From Negotiations to Reality

A qualitative analysis of the European Union’s assessment on Türkiye’s association process

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Abstract

The aim of this Thesis is to analyse Türkiye’s progress and setbacks within its association process and quest for EU membership. By examining Chapter 23 in annual reports released by the European Commission for the years 2013, 2018 and 2023, the role of the EU as a democracy promoter is discussed and questioned. In order to do this, this Thesis basis it’s theoretical framework around Samuel Huntington’s (1991) theory of democratisation, which is applied and questioned. This Thesis uses a qualitative method design to comprehensively analyse how the European Union (Commission) perceives Türkiye’s progress, and to be able to answer if over the last ten years even any progress is made.

Key words

Democracy, Democratisation, Democracy Promotion, European Union, European Union Enlargement, European Union membership and Türkiye.

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Abbreviations

AKP- Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)

CHP- Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)

CJP- Council of Judges and Prosecutors

ECtHR & ECHR- European Court of Human Rights

EU- European Union

EEC – European Economic Community

HRAP- Human Rights Action Plan

MHP- Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi)

NHRI- National Human Rights Institution

PKK- Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê)

RTÜK- Radio and Television Supreme Council (Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu)

YPG- People’s Defense Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel)

WW1: World War 1

WW2: World War 2
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1 Introduction

The early 20th century was a period in time where many states on the European continent faced devastation. During World War I, millions of people lost their lives, and many settlements were destroyed. World War I set in motion the start of the fall of many of Europe’s empires, one of which was the once mighty Ottoman Empire. The devastation and fall of the Ottoman Empire during WWI meant that for the Ottomans there was a necessity to modernize and to establish more of a democratic system. In 1923, partially because of the revolutionizing leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the former Ottoman Empire became the modern Republic of Türkiye (Gençkaya & Özbudun, 2009, p. 81). During the interwar period between WWI and WW2, the devastation of Europe brought instability to the continent and many people suffered of hunger and poverty. When ultimately World War II started, and after half a decade had ended, compared to with the end of WWI different choices were made turn the dire situation around when a choice was made to work on projects that sought cooperation instead of isolation (Phinnemore, 2022, p. 11). The idea of European integration began to take shape. The early years of the European integration project constructed a variety of organizations with different membership states and purposes. One of such proposals was the For Free and United Europe manifesto that is seen as the ground for European Union (EU) later (Phinnemore, 2022, p. 11). These ideas and the establishment of the possibility of such unions made it more embraceable and desirable to be a part of such Union (Gençkaya & Özbudun, 2009, p. 81). Türkiye applied for an association agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1959, which was one of the organizations that had common rules for governing the “common market”. In 1963, Türkiye took on its associate status which resulted in the signing of Ankara Agreement, and which sought to link Türkiye to the EU (Gençkaya & Özbudun, 2009, p. 81). This protocol was established to enhance economic cooperation between member states with the hope that this would keep states from waging war or conflicts against each other. This protocol meant to establish an area where there would be free movement of
goods, workers, and services, and lastly, a closer alignment of economic policies between member states (European Union, 1977). When Türkiye applied for its EU membership in 1987, the Turkish authorities thought that it was the natural thing for Türkiye to become part of the EU. However, in 1995, the EU declined Türkiye’s request for membership since they argued that Türkiye was not yet fully eligible because of their anti-democratic policies and human rights violations (Gençkaya & Özbudun, 2009, p. 81). Türkiye, at this point still very much willing to become a member of the EU, in this period went through some legal reforms in order to become more of a democratic state. This upgrade in their democratic status meant that Türkiye gained the status of candidate country in 1999, and the accession negotiations opened in 2005 (Gençkaya & Özbudun, 2009, p. 85 & 93). When a state is accepted as a candidate for becoming a member of the EU, the candidate has to comply with all of the 35 areas of policies put forward by the EU. Currently, Türkiye complies with 16 of these (European Council, 2023).

1.1 The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the association process between Türkiye and the European Union (EU), and how the EU perceives Türkiye’s progress/setbacks in this process for the years 2013, 2018 and 2023. The year 2013 was a turbulent year in Turkish politics, set one year before the Turkish elections of 2014 and following the aftermath of nationwide protests. The years 2018 and 2023 both represent election years which are of significance because President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling AKP were re-elected both times. Certainly, it is an interesting period of both democracy promotion and democratic backsliding. The following subchapters will provide more information about the purpose of this study, and chapter 2 will provide a research review which helped with the development of the research questions researched for this study.
1.2 Problem Statement

Türkiye has been working closely together with the European Union throughout much of the latter half of the 20th century, and since 1995, is part of a customs union with the EU. Despite of this, Türkiye, which was declared to be eligible to join the EU in 1999, has not yet joined the Union and 24 years later still is considered to be a candidate country (European Union, 2023). According to a newly published report by Freedom House (2023), Türkiye’s democracy has been increasingly backsliding. One of the main reasons given behind the democratic backsliding of Türkiye’s democracy is the oppression by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling AKP who have ruled Türkiye since 2002. This phenomenon of democratic backsliding shadows also within the EU’s accession process which has been worked upon for years. The EU was established in order to gain economic development in Europe and later took on a role of promoter of human rights and for social development which, according to the EU’s own requirements, in some areas stands in stark contrast with Türkiye (Phinnemore, 2022, p. 10; Gençkaya & Özbudun, 2009, p. 83). While the EU is a promoter for democracy in Türkiye, it has faced numerous of challenges that has been putting a shadow over the accession negotiations process. This paper will analyse the challenges that have been putting a shadow over the accession process as well as how the EU has perceived Türkiye’s progress or setbacks in this process.

1.2.1 Research Questions

To provide an in-depth analysis of the Türkiye – EU relationship, the following questions will be analysed and discussed:

- What is the European Union’s assessment of Türkiye’s association process with the EU for the years 2013, 2018 and 2023?
- Has there been any progress/setbacks in this process?
2 Literature Review

2.1 Context

In this chapter, two different articles will be reviewed which helped with the development of the research questions answered in this essay. Further, by addressing earlier research, the article provides points of reference which can be compared to the research conducted for the current article. By addressing these points of reference and combining this with the research conducted for this study, it provides a possibility of putting this research in context. This also entails that this study later can be compared to the earlier research conducted on this particular subject to see how the research differs and compares to each other.

2.2 Explaining the EU’s Legal Obligation for Democracy Promotion: The case of the EU-Turkey Relationship – Paul Cardwell (2017)

The first article reviewed for this thesis is ‘Explaining the EU’s Legal Obligation for Democracy Promotion: The Case of the EU-Turkey relationship’ (2017) written by Paul James Cardwell for the European Paper journal. As the name of the article suggests, it focuses on the legal obligation that translates into the practices of EU democracy promotion. The article takes the Treaty on European Union as a source that explains the EU’s founding points that are based upon the values of freedom, rule of law, democracy, and respect of human rights. These values are there and should be spread through member states for a united community.

According to Cardwell (2017), to be able to understand the promotion of democracy it is necessary to provide for a narrow description of democracy promotion. In the article, the author divides the process into four categories with the two main categories being positive and negative. Positive democracy
promotion is divided into two parts, positive/express and positive/implied instances of democracy promotion. Similarly, negative democracy promotion is also divided into two parts, namely negative/express and negative/implied instances of democracy promotion (Cardwell, 2017, pp. 870-871).

Positively expressed democracy promotion happens primarily through the enlargement process, which are the EUs evaluations of the level of democracy in the candidate states who have applied for EU membership. For Türkiye, this enlargement process is still ongoing with annual reports being released on Türkiye’s progress in the country’s way to democratisation. The negative express democracy promotion includes measures or actions taken by EU to actively impose penalties or sanctions on a country that have been moving slowly in a path of democratic development. Thus, the negative express democracy promotion has not been found actively in the case of Türkiye (Cardwell, 2017, pp. 875-880).

Positively implied democracy promotion includes the projection of the EU’s founding values, which are freedom, the rule of law, democracy, and for states to respect human rights. With the chance of benefitting the EU’s interests and values, this has been applied positively within the EU’s democratic governance. Negative implied democracy promotions are usually hidden, and in case of lacking democratic progress such as again sanctions, pressure and discourage involves negative dimensions. The goal here is to make absence of democratic reforms costly for the applied member state. These categories provide some wider perspective of EU’s democracy promotion in the case of Türkiye. Even though the EU has been criticised for its incoherence, it has been a unique supranational entity (Cardwell, 2017, pp. 880-884).
2.3 From AKP’s ‘Conservative Democracy’ to ‘Advanced Democracy: Shifts and Challenges in the Debate on ‘Europe’ - Başak Alpan (2016)

The second article that will be reviewed in this subchapter is Başak Alpan’s (2016) article ‘From AKP’s ‘Conservative Democracy’ to ‘Advanced Democracy’: Shifts and Challenges in the Debate on ‘Europe’ published in the South European Society and Politics Journal. In general, this article studies the shifting democracy and challenges regarding the subject of Europe. In particular, the study conducted in the article focuses on Türkiye and its ruling power which is the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The period of analysis is from between the 1990s to about 2011s. The paper has two different empty signifiers that the AKP has shifted its discourse on the subject of Europe. The main material that the article builds on are speeches from AKP leaders. Alpan (2016) states that the AKP has declared themselves as the empty signifier which, at the beginning of their reign in 2002, was seen as the conservative democratic party. In 2007 elections, there had been a clear sight of disappearance of this empty signifier; the ideology of conservative democracy had been replaced with another empty signifier, namely towards an advanced democracy (Alpan, 2016, p. 15). There is an importance in understanding the given narratives on Europe and the EU since it must be kept in mind that ‘Europe’ according to different actors has different meanings within the concept of the association process (Alpan, 2016, p. 16).

The author writes that the narrative provided by the AKP in its period as a conservative democratic party was a narrative of cosmopolitanism. In this period between 2002 and the mid 2000’s, the party saw Europe as the promised land. Originally when the AKP was first elected to power, the EU integration process was still seen as going forward and somewhat successful, also different opinions were seen as an asset (Alpan, 2016, p. 17). This concept of conservative democracy had been developing and became the answer to all
existing problems. Some of these problems included for example the oppression and exclusion of the Islamist parties, as well as the normalisation of democracy after the 1980s military coup. In essence, the AKP embraced this cosmopolitanism and became the norm of the politics within the AKP (Alpan, 2016, p. 18). For the AKP, cosmopolitanism meant a way to balance and harmonize between the local, national, and global politics. The geographical location of Türkiye is both a blessing and an issue for Türkiye. If the Turkish state was to become a member of the EU, within the European culture of the EU this would signify a “clash of civilisation”. Türkiye is a secular state but still is influenced by Muslim culture. Further, since Türkiye is also seen as a member of Muslim countries, this would also signify to ‘the alliance of civilisations’ (Alpan, 2016, p. 19). Therefore, for President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, it is a delicate balancing act. In many aspects Türkiye has many European values. Despite the deteriorating Turkish democracy and the democratic backsliding in recent years, at least on paper, the Turkish state and the Turkish constitution consists of a working democracy process where people actively vote on local and national elections. Further, the constitution provides pluralism within the parliament, an independent branch of the rule of law, and a right to the freedom expression. If Türkiye was allowed and able to join the European Union, this would send a strong signal to the world that despite there being major differences in culture between some states and others, they can still work together and establish an “alliance of civilisations” (Alpan, 2016, p. 19). In their period of conservative democracy, the second narrative narrated by the AKP was the one where Europe was seen as ‘the promised land’. For the AKP, the concept of Europe and the union meant something that had been in Türkiye’s historical path for over 40 years, and therefore, that the European Union was crucial for the country (Alpan, 2016, p. 19). The country had been striving for an EU membership for decades and the concept of conservative democracy was than represented as a solution for all existing problems for Türkiye at that time (Alpan, 2016, p. 20).
In the 2007 elections, and the second time in a row the AKP won the elections, the party had developed two new narratives. With that, the party had changed their perspective on democracy which meant a change from the earlier praised conservative democracy towards an advanced democracy.

This was clearly notable in the first speech held by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan after the 2007 election in which he stated that he was very popular in the Middle East and had become the most voted world leader in 2010 (Alpan, 2016, p. 21). The new narrative that emerged was about a regional leadership, which firstly was seen as the most important trademark of an advanced democracy, and secondly the start of a leadership role in the Middle East. This was a very significant change in behaviour since it drifted away from the western foreign affair behaviour towards a more eastern oriented pattern of the foreign affairs (Alpan, 2016, p. 22). Turkish officials explain this change in behaviour by addressing the point that Türkiye beliefs that the West takes them more seriously if the Turkish state has a strong presence in the Middle East. With this comes greater power in the region and more influence on the global stage (Alpan, 2016, p. 22).

The second narrative within this change from a conservative democracy towards an advanced democracy is that Europe and the EU is seen as a “resented guardian and a partner in crime”. Within this narrative, Türkiye takes a different stance towards Europe in the late 2000’s compared to how they perceived the Union in the earlier years of the AKP’s rule. This meant that further reforms within Türkiye regarding the association process with the EU slowed down, and this was allegedly done so because of the AKP’s started striving toward a larger Islamic presence within Türkiye (Alpan, 2016, p. 23). In only a couple of years’ time, the AKP and their efforts to undermine the association process with the EU had succeeded in also turning a larger part of the Turkish population against joining the EU. The narrative that had painted a less positive picture of the EU had also pointed towards flaws with the EU system and its association process with Türkiye, for example, Turkish officials meant that the EU had been changing the rules along the way. During this
period, within the EU, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also became more criticised of being an authoritarian. After this, the discourse of the Turkish state towards the EU changed completely and now the Union was portrayed to have a negative influence on Turkish society (Alpan, 2016, p. 24).

3 Theory

This chapter will define key concepts that this research is going to use in order to answer the research questions put forward in this article. The key concepts that will be a guide throughout this essay is democratisation theory, as well as democracy and democracy promotion. The democratisation theory theorized in this study is proposed by Samuel P. Huntington in the book *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* written in 1991. Lastly, this chapter will provide the purpose behind the chosen theory.

3.1 Key Concepts

3.1.1 Democracy

Before going into the core concept of *democratisation theory*, it is necessary to understand what *democracy* entails since democracy can be explained in many different ways. This study will consider the two core definitions of democracy that are pointed towards by Huntington (1991). Firstly, the democracy definition by Joseph Schumpeter in 1942 is what Huntington (1991) called ‘the most modern formulation of what democracy is’. According to Schumpeter (1942), the definition of classical democracy theory is criticisable that defined in terms of the will of people and the common good. He argued that the democratic method revolves around a system where individuals acquire the power to make choices through competing for the peoples vote. This perspective highlights how a competitive process plays a role, in shaping results (Schumpeter, 1942, referenced by Huntington, 1991, p. 6).
Secondly, the democracy definition by Robert Dahl has established further ideas within the Schumpeter’s tradition. Democracy in this tradition bases on fair, honest and regular elections, and free competition within candidates. Robert Dahl has identified two dimensions of democracy within this definition that includes contestation and participation. This also establishes the existence of civil and political freedom, such as speech and assembly, are considered essential for political discourse and electoral campaigns. With this dimension Dahl sets standards that allows us to evaluate the level of democracy within a country (Huntington, 1991, p. 7).

In conclusion, these definitions of democracy offer this study a deeper understanding of the democratisation process.

### 3.1.2 Democracy Promotion

According to Julia Leininger (2019) in *The Handbook of Political, Social, and Economic*, the idea of democracy promotion is missing a grounded theory but has a lot of research that establishes the theory (Leininger, 2019, p. 447). The reason the promotion of democracy misses theory is that it relies on the concepts of democracy and democratisation (Leininger, 2019, p. 449). Therefore, in this chapter it is needed to briefly explain this concept.

The interchange within the different levels of politics across the domestic level up until the transnational level results in the promotion of democracy which establishes influence (Leininger, 2019, p. 448). In the post-Cold War era the European Union emerged with the values of human rights and the values of social development (Phinnemore, 2022, p. 10). Thus, this paper is built upon the idea that EU is a democracy promoter throughout the continent. As mentioned before, the promotion of democracy is one of the factors that has influenced democratisation and the enlargement process of the EU, and the European Commission is a tool for making countries democratic in order to cooperate with them. This idea will be used in this paper for making analysis and answer some questions out of the reports put on the case of Türkiye.
3.1.3 Democratisation theory

In late 20th century, many countries acquired democratic institutions and these institutions established with what was called the ‘waves of democratisation’. According to Huntington (1991), there are waves of democratisation that refer to periods of history that are characterized by transitions from nondemocratic to democratic regimes, as well as transitions in the opposite direction. Modern history has witnessed three waves of democratisation, each affecting a group of countries in the world (Huntington, 1991, pp. 15-16). During the 19th century, with the emergence of democratic institutions and the gradual development around the world made it harder to point towards which political systems could be classified as democratic. Scholar Jonathan Sunshine puts forwards two classifications for how a political system can be deemed democratic while simultaneously putting that system in context of it the time period that it was set in. The criteria for a democratic political system were first of all the inclusion of people in political decisions, and secondly, an executive who maintained majority support in elections (Huntington, 1991, p. 16).

According to Huntington (1991), the first wave of democratisation, which also is the longest wave of democratisation, has its roots in the American and French revolutions in the 1800s (Huntington, 1991, p. 16). This wave of democratisation could be seen beginning with United States in 1828, and in the following decades the wave finally arrived overseas to Switzerland, France, Great Britain, and some other smaller European Countries who made the transition to democracy. This wave of democratisation took one hundred years, ending in 1926, with thirty countries moving into the democratic column within the world democracy politics (Huntington, 1991, p. 17). Following World War I, the trend of global democracy was unpopular and it led to the first reverse wave of democratisation. The first reverse wave of democratisation was between 1922-1942. During that period many states were moving towards to traditional forms. Huntington (1991) writes that the reverses that were made in the newly made democratic states, were not only
new to democracy, but also some were new nation states (Huntington, 1991, p. 17). Examples of such states who made such transitions and turned either Fascists, Nazi, Communist or militaristic were “Italy, Germany, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Yugoslavia, Austria, Japan, Brazil, and Argentina”. Further, there were also signs of democratic backsliding in France and Great Britain following economically bad years in the 1930’s. This led towards people doubting the concept of democracy since it was argued this concept was not yet established and proven (Huntington, 1991, p. 18).

At the end of World War II, the second wave of democratisation took place in an almost twenty-year period between the early 1940’s and early 1960’s (Huntington, 1991, p. 16). Huntington (1991) writes that during this period in time, the military dictatorships were not seen as reliable anymore and within these states, there was democratisation and the establishment of democratic institutions. Another significant thing in this period of time is the decolonialization process which meant that most of the Western states had lost much of its power over its colonies. These former colonies fought the Western states in order to establish their own self-determination, which meant that many new states were formed. These states were not deemed to be democratic, however, within many of these newly established states, democratic institutions such as parliaments, and democratic processes such as elections, which are deemed normal and necessary for a democracy, were established (Huntington, 1991, p. 19). This second wave of democratisation did not last long since at the end of this twenty-year period, states within Africa, Asia and South America shifted back towards military dictatorships (Huntington, 1991, pp. 20-21).

The third wave of democratisation came between the early 1970’s and 1990 and was especially prominent when the Soviet Union fell. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the US became the dominant power in world politics and in this time period was unchallenged. Many states therefore started their democratic processes, and such was especially the case for the Soviet Union’s former member states who had become free states (some of which eventually even
became members of the EU merely around 10 years after their independence). Further, the third wave was also influential in South America and Asia (Huntington, 1991, pp. 21-23).

3.2 The meaning of democratisation theory

To summarize, this subchapter will provide information on how the theory of democratisation is useful for this study as well as the main idea behind choosing this theory.

By applying Samuel Huntington’s (1991) theory regarding the waves of democratisation and the promotion of democracy, this research study aims to gain a better understanding of the broader patterns of democratic transitions across Türkiye. This theory allows us to identify the transition from the Ottoman rule to the Republic of Türkiye and the ongoing shifts in the country’s political system. This provides the possibility of better understanding why a country with such enriching historical development (especially regarding the case of democratisation) has been going one step forward and three steps back in its path of democratisation for the last 10 years, and in order to understand why this has been happening, this paper will analyse some key milestones and challenges.

4 Method and Material

This subchapter will address what a case study and a qualitative method is and why it is relevant for this essay. Further, it will then discuss the used methods, and materials on how the data was collected for this essay, and this subchapter also includes a discussion on the reliability and validity of the chosen data. Lastly, it will address the possibility of using other methods to analyse the relationship between the EU and Türkiye.
4.1 Method

The method used in this essay is a qualitative method and consists of a text analysis that will be applied to analyse EU-specific documents. The research design will be based like a case-study which will analyse how the EU assesses Türkiye’s efforts of becoming more or less democratic in order to become a member of the EU.

According to Esaiasson et al. in *Metodpraktikan* (2017), qualitative content analysis can have deep and nuanced understanding to the context of one phenomenon (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 211). The dynamics inherent in Türkiye’s pursuit of EU membership and the negotiations surrounding this endeavour, demands a research approach that goes beyond surface-level observations. A qualitative method is well-suited to delve into the "why" questions that underpin these processes. It provides a wide range of arena to explore the multifaceted motivations, challenges, and evolving factors that define the EU-Türkiye’s relationship. It is necessary to dig deeper into the chosen qualitative method. As mentioned earlier, a qualitative method goes beyond surface-level observations. Within the method there are several ways to analyse the topics beyond surface-level, and the chosen analysis in this study is text analysis. Text analysis generally is interested in meaning and meaning-making processes (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 211). The method of text analysis involves a wide range of branches; therefore, it is important to specify which of them this paper will apply. For this paper, the research will be conducted by using analysis. According to Elo et al. (2014), content analysis can be divided into inductive and deductive approaches. The inductive approaches focus upon concepts directly taken from data without predefined categories which allow for more flexibility and exploration of the phenomenon. The deductive approaches focus upon the opposite, here the development of the concepts with predefined categories emphasize the accuracy within the concept (Elo et al., 2014, p. 2). Since the paper focusses on predefined theory which the analysis will be further build upon, this paper will take a deductive approach within the content of the analysis method. While doing a text analysis, it is important to
know that people can interpret the world in a completely different way from each other (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 212). The frameworks of the ontological and epistemological grounds will be mentioned later on in another subchapter of this chapter. Therefore, this chapter is of importance to explain what details this study builds on.

According to Esaiasson et al. (2017), researchers often tend to mix up case studies and comparative studies and highlights several distinctions between the two (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 109). The most important one is that case studies can have one single analytical unit for research, but the comparative studies need to have two analytical units for meaningful comparisons. This paper focuses only on one single actor and does not compare this actor to any other actors that find themselves in similar negotiations for an EU membership. If this paper had been focusing on EU membership negotiations throughout the years than a comparative study design would be possible. The context of this essay focusses on how the EU assesses the state of Türkiye’s democracy and whether Türkiye has made any progress or setbacks within its enlargement process. This will distinguish the diplomatic, political, and economic relationship between Türkiye and EU. Therefore, because this essay merely focuses on one single actor, the chosen design will be a case study.

It is essential to acknowledge the existence of alternative research methods such as quantitative analyses or surveys. However, the qualitative method is deemed most appropriate for this research due to its capacity to capture the subjective interpretations, social constructions, and evolving identities that characterize EU-Türkiye’s relations. It aligns with the research's aim to understand the deep and nuanced meanings of this relationship. In this research design, the qualitative approach serves as a compass, guiding the research through the labyrinth of EU-Türkiye’s interactions, offering a deeper understanding of the social constructions, and evolving identities within the European Union as well as Türkiye.
4.1.1 Ontological and Epistemological Framework

When researching for a comprehensive analysis it is imperative to establish the philosophical underpinnings that drive this research. These philosophical underpinnings are called ontology and epistemology. As Marsh, Ercan and Furlong emphasize in Theory and Methods in Political Science (2017), ontology concerns with the questions of the nature of being, while epistemology concerns about the questions of knowledge. Ontological and epistemological positions shape the way researchers study their subjects. These positions can be unacknowledged; however, these positions still shape the theory and methods which researchers are using (Marsh et. al., 2017, pp. 177-178). This study will have its basis on anti-foundationalist ontology and interpretivist epistemology.

Further, this subchapter will briefly discuss the frameworks and explain how it is relevant to this thesis. The ontological framework guiding this essay is anti-foundationalism and it has its roots in the assumption that there is a reality that is socially constructed (Marsh et al., 2017, p. 183). This anti-foundationalist ontology leads towards the interpretivist epistemology. This means that social phenomenon cannot be understood indecently of our interpretation of them (Marsh et al., 2017, p. 190). This ontological framework will rely on the theory of constructivism and the epistemological framework will rely on the interpretive theory.

Within the context of this essay, the European Union and Türkiye have this interpretivist epistemology on profound significance. Rather than viewing the European Union as a rigid, fixed entity, it will be recognized as a fluid and continually evolving social construct. Thus, the EU's character, its policies, and its overarching identity are in a constant state of continuous change, shaped by the interpretations, beliefs, and actions of its member states and institutions. Therefore, this framework is the most appropriate one to researching this subject.
4.2 Material

This study will have the European Commission’s annual reports on Türkiye as its primary source. The European Commission is the executive part of the European Union (European Commission, 2023b) and yearly has been issuing evaluations of all membership candidate countries regarding the Copenhagen Criteria. Türkiye has been a candidate country since 1999 and has been receiving these annual reports which are one-sided documents that evaluates a country’s progress in meeting the Copenhagen Criteria for EU membership (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of foreign Affairs, 2023).

This study will exclusively focus on reports from the years 2013, 2018 and 2023. These reports are highly complex, and therefore, this study will specifically focus on Chapter 23: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights. The reason why this particular chapter is chosen is because the main issue that this study focusses on is democracy. Therefore, it is relevant to focus on this specific chapter because it provides a nuanced understanding of democratic principles and key areas that are covered within this chapter. Chapter 23 deals with questions regarding judicial independence, rule of law, protection of human rights and civil society participation (European Commission, 2012).

To be able to study the development (or lack thereof) of the democratisation process in Türkiye, the research for this study takes on a pattern of five years in between each. Also, these years each feature some important aspects of Turkish politics. 2013 was a turbulent year in Turkish politics, set one year before the Turkish elections of 2014. The years 2018 and 2023 both represent election years which are of significance because President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling AKP were re-elected both times. Certainly, it is an interesting period of both democracy promotion and democratic backsliding. Secondly, due to limited time, for this thesis it is not feasible to review reports from between 1998 to 2023. Further, this study will mainly research how the AKP has affected the democratisation process in Türkiye. Also, there already
is earlier research on this topic that has analysed the period from the before chosen period for this study.

Secondary sources such as several articles and theses will be the foundational sources for this essay. These secondary sources are peer reviewed articles and regard the development of the EU’s enlargement process with Türkiye throughout the years. Further, also some course literature regarding democracy and European Union Politics will be used to strengthen the arguments made in this thesis. The articles will be chosen in an eliminative way, which means that they must be peer reviewed and suitable for scientific research.

The book *European Union Politics* is written by Michelle Cini and Nieves Pérez-Solórzano Borragán in 2022 and will be used to understand the EU’s historical background and on what kind of grounds the EU is built. Further, this study uses Samuel P. Huntington’s (1991) book named *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* as its theory and will be used to understand the democratisation processes explained in the book.

4.2.1 Reliability and Validity

Validity is essential as it ensures that the chosen research method aligns with the research questions. Good validity is crucial for the quality of the study. In this case, the chosen qualitative method aligns well with the research questions, reflecting the intention of the essay to deeply understand the nuanced relationship between Türkiye and the EU (Bergström & Boréus, 2018, pp. 39-40). A good correspondence between the research questions and methods used in an essay is insufficient for writing a high-quality study since it also needs good reliability. Reliability can be discussed within two categories: firstly, it involves the studies reliability which is also called intersubjectivity. To test reliability, the researcher must go through the same steps again as argued for in this essay and look at the outcome. If the outcome is like the study’s results, then this study has high intersubjectivity (Bergström & Boréus, 2018, pp. 40-41). To have high intersubjectivity, this essay has provided all the necessary information regarding the chosen sources, the
research questions as well as ontological and epistemological framework. Secondly, reliability is also about the reliability of the chosen data source. The reliability of the chosen source can be criticized for taking a one-sided perspective since it only focuses on the side of European Union. The chosen topic that has the aim to focus upon the EU’s implementation of their values can eliminate the criticism. Therefore, this data source is highly reliable for the chosen topic.

5 Presentation of analysis

This chapter will comprehensively examine and analyse the contents of the reports released by the EU covering the years 2013, 2018 and 2023. The output of the chapter will be divided into subchapters with reports from each of the years. Further, this chapter also includes a subchapter where the combined results from all of the year will be compared with each other.

5.1.1 The year of 2013 in the reports of European Commission

According to the European Commission (2013), the 2013 progress report monitors if Türkiye has made progress in meeting the Copenhagen political criteria. This has been done by summarizing what happened in the year 2013 as well as by briefly explaining for each chapter how and if progress was made. The report is based upon the months between October 2012 and September 2013 (European Commission, 2013, p. 3).

The year 2013 represents both progresses and backsliding in the path for democratisation. In late May, protests began to take place demanding the protection of the greenery in the Gezi Park, Istanbul. The protest began spreading to other cities, and quickly developed into broader demanding than just the greenery. The mostly peaceful demonstrations also consisted of a group of violent protestors, who got hit by excessive police force that killed six and injured thousands of people. At the end of the protests, ultimately over 3500 people were put into police custody and 112 people (at time of writing
this) still remain in detention waiting on a judge’s decision (European Commission, 2013, p. 5). However, not only the demonstrators got taken into police custody, some of the police officers accused of using excessive force also faced trials. According to the Turkish authorities, the Ministry of the Interior launched administrative investigations. 32 police chiefs and 30 police officers were suspended from the duty. According to the report, the Turkish government are pending a law which would seek to establish an independent supervisory body for police officers. This would make the investigations more independent, impartial, and effective (European Commission, 2013, p. 6). Despite a violation of human rights both in terms of excessive police force and the unjust investigations against the demonstrators, the government has made some progresses in the Copenhagen Criteria (European Commission, 2013, p. 6). To make this claim more specific, the progress will be accounted for within the chosen chapter below.

5.1.1.1 Chapter 23: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights

In Chapter 23 of the report, the European Commission (2013) has reported that the Turkish state made some progress in its judicial system. Türkiye implemented a strategic nationwide plan which involved more independence and training for judges and prosecutors regarding new legislation, human rights, and judicial ethics for between the years 2012 and 2016. The report tells that there has been a strengthened transparency within the decisions of the High Council, and specifically with their efforts to provide information on judicial matters to the public. However, within this area there also was some criticism regarding the legislation of the High Council, which still remained un-progressed (European Commission, 2013, p. 44). According to the report, Türkiye has not implemented the Criminal Procedure Code adopted in 2005. This means that in the eight years that followed after implementing the law still no judicial police units were established to aid to office of prosecution. Further, the report tells that some progress was made within the efficiency of the judiciary system. In mid-2013, there was a high level of reduction in pending cases on the Court of Cassation compared to mid-2012. With the
implementation of 3rd Judicial Reform Package there was an increase in the usage of judicial control rather than instead detention (European Commission, 2013, p. 45).

Since 2007, there were concerns about the impartiality of the judges and no new law was established since then, which has led to continued criticisms about the equality of arms during the trials and the impartiality of the judges (European Commission, 2013, p. 47). The concept of equality of arms has been established by European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and means fair balance of both parties involved (Oxford Reference, 2023). There are ongoing revisions of the judicial reform strategy by the Justice Ministry and the revision will be finalised when the work on a new Constitution is finalized. In regard to Türkiye, within the report there is criticism about the state’s political influence, either partially or fully, in the decisions of the judiciary system which has led to an awareness of rights and access to justice within the court. There are examples of high-profile cases, like the case of Ergenekon, where the Turkish state has faced criticisms regarding the effectiveness and independence of its judicial system (European Commission, 2013, p. 47).

In the 2013 report, Türkiye had not made any substantial progress in regard to its anti-corruption policy. It is important to note that they had a National Anti-Corruption Strategy and Action Plan which was implemented in 2010 and stretched until 2014. Working groups within the Corruption Strategy and Action Plan have been engaging civil society in terms of collection and tracking data on corruption. This implementation was not finished yet and may change over time (European Commission, 2013, pp. 47-48).

In terms of fundamental rights, some positive steps were taken towards becoming a more standardised European country. The report by the European Commission (2013) mentions that the ECtHR in 2013 provided some reporting on human rights violations in terms of the Gezi Park protests. Despite this, some progress on the matter of human rights was made. As pointed towards earlier, the training for judges and prosecutors on human rights as well as its
role in informing was put onto work. The Turkish National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), established in January 2013, also elected its first president. Still, the EU pushed Türkiye to further strengthen its position regarding human rights with correspondence the European standards (European Commission, 2013, p. 49).

The ill-treatment of Turkish citizens by police officials continued to be a matter of concern for The Council of Europe Secretary-General which led to Türkiye installing audio-visual recording systems at their detention and interview rooms in 15 provincial counter-terrorism departments (European Commission, 2013, p. 50). To further improve these prison systems, its staff also received training on European prison rules and international standards. The ECtHR further pointed towards some areas of concerns regarding the treatment of prisoners by officers. The prisoners also were stripped of their right to vote on Turkish elections (European Commission, 2013, p. 51).

The 2013 report mentions that the Turkish state had also limited the rights of its citizens online by implementing a new law that limited freedom of expression and access to independent information. The report mentions that an independent website has reported that the Turkish authorities banned 32 000 websites which has to be revised and reversed to cohere to the European standard. In addition to this, there also were concerns about the independency of media since a large number of television stations got fined for covering the news of Gezi Park protests. This was no different on social media. Some people that put out statements about these protests were put into custody, which the EU deems to be a violation of human rights. The Turkish authorities reasoning behind this was that these people were considered a threat for society and incited violence (European Commission, 2013, p. 52). Despite the challenges of freedom of assembly, throughout the year there were some peaceful protests without disruption (European Commission, 2013, p. 53).
Overall, the 2013 report argues that the Turkish authorities have failed to accomplish the European standard of legislation and freedom (European Commission, 2013, p. 64).

5.1.2 The year of 2018 in the reports of European Commission

According to the European Commission (2018), the 2018 progress report monitors if Türkiye has made progress in meeting the Copenhagen political criteria. This has been done by summarizing what happened in the year 2018 as well as by briefly explaining for the chapter chosen how and if progress was made. The report of the year 2018 covers the period from September 2016 to February 2018 (European Commission, 2018, p. 3).

The year 2018 represents both the aftermath of an attempted military coup, and the referendum election that changed the government’s political system. After the attempted coup on the 15th of July 2016, the government declared a state of emergency that still is in operation at the time of writing this report. This state of emergency had been declared to dismantle the Gülen movement, which the Turkish state considers to be a terror organization and responsible for the attempted coup (European Commission, 2018, p. 8). Türkiye has been a matter of concern for the EU due to their actions under this state of emergency (European Commission, 2018, p. 8). In 2017, Türkiye held a referendum election that proposed a change to the constitution (European Commission, 2018, p. 10). This referendum proposed to change the Turkish government structure from a parliamentary democracy towards a presidential system. What this ultimately entailed was more power to the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its coalition party, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) (European Commission, 2018, p. 10). The referendum was held in a democratic manner since all Turks eligible to vote were allowed to do so, however, the environment that the referendum was set in has been argued to be based on undemocratic grounds. Those who opposed the referendum and the changes to the Turkish constitution were limited on their possibilities of campaigning and did not have equal opportunities to express themselves on
the public level (European Commission, 2018, pp. 11-12). According to the report by the European Commission (2018), Türkiye has been moving away from the EU and no new chapters regarding the accession process had been opened (European Commission, 2018, p. 3). These futuristics of backsliding in terms of Turkish democracy will be explained further in the chosen chapter below.

5.1.2.1 Chapter 23: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights

In Chapter 23 of the report, the European Commission (2018) reported that the Turkish state made some serious democratic backsliding. The recommendations made in previous reports by the EU had not been implemented.

The political influence over the judiciary system and the discrimination against judges who desired to be independent was still very much an issue (European Commission, 2018, p. 22). The report mentions that the implementation of the judicial reform strategy for 2015-2019 still was ongoing, but that the strategy needed to be revised in order to maintain the changes made within the judiciary system after the attempted coup in 2016. These changes were not only required in the judiciary strategy of the Turkish state, but also changes to the Council of Judges and Prosecutors (CJP) were required. The continued engagement within the transferring of judges and prosecutors against their will was a matter of concern for the EU. In order to restore its credibility and to comply with the EU standard, the CJP had to strengthen its transparency and become independent (European Commission, 2018, p. 24). In the report, the European Commission (2018) writes that there was a clear discrimination of suspects which fostered by the executive and legislative branches. In order to comply with the EU standard, these branches of government cannot have an influence over individual judiciary cases (European Commission, 2018, p. 25). A new policy was implemented that meant that judges and prosecutors had to declare their earnings on years that ended with 0 and 5 (2020, 2025 etc.). As of 2017, nearly all judges had declared their earnings and were now waiting for the
verification system to declare their earnings late, accurate or inaccurate. This system needed to be adapted by the Office of Judicial Ethics (European Commission, 2018, p. 25). Since some judged and prosecutors were removed from their offices after the attempted coup, some spots were vacant and had to be gradually filled with other candidates through a fast-track procedure. The previous requirements to be anointed such positions consisted of two years of training, but in order to fill these positions and to put ‘under the rug’ that many judges and prosecutors were fired, this was done as fast as possible. This fast-tracked process had raised questions regarding the transparency and professionalism of the selection of candidates. In December 2016, an in-service training was provided, which was criticised about its sufficiency and quality. The frequent transfers of judges and prosecutors also raised questions about the quality of justice in Türkiye (European Commission, 2018, p. 26).

Türkiye’s investigation, prosecution and conviction regarding corruption cases missed sustained efforts. The current legal and institutional framework in Türkiye has created opportunities for political interference in the investigation process. There is no permanent anti-corruption body or institution in combating corruption (European Commission, 2018, p. 28). The 2010-2014 anti-corruption strategy failed to achieve its objectives, also the transparency and anti-corruption plan introduced in 2016 failed to be implemented. In the absence of current political ownership, the European Commission could not find concrete measures and had limited options for analysing this (European Commission, 2018, p. 29).

In terms of the development of fundamental rights in Türkiye, no progress was made either (European Commission, 2018, p. 29). Since September 2016, the ECHR found there to be violations in 163 out of 168 cases and not a single development in any of the articles was put forward by the ECHR (European Commission, 2018, p. 30). Two authorised institutions prevented violations in regard to the enforcement of human rights. A lack of transparency was reported throughout the subchapter on fundamental rights. The freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and the right to a fair trial was described as
not being in line with the European standards. Many of the human rights activist received judicial prosecution and faced ill-treatment and violent attacks (European Commission, 2018, p. 31). The nature of torture and ill-treatment in prisons remained a matter of concern for the European Commission, however, a few areas stayed in good terms with the European standards. Even though President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in early 2017 stated that there was a possibility of reinstating the death penalty, in all circumstances the right to life was respected and there had not been any signs of implementing such laws (European Commission, 2018, p. 32). Further, the freedom of worship of any religion has been generally respected (European Commission, 2018, p. 33). An area that has seen continuous backsliding in the ability of freedom of expression. The limitation of the free media has continued with increasing self-censorship (European Commission, 2018, p. 34). The intimidation of journalists was higher than ever, and the number of journalists put into custody is over 150. The government had strong influence over the media, handing out high fines and closing down many tv-stations, newspapers and radio channels that were critical of the government. Many of the arrested journalists were charged with being part of terrorist groups and insulting public officials (European Commission, 2018, p. 35).

Overall, the 2018 report argued that the Turkish state was seriously backsliding regarding matters of the judiciary system and fundamental rights within the country.

5.1.3 The year of 2023 in the reports of European Commission

According to the European Commission (2023), the 2023 progress report monitors if Türkiye has made progress in meeting the Copenhagen political criteria. This has been done by summarizing what happened in the year 2023 as well as by briefly explaining for the chapter chosen how and if progress was made. The report of year 2023 covers the period from June 2022 to June 2023 (European Commission, 2023a, p. 4).
The year 2023 reports some serious backsliding and weaknesses in Türkiye’s democratic institutions. The earlier mentioned referendum, held in 2017, gave the Turkish president more power and made it easier to stay in power which has caused some serious problems for the Turkish political system and its three branches of government. These changes have made the executive branch the only one out of three that is democratically elected, and the other branches remain in the hands of presidency (European Commission, 2023a, p. 4).

After a massive earthquake hit Türkiye in February 2023, killing tens of thousands of people, again, there were attacks by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) which is listed by the EU as a terrorist group. In November of 2022, a terrorist attack was carried out in Istanbul which the Turkish authorities argued was carried out by the People’s Defence Units (YPG), an affiliate of the PKK. The PKK denied any involvement in this terrorist attack, but still there have been continues bombings around Türkiye’s southern border with Iraq and Syria. As a result of this, Turkish authorities have responded by performing airstrikes against them (European Commission, 2023a, p. 4).

According to the report, the 2023 election campaign was limited and there were citing’s about their being some serious issues regarding the freedom of expression in the country. The implementation of the ECtHR’s recommendations has been going slow and have caused major concerns regarding the area of human rights. Further, there has not been any development in the area of freedom of assembly either (European Commission, 2023a, p. 6). These features of democratic backsliding in Turkish democracy will be explained further below.

5.1.3.1 Chapter 23: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights

In Chapter 23 of the report, the European Commission (2023a) reported that the Turkish state made a clear democratic backsliding. The recommendations made in previous reports by the EU had not been implemented.
Some concerns have been reported regarding the established 7th judicial reform package, which has failed to address the structural issues of the Turkish judicial system. The report states that also some positive steps have been taken, but that these were minor. One of such issues is the sentencing of smugglers, and another is that mothers now have a possibility of delaying sentences if it regards their sick children (European Commission, 2023a, pp. 24-25). There still are high concerns about the independence and impartiality of the judiciary system and its judges and prosecutors. Comments were made publicly regarding ongoing judicial cases by high-level officials, as well as representatives of the executive member, including the president. The recruitment of judges and prosecutors is still made under non-transparent circumstances, which can raise questions about if the selection was done with justice and fair processes in mind (European Commission, 2023a, p. 25). As in earlier years, before being appointed as a judge or prosecutor, candidates still have to undergo training. What concerns the European Commission (2023) is that this training closely follows the will of the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. This has led to there being concerns over the quality of judicial decisions and indictments, marked by insufficient legal reasoning and factual evidence. The ongoing issues with the transferring of judges and prosecutors affects the quality of justice as well. The lack of transparency within the trial-monitoring has raised questions about fairness and openness within the proceedings of the cases. In October 2022, the Council of State made a significant ruling in favour of reactivating the 178 judges and prosecutors’ who had been dismissed under the 2016 state of emergency. These dismissals were based on alleged ties to the Gülen movement. The Council of State asserted that the acts attributed to the individuals were insufficient to prove their connections to the movement. Furthermore, the Council of State ordered the State to provide compensation and damages to the affected judges and prosecutors. In March 2023, the number of reactivated judges and prosecutors had been increased to 845 judges and prosecutors (European Commission, 2023a, p. 26). The fight against corruption has been in a stable position, meaning that they did not make any action on the anti-
corruption planning and strategy process (European Commission, 2023a, p. 27).

In terms of the fundamental rights within Türkiye, there had not been any further developments. The 2021 Human Rights Action Plan (HRAP) continued to be implemented, but there were no improvements of the overall situation regarding human rights (European Commission, 2023a, p. 29). The space for civil society and human rights organisations had further decreased through pressure by judicial and administrative investigations. There are continuous intimidation attempts on human rights defenders. The report argues that they faced unequal trials, that there often was a lack of evidence, and an improper use of the anti-terrorism law against NGOs and human rights defenders (European Commission, 2023a, p. 30). Further, there were reports on the ill-treatment of people captive in detention centres, prisons, transportation vehicles, and on the street during demonstrations. The excessive force by security forces have continued to be a matter of concern (European Commission, 2023a p. 31). The freedom of worship has generally been respected, however the discrimination of minorities such as Alevi’s, non-Muslims, Christians, and Jews has continued (European Commission, 2023a, pp. 32-33).

The area of freedom of expression continuously has been backsliding in recent years. Journalists, writers, activists, and opposition politicians have continuously been arrested, detained, prosecuted, and convicted. These limitations had a serious impact on the freedom of expression and the freedom of the press and has led to even more self-censorship. In the report, the European Commission (2023) writes that at the beginning of 2022 some journalist who reported on the devastating earthquake had been blocked of and arrested by the police. Turkish authorities explained that the reason for this was that the region was in a state of emergency and that they took pictures without permission. Not only journalist, writers and other professions faced some problems, also civilian victims of the earthquake who talked about their experience had been threatened (European Commission, 2023a, p. 34). In
October 2022, a new media law got adopted that raised concerns due to its interpretation of the language. Within this law, ‘false or misleading information’ on the internet was criminalized and was argued could be used to suppress any online criticism of the government. Further, this also does not provide an equal and independent use of executive power (European Commission, 2023a, p. 35). The existing legislation did not ensure an open and free internet. Frequently, many websites were banned, and individuals on social media who were vocal about their criticism of the government were targeted. In March of 2023, 25 penalties had been issued by the RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) authorities who inspect online broadcasts. Further, during the second day of the earthquake, Turkish authorities temporarily banned Twitter to stop the criticism of the government (European Commission, 2023a, p. 37).

Overall, the 2023 report argued that the Turkish state was seriously backsliding regarding matters of the judiciary system, and also the fundamental rights within the country.

5.2 Results and discussion

The basis for this research study was the idea that the EU could be seen as a promoter of democracy, which automatically makes us think that they would be quite successful in doing this. However, for Türkiye, quite the opposite has been the truth. The Turkish government has not been able (or willing) to meet the requirements put forward by the EU. In the following paragraphs, the whole analysis itself will be summarised and discussed.

As the European Commission annual report stated for the year 2013, Türkiye was on its way to achieve its European standardised political reforms but had still failed to accomplish this (European Commission, 2013, p. 64). In 2013, Turkish authorities received heavy criticism of many Turks who spoke out against the government. To solve this problem, the government responded by harshly pushing back on this criticism (European Commission, 2013, p. 5). A
possible reason for doing so could be to show other governments that the Turkish government is strong and resilient. The excessive force that the police released on the peaceful Gezi Park protests has been reported by the ECtHR as a violation of human rights (European Commission, 2013, p. 49). To contrast this, Türkiye implemented a training process on human rights for judges and prosecutors to ensure that the trial processes were fair.

As the European Commission annual report stated for the year 2018, Türkiye had been backsliding in many of the categories regarding the functioning of the Turkish democratic system (European Commission, 2018, p. 8). The aftermath of the attempted coup made the citizens of Türkiye vulnerable, which further meant that the Turkish government was able to put forward a successful referendum claiming greater influence and power. Now the government had greater opportunities of eliminating its competitors by accusing them of being involved with the Gülen movement, who the Turkish government said was responsible for the attempted coup in 2016 (European Commission, 2018, p. 8). The referendum elections that were held in 2017 not only gave the government more power it ensured and strengthened their place within Turkish politics, but also meant that Türkiye strayed further from the European ideals desired and required by the EU to come closer together regarding the association process.

As the European Commission annual report stated for year 2023, Türkiye has not made any progress on any of the categories that the European Commission has provided, which makes 2023 the worst year for democratic backsliding in this research study. There are many reasons that could explain why this would be the case, for example the aftermath of the referendum, a vulnerable hyper polarized population, a weak functioning of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, the imprisonment of many opposition politicians, critics, journalist, and writers, and more. In 2023, there also was a general election which was won by the incumbent regime making them even more powerful (European Commission, 2023, pp. 5-6) (European Commission, 2023, pp. 25-29) (European Commission, 2023, pp. 32-37).
Overall, despite there being some signs that over ten years ago Türkiye was seeking further cooperation with the EU, it seems as if Türkiye now is further from completing its association process with the EU than it was in 2013. Therefore, it seems reasonable to say that the democratisation process in Türkiye is failing. The Turkish political system on paper consists of democratic institutions that should work as well as in other European countries that are part of the EU, however, the democratic backsliding in the last ten years has made many of them non-reliable or non-functioning. The Third Wave of democratisation in Eastern Europe in the 1990’s, as proposed by Samuel Huntington in 1991 (Huntington, 1991, pp. 21-23), seemed originally to apply to Türkiye as well. In the early 2000’s up until around the year 2013 there was progress, however, this progress seems to have gone backwards during the last ten years. As of right now, it seems highly unlikely that this will change any time in the foreseeable future since President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was re-elected in 2023 and will be the Turkish leader for the upcoming years.

5.3 Future of the research of EU-Türkiye relation

It would be interesting to continue studying and working with this subject in the future and to compare the case of Türkiye and the EU with other states that have gone through similar processes. By doing such a study, it would provide an opportunity of finding out why in some cases the EU is successful in being a promoter of democracy, and why they in some cases fail to make a difference. Recently, Moldova and Ukraine became candidate countries for entering the EU and others have been for a while. The association process takes many years and is very difficult for states to complete. In order to do it properly, further research should be conducted to find out what the best way is for the EU to be a promoter of democratisation in regard to the candidate countries. Hopefully, this would make this process quicker and also more reliable by providing better results.
6 Conclusion

In conclusion, by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the European Commission's annual reports from 2013, 2018 and 2023, the study provides a nuanced picture of Türkiye’s process within its association process with the EU. In 2013, the EU and the Commission had seen some improvements and assessed that Türkiye, despite there being flaws, had made some progress in its association progress with the EU. In 2018, the EU’s assessment of the situation was that there were signs of Türkiye backsliding within its association process, questioning some of the basic rights within Türkiye that strayed far away from the European standards. In 2023, the earlier assessment of 2018 had come full circle when the EU assessed that Türkiye’s democratic institutions had seen some serious setbacks. Therefore, it is fair to assess that this Thesis has shown that Türkiye has been backsliding in this process and that, at least for the coming years, it is unclear if this will change in anyway.

Originally, Türkiye seemed to be striving for becoming a successful democracy and to become part of the EU, however, it seems like the Turkish state has chosen a different path going forward. In some states the EU arguably has been successful in being a promoter of democracy, however, they seem to have failed to do so in Türkiye. The question that remains to be answered is what the future of Türkiye will look like. If they are to become a member of the EU much needs to be changed, and with the AKP’s current position on the EU and the party’s power within Turkish politics, it seems highly unlikely that this will change anytime soon.
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