries into the bloc, and the subsequent financial crisis, many European governments and citizens have shown little enthusiasm for admitting another large and relatively less prosperous member. This growing lack of political will to expand the Union represents an implicit economic barrier: there is no EU-wide consensus on whether to bear the financial costs and structural adjustments that Turkey's accession would entail (Remiro Brotóns et al., 2005).

In conclusion, although Turkey and the EU are already closely linked economically, with the EU being Turkey's main trading partner and European companies playing a major role in Turkish investment, doubts persist about the economic compatibility and viability of Turkey's accession. The recent volatility of the Turkish economy, combined with European concerns over the budgetary and labor market impact of its entry, have significantly dampened enthusiasm for further integration in this area.

3. GEOSTRATEGIC FACTORS

Turkey's geographical position makes it a natural bridge between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, which has profound geostrategic implications, both in favour of and against its accession. On the one hand, Turkey is a key security ally: it has been a NATO member since 1952 (with the second-largest army in the Alliance) and has, for decades, served as the southeastern flank of Western defence, bordering conflict-prone areas such as the Middle East and the Caucasus. Full integration into the EU could enhance Europe's geopolitical influence, providing the Union with a stronger presence in strategic regions. In fact, leaders from countries such as the United Kingdom, historically strong supporters of Turkey's candidacy, have emphasised the "immense strategic importance" of anchoring Turkey to the West and presenting it as an example of a modern, democratic Muslim nation in a turbulent region. A Turkey within the EU would mean that the Union

would have a direct border with countries like Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Seen positively, this could allow the EU to exert greater stabilising influence over these conflicts and better manage challenges such as terrorism and migration flows coming from these regions (Remiro Brotóns et al., 2005, p.13-16).

However, this same geography also raises concerns and risks for the EU. Turkish accession would expand the Union's external borders to highly conflict-ridden areas, making the EU's new frontiers those of Syria (in civil war since 2011), Iraq (a country destabilised by decades of conflict), and Iran (a regional power with which the West has had nuclear-related tensions). Many European strategists question whether the EU is prepared to take on such borders, which could imply greater security responsibilities and increased vulnerabilities in the face of regional crises.

The question of where Europe's geographical limits lie has always been present in the debate: Turkey's potential entry would mean that the EU extends as far as the Caucasus and the Near East, a notion that, for some, blurs Europe's geopolitical identity. In this context, there have been concerns about the risk of "importing" regional conflicts into the Union. A clear example is Cyprus: since 1974, Turkey has maintained troops in northern Cyprus and does not recognise the internationally recognised Cypriot government, which is an EU member. This dispute has directly affected the accession negotiations, with several chapters blocked by Cyprus until Turkey complies with its obligation to recognise the Cypriot government and normalise relations. If Turkey were to join without resolving the "Cyprus question," the EU would face the paradox of having one member state that does not recognise another, a diplomatically untenable situation. Similarly, disputes between Turkey and Greece persist. Although both are NATO members, they remain historical rivals, clashing over territorial waters in the Aegean Sea, the status of certain islands, and airspace issues. These tensions have even led to military incidents and European sanctions, as seen in 2020 when the EU sanctioned Turkish officials over illegal drilling in waters near Cyprus. For many in Europe, integrating Turkey without first resolving these disputes would mean importing internal geopolitical tensions into the bloc (Remiro Brotóns et al., 2005, p.54-61).

Additionally, Turkey's foreign policy over the past decade has at times diverged from that of the EU, leading to distrust. Traditionally, Turkey was a reliable Western ally during the Cold War. However, more recently, Ankara has pursued a more independent agenda, at times even contradicting European interests. For example, Turkey has launched repeated unilateral military operations in Syria against Kurdish militias that, paradoxically, were allies of the US and Europe in the fight against ISIS, drawing sharp criticism from European governments. In Libya, Turkey

intervened in the civil war on one side, indirectly confronting France, which supported the opposing faction. In 2020, Turkish gas explorations in the eastern Mediterranean triggered a major crisis with Greece and Cyprus, prompting the EU to threaten harsher sanctions. Furthermore, Ankara's close ties with Moscow deeply concern Brussels: in 2019, Turkey purchased the Russian S-400 missile defence system, which is incompatible with NATO's air defence systems, leading to US sanctions and Turkey's suspension from the F-35 fighter jet program. During the war in Ukraine, although Turkey condemned Russia's invasion and mediated agreements such as the Black Sea grain export deal, it refused to join Western sanctions against Russia and has been accused of acting as a loophole for sanctioned goods. These ambiguities have led many European leaders to view Turkish foreign policy as "threatening and antagonistic," particularly due to its ties with Russia. Consequently, Ankara is no longer seen as a reliable ally in all international matters but rather as a competitor seeking to expand its influence in regions such as the Balkans, Central Asia, and Africa, sometimes at the EU's expense (Remiro Brotóns et al., 2005, p.54-61).

That said, geostrategic interdependence has also fostered some cooperation despite the stagnation of Turkey's accession process. The 2015-2016 migration crisis underscored Turkey's importance: millions of Syrian refugees crossed its territory on their way to Europe. The EU turned to Ankara for assistance in curbing this flow, resulting in a 2016 agreement under which Turkey would strengthen border controls and accept the return of migrants in exchange for European financial aid (six billion euros) and promises to expedite visa liberalisation and negotiation chapters. Although the political aspects of the agreement (such as visa liberalisation) never materialised due to subsequent tensions, the migration component largely functioned as intended. This highlights that, beyond the formal accession process, Europe needs Turkey to manage shared strategic challenges, whether in migration, counterterrorism (as Turkey provides intelligence on jihadist cells given its position), or regional conflicts (such as its mediation between Russia and Ukraine). Even in the context of the war in Ukraine (2022-2023), Turkey's control over the Bosphorus Straits has played a crucial role in Black Sea security, which "has convinced many European leaders of the need for greater engagement with Ankara." In July 2023, Turkey finally agreed to lift its veto on Sweden's NATO accession, a gesture well received in Brussels (Remiro Brotóns et al., 2005, p.54-61).

These developments reflect a paradoxical reality: while political relations remain strained, the EU cannot ignore Turkey's strategic significance. This has led to proposals for a "new

framework of cooperation,” which will be analysed later. For now, it is enough to state that Turkey’s geographical position and international environment have been a double-edged sword: they make Turkey an essential country for European security, but also a problematic neighbour whose external tensions complicate its full integration into the European family.

4. OTHER MEMBERS

The attitude of EU member states has been a decisive factor in the course of Turkey’s accession process. Unlike previous enlargements, where there was a clear political consensus in favor, the Turkish case has faced strong resistance from several influential countries, driven by both domestic political calculations and identity-related concerns. The accession of any new member requires unanimity from all EU states, meaning that even a single dissenting country holds veto power. In this case, nations such as Greece and Cyprus among others, have consistently expressed reservations, making it difficult for the process to move forward.

France has perhaps been the most vocal political opponent. Former President Nicolas Sarkozy embodied this resistance during his tenure (2007-2012), repeatedly stating that he did not see Turkey as part of Europe and openly proposing that it should only be offered a privileged partnership rather than full membership. He even went so far as to declare outright that “Turkey will never be European,” arguing that geographically and culturally, it falls outside the European sphere. As a result, under Sarkozy’s government, France blocked the opening of several negotiation chapters, particularly those related to key political matters. In June 2007, for instance, Paris vetoed discussions on the economic and monetary policy chapter with Turkey, allowing only technical topics to progress, thereby derailing the planned negotiation timeline. This French position, to varying degrees shared by other states, reflects both identity considerations (which will be addressed in the next section) and domestic political concerns. French public opinion was largely opposed to Turkey’s accession, and political opposition to it proved electorally advantageous. In fact, in 2005, France amended its constitution to require a mandatory referendum for any major future enlargement, a clause designed specifically with Turkey in mind. Even after Sarkozy, French skepticism persisted: his successor François Hollande slowed negotiations, and President Emmanuel Macron has declared that there is currently “no prospect” of Turkey’s accession in the

near future, prioritising instead a different strategic relationship (Remiro Brotóns et al., 2005, p.63-65).

Germany, on the other hand, initially supported Turkey's candidacy during the government of Social Democrat Gerhard Schröder (until 2005). However, with the arrival of Angela Merkel to power, Berlin aligned with the idea of a "privileged partnership" rather than full membership. While Merkel formally kept negotiations open (partly out of respect for previous EU commitments), she always made her skepticism clear. Finally, in 2017, amid growing bilateral tensions over the arrests of German citizens in Turkey and other diplomatic clashes, Merkel hardened her stance during the German electoral campaign, publicly stating that "Turkey should not become a member of the EU," effectively sealing the fate of the negotiations. This firm stance was backed by unanimous support from Germany's major political parties: even Social Democrat Martin Schulz, Merkel's electoral rival, promised to halt Turkey's accession if elected chancellor. Although Germany has a large Turkish diaspora, this has not translated into political support for accession; on the contrary, the presence of a significant immigrant community has fueled debates on cultural integration, which certain sectors have used to argue against Turkey's entry. Nonetheless, Germany has sought to maintain practical cooperation with Ankara for mutual interests in trade and migration, even as it politically considers Turkey's candidacy frozen (Remiro Brotóns et al., 2005, p.63-65).

Austria has consistently been one of the most staunch opponents of Turkey's EU accession. As early as 2005, on the eve of negotiations, the Austrian government pushed for the goal to be something less than full membership, advocating instead for an intermediate status. Vienna only withdrew its initial objection after securing concessions, such as expediting Croatia's accession, which was achieved a few years later. Austrian skepticism is partly due to the fact that its public opinion has been one of the most hostile toward Turkish membership: polls from the mid-2000s showed extremely low support among Austrians for Turkey's accession (barely 10%, compared to an EU average of 35%). This widespread opposition has influenced all Austrian governments, including those of the grand coalition, and even more so when nationalist parties with anti-Turkish rhetoric have been in power. In 2016, Austria became the first EU country to formally call for the suspension of negotiations following Turkey's post-coup crackdown. Even in 2023, the Austrian foreign minister reiterated that "Turkey's full accession is not on the agenda," instead advocating for the definition of "a new model of cooperation" (Remiro Brotóns et al., 2005, p.63-65).

Alongside France, Germany, and Austria, other EU states have also raised objections. Cyprus and Greece, due to their long-standing conflicts with Turkey, have consistently conditioned the negotiation process on resolving these disputes. Meanwhile, countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands reflect societies with significant anti-accession segments, in part due to the rise of populist anti-immigration parties that use Turkey as a political scare tactic, arguing that its membership would accelerate the “Islamization” of Europe or increase Muslim migration (Remiro Brotóns et al., 2005, p.63-65).

Over time, European public opinion has become increasingly opposed to Turkish enlargement. Resistance grew particularly after the 2015 migration crisis and jihadist attacks in Europe, which reinforced existing prejudices. By 2019, surveys indicated majority opposition to Turkey’s accession in countries such as France, Germany, Austria, and Belgium, in some cases exceeding 70%. This electoral reality has influenced political leaders. As President Erdoğan remarked in 2025, referring to the rise of the far right in Europe, “anti-immigrant and Islamophobic demagogues are filling the political vacuum” and fuelling opposition to Turkey. Indeed, parties like Austria’s FPÖ or France’s National Rally have capitalised on the issue, presenting Turkey’s accession as a threat to European identity that must be stopped (Remiro Brotóns et al., 2005, p.63-65).

In conclusion, the lack of unanimous consensus within the EU has been a decisive factor: even if Turkey were to meet all the technical criteria, it would still require the political approval of all member states, something that currently appears unattainable. The governments of key countries have openly expressed their veto or, at the very least, their unwillingness to move forward, effectively blocking Turkey’s accession. This resistance reflects a combination of political, economic, and socio-cultural reservations among Europeans, which have weighed as heavily, if not more, than Turkey’s own shortcomings. As some have put it, Turkey has encountered a “European wall” that is both external (strict accession conditions) and internal (lack of acceptance within Europe).

3.3.2 The Role of Islamisation

Turkey's bid to join the European Union has always highlighted the controversial and sensitive role that Islamisation is playing in the process of European integration. Islamisation, in this context,

refers to the increasing presence and role of political Islam in Turkey's public and governmental life. It is now one of the most visible questions about the country's bid. The EU, founded on secular and liberal democratic foundations, was faced with an unprecedented situation: the prospect of full membership of a large Muslim-majority country. Both Turkey and the EU have therefore been compelled to address fundamental questions of identity, values, and whether political Islam can be accommodated within the European integration project.

What has emerged over the decades is that more than institutional or geopolitical obstacles, it is the cultural, political, symbolic, and ideological dimensions of Islamisation that have proven most difficult.

The issue is intertwined with the development of Turkey's domestic politics, particularly under the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), and with wider debates in Europe about the Union's character and future itself. Turkey's application has become a case study on if multicultural, plural Europe can absorb a country with a strong Islamic identity. For many Europeans, Turkey's application raised the question of whether a society that was so predominantly Muslim, with a different past and political trajectory, could ever truly "belong" in the European family. Importantly, these doubts were not in general founded upon religious prejudice, after all, the EU is secular in focus, but on deep doubts concerning where Europe's cultural and normative borders lie (González de Cardedal, 2003).

The accession of Turkey compels Europe to define its fundamental identity. He continued by observing that the issue was not a conflict between Christianity and Islam per se. European political philosophy has consistently emphasised freedom of religion and the legitimacy of public expressions of faith. In fact, from the Christian theological perspective, Islam's public arousal of faith in God could even be welcomed. Christians may view the inclusion of Turkey as a chance to reassert common spiritual values. Therefore, the key issue was not religious paradox but whether Turkey and Europe have sufficient cultural and ideological commonality. The public opinion in EU member countries mirrored these doubts. Even though most European governments were in support of the opening of negotiations, public opinion was more skeptical, particularly in countries like France, Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands, those with large Turkish diasporas and more direct experiences of integration challenges (González de Cardedal, 2003).

All too often, social tension or integration failure was blamed (fairly or unfairly) on religious or cultural differences, fuelling anxiety that Turkish membership would be problematic (Abad Alonso, 2003). Meanwhile, Turkish domestic political developments seemed to provide some ammunition for certain of those European fears. Since its foundation as a republic in 1923, Turkey

had been a strongly secular state, with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk making laicism one of the founding principles of national identity. This amounted to religion being banished from public life and political institutions (González de Cardedal, 2003).

By the 1990s, Islamist parties were banned, and religion was culturally accepted but heavily restricted politically. It is under these conditions that the AKP emerged in the early 2000s. The party placed itself not as an Islamist but as a conservative democratic movement similar to European Christian-democratic parties. In its early years, the AKP leadership went out of its way to declare respect for Turkey's secular constitution and pledged to uphold democracy, women's rights, and civil liberties. Erdoğan's 2002 platform included explicit promises to separate religion from political power and to promote human rights and freedom of expression, a risky position for an Islamist-based party (Abad Alonso, 2003). This was both a genuine ideological shift and a pragmatic political calculation: demonstrating loyalty to European values was the most effective way of securing EU accession.

During the early 2000s, the AKP advanced many reforms that seemed to justify this promise. The government legislated laws aimed at meeting EU prerequisites, including the empowerment of the rule of law and the militarisation of the military. A major outcome was the curtailment of the military's power, which had been the most powerful custodian of secularism. European Commission reports acknowledged both these reforms and Turkey's continued commitment to its secular tradition even while noting ongoing issues e.g., discrimination against non-Muslim religious minorities, that Turkey had not yet addressed. Now it was as if there was an unwritten deal: Europe would support Turkey's integration if it stayed on a secular, democratic course, and the AKP, for its part, used EU criteria as a blueprint for change at home (Centro de Investigaciones de Política Internacional, 2023). Interestingly, all of these changes took place under the leadership of a profoundly religious party, and this meant that political Islam and liberal democracy in Europe were not irreconcilable.

However, as the years passed, this narrative began to change. The AKP started to more overtly acknowledge its religious roots around 2007. A series of policy proposals and public statements marked a turn towards greater Islamisation of society. The party reconfigured education policy to favour graduates of Imam-Hatip religious secondary schools, proposed (though subsequently dropped) a bill criminalising adultery, and lifted the longstanding ban on Islamic headscarves at universities and in the public service. These were framed as policies enhancing individual freedom, but they also brought religious symbols into public spaces rigidly controlled by secular norms. Simultaneously, Erdoğan and other leaders started to invoke Ottoman-Islamic

identity more intensely, adopting a "neo-Ottoman" agenda putting Turkey at the centre of the Muslim world (Centro de Investigaciones de Política Internacional, 2023). This cultural and symbolic turn was a break from past decades of pro-Western orientation.

Despite the fact that Turkey remained officially secular, the balance between religion and public life was clearly tilting. The tension between secular and religious forces climaxed in political conflict. In 2007, the military and judiciary attempted to block the AKP's presidential candidate on the basis of his Islamist roots, leading to the "e-coup." Erdoğan's government was able to survive thanks to the support of an alliance with the Gülen movement, which helped to discredit and undermine secularist competitors through controversial trials. This was a fundamental political reconfiguration: the military's secular guardian role was cut back, and a new religiously conservative elite came to power. For the EU, this development was a cause for alarm. The incremental removal of democratic checks and balances and the increasing evidence of authoritarianism were contrary to the Copenhagen political criteria that Turkey had committed to. What particularly surprised European observers was that these developments were regularly framed in religious or traditionalist discourses, talking up family values or codes of morality that were sometimes at odds with the EU's liberal norms on gender equality and minority rights. Thus, the EU accession process stalled (Centro de Investigaciones de Política Internacional, 2023).

By 2016, after the failed coup, negotiations had effectively come to an end. Erdoğan's authoritarian consolidation, nationalist-Islamic discourse, and human rights record made many Europeans think Turkey was no longer compatible with the EU's democratic example. Yet, EU reservations were not the only cause of the increasing divergence. Turkish public opinion also began to change. Most Turks felt that, despite implementing painful reforms and concessions, the EU never genuinely intended to accept a Muslim-majority country. This perception of cultural prejudice fuelled nationalist anger. As González de Cardedal (2003) described it, it was a case of "Europe says 'yes' and means 'no', and Turkey says 'yes' but deep down remains 'no'." The longer it continued, the more Turkey turned to its Islamic and regional identity. Critics warned that shutting out Turkey could have the opposite effect, encouraging precisely the kind of ideological turn that Europe dreaded. And, as EU membership hopes disappeared, Turkey did indeed grow more confident in developing links with its Muslim neighbouring countries and in assuming a non-Western identity. (Centro de Investigaciones de Política Internacional, 2023).

3.3.3 Theoretical Framework

To better understand the nature of Turkey's European Union accession process, it is essential to examine it through the lens of key theories of European integration. These theoretical frameworks provide critical insights into the dynamics, expectations, and limits of EU enlargement as applied to Turkey's candidacy. While theories such as neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism, constructivism, and postfunctionalism each offer compelling perspectives, none can fully account on their own for the complex interplay of economic, political, and identity-based factors that have shaped this uniquely protracted case. The following analysis explores how these theories interpret Turkey's path toward the EU, and more importantly, where they fall short in explaining why a process once marked by optimism and institutional momentum has remained effectively frozen. This section begins with the functionalist approach, which emphasises the role of economic cooperation and sectoral interdependence, before considering broader political and socio-cultural explanations that emerge in other theoretical models.

Turning to neofunctionalism, although early theorists like Haas did not focus on enlargement, later scholars such as Macmillan, Schimmelfennig, and Sedelmeier applied this framework to EU expansion, particularly in the context of Turkey's candidacy. From this perspective, the surprising perseverance of Turkey's accession process could be attributed to mechanisms of spillover. For instance, the establishment of the 1995 Customs Union generated economic interests, as both European and Turkish companies benefitted from reciprocal market access, thereby promoting pressure for deeper bilateral ties. Likewise, the European Commission played a facilitating role, repeatedly recommending progress whenever Turkey met the criteria, acting as a supranational promoter of enlargement. Catherine Macmillan, in fact, argues that the progress made (including the opening of accession talks in 2005 despite initial opposition from some member states) can be explained through a neofunctionalist lens, as functional spillovers and supranational actors kept the process alive. Turkey also participated in numerous European programs creating an institutional web that exerted further pressure toward full integration (MacMillan, 2009).

Nevertheless, neofunctionalism fails to explain why the Turkish process, after reaching such heights, is paralysed. The theory tends to downplay national governments' agency and identity-related factors, assuming that elites and institutional dynamics would invariably push integration forward. In Turkey's case, while spillovers led to the start of negotiations, resistance from key

member states, such as France, Austria, and Cyprus, acted as a counterforce that the theory did not fully anticipate. So, while neofunctionalism accounts for how Turkey made significant progress (driven by institutional and economic inertia), it cannot explain why it did not advance further: for that, one must consider external factors such as intergovernmental politics and identity, which eventually imposed a pause to the process (MacMillan, 2009).

From the intergovernmentalist perspective, Turkey's candidacy is primarily shaped by negotiations between European capitals. Unlike the neofunctionalist approach, this view centres on how states like France, Germany, the UK, Greece, and Cyprus have conditioned Turkey's accession trajectory based on their national interests. Since EU accession requires unanimity among member states, any single objection can halt critical steps. In practice, this pattern has repeated itself: as said before, some European countries have consistently opposed Turkey's integration, especially as Turkey has increasingly diverged from EU democratic standards. As some analysts put it, "Ankara knows it is neither wanted nor will be welcomed into the European club" as long as explicit rejection from key governments persists. This primacy of national interests largely explains the deadlock: several critical states have concluded that the political costs of accepting Turkey, such as migration impacts, budgetary adjustments, or backlash from domestic voters, outweigh potential geostrategic or economic gains (Hoffmann, 1966).

The constructivist insight relates to democratic norms and values. The EU defines itself as a community of shared principles, such as freedom, democracy, and human rights. In the early 2000s, there was hope that Turkey would converge with these standards through EU conditionality and internal reforms. However, over the past decade, Turkey has experienced democratic backsliding, like concentration of presidential power, and repression of the opposition. From a constructivist lens, this divergence from EU norms reinforces the narrative that Turkey no longer shares the Union's political identity. Consequently, Europe views Turkey as both culturally distinct and normatively incompatible. While constructivism highlights these crucial identity and normative barriers, it is not a complete explanation on its own. It clarifies the emotional and social roots of rejection, as Turkey is perceived as "too different" by many Europeans, but may underplay tangible factors like geopolitics or economic concerns. Furthermore, identity is not static: Turkey has a secular tradition and long-standing ties to Europe (e.g., NATO membership, Council of Europe since 1950), and was seen as a legitimate candidate in the 1990s–2000s. This suggests that identity narratives can be reshaped through political leadership. Therefore, the constructivist lens correctly

identifies the lack of identity “fit” as central to Turkey’s stagnation, though understanding how these perceptions became politically decisive requires complementing the analysis with postfunctionalist insights (Ballet, 2006).

Turkey’s accession to the European Union provides a paradigmatic case for illustrating the core claims of postfunctionalist theory. Postfunctionalism argues that European integration has become increasingly politicized, especially as it touches on issues of identity, sovereignty, and national belonging. In this framework, the preferences of domestic publics, the mobilisation of political parties, and the salience of national identity have come to shape, and often constrain, elite decisions on further integration and enlargement (Hooghe and Marks, 2008).

In the case of Turkey, this politicisation has been particularly acute. Nationalist and far-right parties across Europe have seized on Turkey’s accession as a symbolic threat to a perceived cultural and civilisational definition of Europe. These actors have used Turkey as a mobilising tool to rally opposition to EU enlargement, turning what might once have been a technocratic matter into a contentious domestic issue. As traditional and authoritarian parties are more likely to oppose enlargement, aligning with nationalist narratives that frame Turkey as an outsider. Under electoral pressure from these forces, even centrist governments that might have otherwise supported Turkish accession for geostrategic reasons have found themselves politically constrained. Postfunctionalism, therefore, offers a powerful explanation of why Turkish accession has become politically unfeasible in many EU member states (Hooghe and Marks, 2008).

Therefore, the EU itself has adapted its approach. Since 2018, both the European Commission and the Council have stated that no new negotiation chapters with Turkey will be opened, effectively freezing the process. This decision acknowledges that, under current political conditions, offering a credible accession perspective is no longer viable (Hooghe and Marks, 2008).

In short, postfunctionalism contributes a crucial piece to understanding Turkey’s stalled accession: it reveals how domestic political pressure and identity concerns within EU member states have transformed the issue into a politically toxic topic, making it nearly impossible for any government to support enlargement actively.

CONCLUSIONS

The Mediterranean dimension of European integration, focusing on the three cases of Greece, Cyprus and Turkey, whose trajectories reveal not only the structural dynamics of EU enlargement, but also the symbolic, cultural, and identity-based boundaries that shape it. Beyond formal criteria enshrined in EU treaties and the Copenhagen criteria principles, the enlargement process is deeply embedded in historical narratives, geopolitical interests, and, crucially, normative judgments about what it means to belong to Europe. What emerges from this research is a far more complex, and at times uncomfortable, picture of European integration than the idealised vision often presented in official discourses.

One of the most striking conclusions that can be drawn is that European integration, despite being framed as a technocratic and normative project, is in fact highly political and selective. The cases of Greece and Cyprus illustrates how historical, cultural, and religious affinities with the “European core” can facilitate accession, even when economic and institutional readiness is lacking. In contrast, Turkey’s stalled candidacy shows how identity markers can serve as *de facto* exclusionary tools, regardless of strategic interest or legal progress.

While the EU presents itself as a community based on shared values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, the reality is that these values are unevenly interpreted and applied. Greece joined the European Economic Community despite significant economic weaknesses, largely because its returns to democracy after military dictatorship resonated with the symbolic narrative of Europe as the cradle of democracy. Cyprus, divided and embroiled in a long-standing territorial conflict, was admitted into the Union in 2004 with the full knowledge that EU law would not apply to the northern part of the island. These decisions were not strictly based on objective criteria but on political calculation, solidarity among member states, and a willingness to stretch the rules for countries that were perceived as “belonging” to Europe.

Turkey, on the other hand, has fulfilled many of the same technical and legal requirements, at times even exceeding the reforms undertaken by previous accession states, but remains excluded. The reasons for this are multifaceted, but they coverage around a core issue: Turkey is not perceived as part of the European identity. Its Islamic heritage, geopolitical assertiveness, and divergent political trajectory have all contributed to a growing sense of incompatibility, even though these

factors were arguably present from the outset. What has changed is not Turkey's essence, but Europe's willingness to imagine it as part of its normative and cultural space.

This reveals a fundamental tension within the EU: it claims to be a universalist project open to any country that adopts its values, but in practice, it is also a bounded community shaped by historical memories, cultural preferences, and unspoken anxieties about identity. European integration is not merely a legal or economic process; it is also an act of collective self-definition. Who gets to be European, and under what conditions, is not simply a matter of compliance with treaties, but of symbolic inclusion within a cultural and civilisational imaginary. This dimension of integration is rarely acknowledged in official documents but becomes starkly visible in moments of enlargement, crisis, or external challenge.

The role of religion in this identity construction cannot be overlooked. While the EU does not define itself as Christian, the cultural heritage of Christianity permeates its institutions, historical narratives, and symbolic references. This has become particularly salient in debates over Turkey's accession, where concerns about Islamisation, secularism, and cultural integration have implicitly shaped public opinion and political discourse. The rejection of Turkey is often articulated in terms of democracy and human rights, but it is difficult to separate these arguments from underlying fears about religious and cultural difference. This suggested that, contrary to its universalist rhetoric, the EU does not in fact operate with a notion of European identity that is historically and culturally specific.

Such a realisation is not merely academic. It has real political implications, especially for the future of European integration. If the EU continues to function as a gatekeeper of identity, selectively enforcing its norms and accommodating only those who fit its unspoken cultural template, it risks undermining the credibility of its enlargement policy and alienating its neighbours. The Mediterranean region, rich in diversity, history, and strategic importance, offers both a challenge and an opportunity in this regard. The EU can either reimagine its borders as flexible and inclusive, or it can retreat into a narrower vision of Europeanness that prioritises cultural homogeneity over political pluralism.

Moreover, the growing role of identity politics within member states has had a profound impact on the EU's capacity for enlargement. The rise of Euroscepticism, nationalism, and anti-immigration sentiment has made it increasingly difficult for governments to justify the accession of

countries that are perceived as culturally or economically distant. Turkey, once hailed as a bridge between East and West, now faces a European public largely opposed to its membership. This is not merely a response to Turkey's democratic backsliding, but a broader symptom of Europe's internal crisis of identity and purpose.

Looking to the future, the prospects of European integration appear uncertain. On the one hand, the EU remains a unique model of regional cooperation, with a robust institutional framework and a strong normative appeal. On the other hand, its internal divisions, cultural anxieties, and geopolitical hesitations threaten to fragment its vision. The Mediterranean will continue to be a testing ground for the EU's ability to reconcile its identity with its strategic interests. Whether the Union chooses to remain a closed club of like-minded states or to evolve into a more inclusive and pluralistic community will determine not only the fate of enlargement but also the legitimacy of the entire European project.

From a normative standpoint, the EU must confront the contradictions between its values and its practices. If it is to be taken seriously as a community of values, it must apply its criteria consistently and transparently, avoiding double standards based on identity, religion, or geopolitics. This means engaging critically with the symbolic boundaries of Europe and recognising that integration is as much about inclusion as it is about control.

At the same time, there is a need for a deeper and more honest conversation about European identity. Rather than denying its cultural roots or attempting to erase difference, the EU should embrace its diversity as a source of strength. This includes acknowledging the Mediterranean as an integral part of the European story, not as a periphery or a buffer zone, but as a shared space of history, exchange, and possibility. Such a shift requires both institutional reforms and cultural change, moving beyond the narrow frameworks of Westphalian statehood and civilisational exceptionalism.

Finally, I leave this research with a greater awareness of the tensions that define European integration. It is not the flawless process of peace-building and prosperity that official narratives often portray. It is a messy, contested, and deeply political journey, marked by moments of solidarity as well as exclusion, of aspiration as well as disillusionment. But it is precisely in these tensions that the future of Europe will be decided.

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Declaración de Uso de Herramientas de IA Generativa en Trabajos Fin de Grado

Por la presente, yo, María Dolores Carmona Lozano, estudiante del Doble Grado en Derecho y Relaciones Internacionales de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas, al presentar mi Trabajo Fin de Grado titulado “The History of European Integration: The Mediterranean Dimension”, declaro que he utilizado herramientas de IA Generativa, como ChatGPT u otras similares, exclusivamente en el contexto de las actividades descritas a continuación:

- Asistente de comprensión y síntesis de fuentes académicas complejas: Para resumir, reorganizar y comprender textos avanzados de teorías de integración europea y de estudios históricos relacionados con la Unión Europea y la región mediterránea.
- Apoyo en traducción y revisión lingüística: Para traducir fragmentos del español al inglés y viceversa, así como para mejorar la corrección gramatical, la cohesión y la formalidad académica en el idioma inglés.
- Sugerencias de mejora de redacción y claridad: Para reescribir párrafos o formular alternativas de expresión más académica o precisa, sin alterar el contenido intelectual original.
- Asistente de revisión de estilo académico: Para sugerir mejoras en la formulación de introducciones, transiciones entre capítulos y conclusiones de manera más formal y adecuada a los estándares universitarios.

Afirmo que toda la información, el análisis crítico, la interpretación y la redacción final presentada en este trabajo son el resultado de mi esfuerzo individual, investigación propia y reflexión académica, salvo en aquellas actividades de asistencia descritas anteriormente. Además, he incluido todas las referencias necesarias en el TFG, siguiendo las normas de citación correspondientes, y he explicitado de manera transparente el uso de herramientas de IA cuando ha sido pertinente.

Soy plenamente consciente de las implicaciones académicas y éticas de presentar como propio un trabajo no original y acepto las consecuencias derivadas de cualquier violación de esta declaración.

Fecha: 26/04/2025

Firma: María Dolores Carmona Lozano