



EU influence beyond conditionality: Turkey plus/minus the EU

by Mario Zucconi, Cham, Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 347 pp., \$99.99 (hardcover), ISBN 978-3-030-25559-6

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BOOK REVIEW

EU influence beyond conditionality: Turkey plus/minus the EU, by Mario Zucconi, Cham, Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 347 pp., \$99.99 (hardcover), ISBN 978-3-030-25559-6

Turkey has deep historical roots with the European Union (EU). The Turkish application to establish an association with then-European Economic Community in 1959 marked the first interaction between the two, and after several attempts Turkey received candidate state status in 1999. The beginning of Turkey's accession negotiations on October 2005 constituted an important turning point for Turkey's relations with the EU and Turkey's socio-political transformation. Since the early 2000s, there has been a proliferation of books, journal articles, monographs, and research reports that analyze Turkish-EU relations and Turkish political developments from different perspectives. Often, the approaches in this literature provide a limited approach that focuses on a combination domestic factors and party politics to elucidate changes within Turkey. Mario Zucconi's book is among one of the few studies that focus on the application of external normative frameworks and the influence of powerful external incentives on Turkish politics, particularly the impact of the EU conditionality (or Europeanization) and transformative power attached to the accession process. In this book, the author aims to provide an in-depth analysis of domestic politics through the role played by the EU in Turkey's democratic evolution and empowerment of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the early 2000s. Additionally, he assesses the implications of the democratic evolution of Turkey on both a regional and global level.

The book consists of seven chapters. Chapter One (Introduction) embarks on a brief summary of Turkish-EU relations and the transformative power of the EU as a facilitator of Turkey's democratic transition. The general perspective in much of the existing literature on the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy is largely explained through domestic forces, and external actors assumed a marginal role. From this point of view, this chapter focuses on the relevance of external normative frameworks and the role of international organizations on democratic transition and governance. Thus, the impact of the EU accession conditionality is used as an incentive-based approach on Turkey's political evolution.

The ensuing chapters analyze Turkish political dynamics both under EU conditionality in the early years of accession and in the absence of the EU's ability to exert political influence on Turkey more recently. Chapter Two provides a detailed analysis for measuring the impact of the EU's influence on the structural level. Here Zucconi stresses the polarization around the secularism/Islamism division and political stalemate that characterized Turkish politics at the end of the 1990s. By doing so, this study claims that the "new phase" of Turkey's

political history began to emerge with the growing emphasis of the religious factor during the 1990s, rather than the first electoral victory of the ruling party AKP in 2002. In his account, the historical developments and consequent socio-political transformation are best explained through the changes in the political participation and representation of the “periphery” and “center”. In this sense, Zucconi provides a detailed account of the process which paved the way for the AKP to acquire power.

Chapter Three and Four analyze the role of the EU in the “new politics” of Turkey and the country’s democratic transformation in the early 2000s. The election victory of the AKP was mostly associated with concepts such as “moderation” and “adaptive party politics” that built on the electoral surge of the Refah (Welfare) Party in the mid-1990s. However, Zucconi also brings the impact of the EU to the table. According to the author, the crucial role of the EU as an incontrovertible component of the transformation of Turkish politics was that it served as a “legitimacy tool,” which played the role of a substitute domestic authority. Thus, within the changing dynamics of domestic politics, the EU became a safeguard for the country’s democratic evolution and, for a time, the AKP’s survival in power.

Chapter Five discusses the subsequent erosion of the EU’s credibility and influence. The mutual interest in the membership process among political elites and the wider public was the anchor behind the transformative role of the EU in Turkish politics. The author argues that the stalling accession process in the 2000s stemmed from “enlargement fatigue” of the EU as well as other issues such as a wider discussion of “European identity,” the unresolved Cyprus conflict, and demands to recognize the Armenian genocide. Zucconi substantiates the crucial role of EU conditionality in the country’s democratic transition via the effect of the stalling membership process on Turkey’s progressive evolution in an authoritarian direction under the AKP. Political polarization, similar to that which the country experienced in the 1990s, re-emerged as a result of the weakness of the EU factor, but this time in favor of the AKP.

Chapter Six and Seven elaborate on the author’s main arguments and findings, examining the presence and absence of the EU factor in the Turkish politics and the implications of an EU minus Turkey in terms of regional and global order. In Chapter Six, Zucconi analyzes the ideational and mobilizing factors that create a new base for the AKP while Turkey gradually moves in an authoritarian direction. The chapter’s main objective is to demonstrate the effects of the lack of an EU factor in the country’s political development. Lastly, Zucconi draws several extensive conclusions in Chapter Seven concerning the constitutional and institutional structure of Turkey with the existence and non-existence of the EU conditionality. This chapter provides a brief analysis of the Europeanization process of Turkey with the EU’s influence compared with the absence of it, which is characterized as a “de-Europeanization” process. Zucconi’s approach is consistent with the prevailing theoretical studies within the literature that affirms the membership in international organizations can stimulate democratic consolidation but does not necessarily hinder authoritarian reversals.

Mario Zucconi's book makes a valuable contribution to the literature of EU-Turkey relations, especially research on the de-Europeanization process and democratic backsliding, by building a bridge between Turkey's political history and present political circumstances. However, the structural transformation of Turkey could have been analyzed in parallel with the transformation and challenges that the EU itself experienced, such as the rising populist waves in the continent and Eurosceptic orientations within its member states, to illustrate the reciprocal and complex nature of Turkish-EU relations. The book is also somewhat dated in its analysis since the conceptual framework of differentiated integration is now widely used in the literature to elucidate relations between parties due to retreat of membership conditionality and functional cooperation caused by high interdependence. Nevertheless, the detailed analysis of Turkey's domestic politics provides a useful empirical contribution for understanding the political legacy that underlies today's political realities. Additionally, this book will be an important guide for researchers who are interested in the role of international organizations on democratic transition/backsliding, especially given its comprehensive analysis of the Turkish case.

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