A MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE DYNAMICS BEHIND GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES IN TURKEY SINCE 1999

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submitted by **NERGİS NİL KAYA** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Science in European Studies, the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University** by,

Prof. Dr. Sadettin KİRAZCI
Dean
Graduate School of Social Sciences _____

Prof. Dr. Başak ALPAN
Head of Department
Department of European Studies _____

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zerrin TORUN
Supervisor
Department of International Relations _____

Examining Committee Members:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Erdem ÇOLAK (Head of the Examining Committee)
Middle East Technical University
Department of Political Science and Public Administration _____

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zerrin TORUN (Supervisor)
Middle East Technical University
Department of International Relations _____

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ayşe Ömür ATMACA
Hacettepe University
Department of International Relations _____

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Name, Last Name: Nergis Nil Kaya

Signature:

ABSTRACT

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KAYA, Nergis Nil
M.S., The Department of European Studies
Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zerrin TORUN

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This study examines the dynamics behind the trajectory of gender equality reforms in Turkey following its acquisition of European Union (EU) candidate country status in 1999. The research questions whether periods of progress, stagnation, and regression in the field of gender equality can be explained solely by Europeanization or whether additional factors should be considered. For this purpose, the study is designed as a qualitative desk research and is based on official documents and academic literature. The multidimensional analytical framework combines Europeanization and de-Europeanization with internal factors and non-EU external factors. The findings reveal that the comprehensive reforms of the early 2000s occurred through the interaction of credible EU incentives, domestic political dynamics, and a favorable global climate. However, after 2005, the decline in the EU's credibility in Turkey and the change in domestic political priorities led to a slowdown in reforms. Since 2011, the discursive transformation of the ruling party, the weakening of civil society, global authoritarian tendencies, and the process of de-Europeanization have come together, resulting in a regression in reforms.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Europeanization, EU Enlargement, Turkey

ÖZ

1999'DAN GÜNÜMÜZE TÜRKİYE'DE TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET EŞİTLİĞİ POLİTİKALARININ ARKASINDAKİ DİNAMİKLERİN ÇOK BOYUTLU ANALİZİ

KAYA, Nergis Nil
Yüksek Lisans, Avrupa Çalışmaları Bölümü
Tez Yöneticisi: Doç. Dr. Zerrin TORUN

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Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin 1999'da Avrupa Birliği (AB) aday ülke statüsü kazanmasının ardından toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği reformlarının seyrinin arkasındaki dinamikleri incelemektedir. Araştırma, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği alanındaki ilerleme, duraklama ve gerileme dönemlerinin yalnızca Avrupalılaşma ile açıklanıp açıklanamayacağını ya da ek faktörlerin dikkate alınıp alınmaması gerektiğini sorgulamaktadır. Bu amaçla çalışma, niteliksel bir masa başı araştırması olarak tasarlanmış ve resmî belgeler ile akademik literatüre dayandırılmıştır. Çok boyutlu analitik çerçeve, Avrupalılaşma ve Avrupa'dan uzaklaşmayı iç faktörler ve AB dışı dış faktörlerle birleştirmektedir. Bulgular, 2000'li yılların başındaki kapsamlı reformların güvenilir AB teşvikleri, yerel siyasi dinamikler ve elverişli küresel iklimin etkileşimiyle gerçekleştiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Ancak 2005 sonrasında Türkiye'de AB'nin güvenilirliğinin azalması ve iç siyasi önceliklerin değişmesi reformların yavaşlamasına yol açmış, 2011'den itibaren ise iktidarın söylemsel dönüşümü, sivil toplumun zayıflaması, küresel otoriterleşme eğilimleri ve Avrupa'dan uzaklaşma süreci bir araya gelerek reformlarda gerilemeye neden olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği, Avrupalılaşma, AB Genişlemesi, Türkiye

To my mother, with love

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM iii
ABSTRACT iv
ÖZ vi
DEDICATION viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix
TABLE OF CONTENTS x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS xii
CHAPTERS
1. INTRODUCTION 1
1.1. Objective, Research Problem, and Methodology of the Study 1
1.2. Significance and Limitations of the Study 4
1.3. Structure of the Study 5
2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK 8
2.1. Introduction 8
2.2. Europeanization 8
2.2.1. Enlargement-led Europeanization 12
2.2.2. De-Europeanization 16
2.3. Other Explanators of Change 18
2.3.1. Internal Factors 19
2.3.2. Non-EU External Factors 22
2.4. Conclusion 25
3. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND GENDER EQUALITY 27
3.1. Introduction 27
3.2. EU's Gender Regime 27
3.2.1. Legal Framework 28
3.2.2. Policy Instruments 33
3.2.3. Financial Mechanisms 37
3.3. Promoting Gender Equality in Candidate Countries 41

3.3.1. Legal Framework 42
3.3.2. Policy Instruments 44
3.3.3. Financial Instruments 47
3.4. Conclusion 48
4. UNDERSTANDING GENDER EQUALITY REFORMS IN TURKEY 50
4.1. Introduction 50
4.2. Legal Framework 50
4.3. Policy Instruments 59
4.4. Financial Mechanisms 66
4.5. Explaining the Trajectory of Turkey's Gender Equality Reforms 71
4.5.1. Europeanization and De-Europeanization 72
4.5.2. Internal Factors 76
4.5.2.1. Instrumentalization of Gender 77
4.5.2.2. Women's Movement and Civil Society 82
4.5.3. External Factors 86
4.6. Conclusion 94
5. CONCLUSION 97
REFERENCES 102
APPENDICES
A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET 134
B. THESIS PERMISSION FORM / TEZ İZİN FORMU 146

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AP	: Accession Partnership
CEDAW	: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEEC	: Central and Eastern European Countries
CERV	: Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme
EIM	: External Incentives Model
ESF	: European Social Fund
ESF+	: European Social Fund Plus
EU	: European Union
GONGO	: Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organization
ILO	: International Labour Organization
IPA	: Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
JDP	: Justice and Development Party
KSGM	: General Directorate on the Status of Women
LIO	: Liberal International Order
MFF	: Multinational Financial Framework
NOW	: New Opportunities for Women Initiative
NPAA	: National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis
OMC	: Open Method of Coordination
TAIEX	: Technical Assistance and Information Exchange
TGNA	: Turkish Grand National Assembly
UN	: United Nations
UNDP	: United Nations Development Program

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Objective, Research Problem, and Methodology of the Study

Gender equality means that individuals have equal rights, opportunities, resources, and protections regardless of their gender.[1] It is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Gender equality is a precondition for increasing societal productivity and economic growth. It enables the strengthening of fair and inclusive governance through equal representation in politics, leadership positions, and decision-making mechanisms. In addition to these, it is necessary to achieve sustainability goals such as a healthy planet, climate-friendly transformation, and care society.[2]

In Turkey, achieving gender equality has been an important struggle throughout the country's history. Since the establishment of the Republic, various steps have been taken. However, the late 1990s and the early 2000s marked a turning point in the development of this policy area. Reforms were carried out in many areas, such as civil rights, education, employment, institutions, and combating violence against women. Nevertheless, from the mid-2000s onward, the reform momentum slowed, and since the 2010s, some earlier gains have been rolled back. Gender inequalities persist in Turkey's society, media, and public life. While laws protecting gender equality exist on paper, they are often ineffective in practice. Combating gender-based violence and harassment has been on the agenda for years, as women are

[1] "Gender Equality: Glossary of Terms and Concepts," UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, November 2017, 3, https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/1761/file/Genderglossarytermsandconcepts.pdf.

[2] "Gender Equality," United Nations, accessed August 14, 2025, https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/gender-equality.

disproportionately affected by such abuses. For instance, according to a UNFPA-supported study, eight out of ten victims of violence are women.[3] Furthermore, in 2024 alone, 394 women were murdered in Turkey, leaving femicide at an alarmingly high rate.[4] Practices such as not sending girls to school and marrying them off at an early age continue among some groups.[5] Comments about women often focus on how they should dress, the number of children they should have, or what time is considered appropriate for them to go out. The lack of a comprehensive welfare state in Turkey means that working mothers are expected to perform at their best at work while taking on almost all the caregiving and household chores at home.[6] Efforts to seek rights in the public sphere are also being blocked. Peaceful events such as International Women's Day and Pride marches are being banned, and protesters' demands for equality and freedom are suppressed. These issues are also reflected in Turkey's global standing in this area. According to the World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Gender Gap Report, Turkey ranks last in Europe and 127th out of 146 countries worldwide in terms of gender equality.[7]

This thesis intends to inquire into the course of gender equality reforms since Turkey became a European Union (EU) candidate, considering the periods of progress, stagnation, and regression, and aims to analyze the dynamics behind this process. In this context, the research questions of the study are: 1) What explains the trajectory

[3] "UNFPA-TKDF Domestic Violence Report Has Been Released!," UNFPA Türkiye, June 21, 2023, https://turkiye.unfpa.org/en/news/unfpa-tkdf-domestic-violence-report-has-been-released.

[4] "We Will Stop Femicides Platform 2024 Annual Report," Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu, September 1, 2025, https://kadincinayetlerinidurduracagiz.net/veriler/3130/we-will-stop-femicides-platform-2024-annual-report.

[5] Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü, *Türkiye'de Çocuk Yaşta, Erken ve Zorla Evlilikler: 1993-2018 Türkiye Nüfus ve Sağlık Araştırmaları Veri Analizi* (UNFPA Türkiye, 2020), https://turkiye.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/turkce_web_son_pdf.pdf; Turkish Statistical Institute and UN Women Türkiye, *Women in Türkiye: A Statistical Overview 2024* (2024), 30, https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/unwomen_turkiye_istatistiklerdekadin_english_digital.pdf.

[6] İdil Safiye Soyseçkin, "Balance Between Work and Family Life: Middle Class Working Mothers in Turkey," *Fe Dergi* 8, no. 1 (2016): 130–43, https://doi.org/10.1501/Fe0001_0000000157; Sevgi Çoban, "Bakım Rejimleri ve Türkiye'de Bakım Emeği," *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 40, no. 2 (2023): 455–65, https://doi.org/10.32600/huefd.1228210.

[7] *Global Gender Gap Report 2024* (World Economic Forum, 2024), 249, https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024/.

of gender equality reforms in Turkey since 1999? 2) Is Europeanization alone sufficient to explain the progress and regression in this policy area? The study argues that while Europeanization is an important explanatory framework, it is insufficient when considered alone. Turkey's reform trajectory can be explained through the interaction of EU conditionality with domestic political dynamics and broader non-EU global factors. This interaction gave momentum to reforms in some periods, while in others it contributed to stagnation and regression.

This study is structured as a desk study with a qualitative research design. The study uses a three-dimensional analytical framework consisting of Europeanization/de-Europeanization, internal factors, and non-EU external factors. This framework has been chosen to provide a comprehensive explanation of Turkey's post-1999 reform process. Europeanization was selected as it is one of the most widely used theoretical approaches to explain policy alignment and norm transfer in EU candidate countries. Since Turkey obtained EU candidate country status in 1999, the selected year provides a logical starting point for this framework. Nevertheless, explaining the reforms solely through Europeanization is insufficient, as the reviewed literature shows. Domestic political dynamics and global political climate have significantly influenced the course of the reform process. Therefore, this study offers a multi-layered analysis by addressing these three dimensions together.

The primary sources used in this analytical framework include official EU documents, namely, the acquis communautaire, Accession Partnership (AP) documents, Progress Reports, Gender Equality Country Reports, Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) regulations, implementation guidelines, project fiches, strategy documents, and action plans. On the Turkish side, constitutional and legislative amendments, as well as strategy documents, were examined. In addition, documents from international organizations such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UN Women, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the World Bank were also evaluated. Furthermore, reliable news sources reflecting discourse and policy developments in the field of gender equality were also included in the analysis. Secondary sources include academic books, peer-reviewed articles, theses, and other academic studies.

1.2. Significance and Limitations of the Study

Turkey's transformation regarding gender equality since 1999 is too multifaceted to be explained solely by the Union's influence. Although Europeanization offers important insights, this thesis argues that it cannot, on its own, explain the progress and regression observed in Turkey. The study argues that the course of reforms can only be understood by considering Europeanization and de-Europeanization in conjunction with domestic political dynamics and non-EU global factors. Despite significant studies on EU conditionality and gender equality,[8] there is no comprehensive research that systematically brings these three dimensions together within a single analytical framework and applies them across legal frameworks, policy instruments, and financial mechanisms. By constructing and applying this framework, the thesis offers an original methodological contribution that goes beyond descriptive approaches or single-theory explanations, revealing both the limits of Europeanization and the explanatory value of a multi-layered approach.

This study has several limitations. The research is qualitative in design and does not include primary field data collected from policymakers or civil society representatives. Instead, a comprehensive analysis was conducted based on primary and secondary sources. The time frame is limited to the period from Turkey's attainment of EU candidate country status in 1999 to the present day, with reference to the period prior to this only where necessary for historical context. The scope of the study is selective from both the EU and Turkey perspectives. Rather than examining all of the EU and Turkey's legal frameworks, policies, and financial mechanisms related to gender equality, the study focuses on those that are considered most meaningful and effective for the research objective. Although the concept of gender equality is used, the focus of the study is primarily on women's rights.

[8] See Saniye Dedeoğlu, "Equality, Protection or Discrimination: Gender Equality Policies in Turkey," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 19, no. 2 (2012): 269–90, https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxs004; Marella Bodur Ün and Harun Arıkan, "Europeanization and De-Europeanization of Turkey's Gender Equality Policy: The Case of the Istanbul Convention," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 60, no. 4 (2022): 945–62, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13292; Ayşe İdil Aybars et al., "Europeanization without Substance? EU–Turkey Relations and Gender Equality in Employment," *Comparative European Politics* 17, no. 5 (2019): 778–96, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-018-0125-2.

Policies related to sexual orientation and LGBTQ+ rights are excluded from the scope. This is because in the Turkey-EU context, gender equality has been framed mainly around women's rights, while LGBTQ+ rights have remained marginal in EU documents. For example, the 2013 Progress Report was the first document to address LGBTQ+ individuals and the legal and practical measures needed to prevent discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity.[9] In addition, in Turkey, there is no legal framework that explicitly protects LGBTQ+ individuals. While the constitution and some laws contain general non-discrimination provisions, these do not extend to sexual orientation and gender identity. Political and social debates surrounding LGBTQ+ rights have kept this area marginalized in the policy agenda. Homophobic rhetoric from some high-level government officials, the lack of effective legal and institutional mechanisms, and the pressure on rights defenders have further deepened discrimination, leaving LGBTQ+ individuals increasingly vulnerable.[10] Therefore, limiting the scope to women's rights provides analytical coherence and enables the study to address its research questions more effectively. Finally, since Turkey is examined as a single case, the generalizability of the findings to other candidate or potential candidate countries is limited.

1.3. Structure of the Study

This thesis consists of five chapters, including this one. The first chapter, Introduction, provides general information about the topic. It explains the study's objective, research questions, and methodology. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 presents a three-dimensional analytical framework for understanding the course of gender equality reforms in Turkey since 1999. First, the literature on Europeanization is discussed, followed by a section explaining how this process takes place in candidate countries. The concept of de-Europeanization, which refers to the weakening or reversal of Europeanization, is also examined. Under the internal

[9] Cenap Çakmak and Ali Onur Özçelik, "EU Accession Process and Women's Rights in Turkey: The Effects on Family Values and Culture," in *EU Conditionality in Turkey: When Does It Work? When Does It Fail?*, 1st ed., ed. Cenap Çakmak and Ali Onur Özçelik (Lexington Books, 2022), 122, https://doi.org/10.5771/9781666910704.

[10] *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex People Covering the Period of January to December 2023* (ILGA-Europe, 2024), https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2024/02/2024_turkey.pdf.

factors, the dynamics influencing Turkey's overall reform process are addressed, such as party interests, the role of civil society and social movements, and the influence of the media and business world. As for the non-EU external factors, global norms, the role of international actors such as the UN, and the concept of zeitgeist are discussed. Chapter 3 focuses on how the EU promotes gender equality within the Union and in candidate countries in three dimensions: legal framework, policy instruments, and financial mechanisms. The first section explores these three dimensions at the Union level. Under the legal framework, the process of the EU's gender equality legislation evolving from a narrow economic approach to a rights-based system is discussed. Regarding policy instruments, implementation and guidance tools such as multiannual action programs, gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting, and the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) are examined. As for financial mechanisms, the analysis evaluates the transition process from dedicated funds for gender equality to the integration of gender as a horizontal priority in EU funding programs. In the second section, the same three dimensions are addressed in the context of candidate countries. In terms of the legal framework, the process of legislative alignment and institutional development is outlined. Policy instruments focus on EU documents and technical support mechanisms, while the financial mechanisms section discusses the role and evolution of IPA funds in supporting gender equality. This section provides the basis for the evaluation of the Turkish case in the next section. Chapter 4 provides the main analysis part of the thesis; it directly answers the research questions and brings together the overall findings. It examines why gender equality reforms in Turkey have accelerated, slowed down, and regressed since the country's EU candidacy. In the first section, the discussed framework of Chapter 3 is adapted to the Turkish context. Within the legal framework, changes made to fundamental legislation, such as the constitution and codes, and their link to the EU accession process are addressed. In terms of policy tools, the EU's guidance and monitoring processes are examined through Accession Partnerships, National Programs, Progress Reports, Gender Equality Country Reports, and technical support mechanisms. Under the heading of financial mechanisms, projects supported through IPA funds and their effects are evaluated. In the second section, the reform process is examined in the context of

Europeanization/de-Europeanization, internal factors, and non-EU external factors, using the analytical framework developed in Chapter 2. The conclusion chapter summarizes and brings together the findings obtained throughout the study and provides a comprehensive answer to the research questions. It also highlights the importance of the study in terms of future research and discussions in the field of gender equality.

CHAPTER 2

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the analytical framework used to examine how and to what extent the European Union has influenced domestic reforms in Turkey, with a particular focus on gender equality. The literature focusing on the Europeanization processes of candidate countries has highlighted the EU's transformative power through conditionality. However, the trajectory of reform adoption and implementation in these countries cannot be fully explained by the influence of the EU. As seen in the Turkish case, fluctuations in reform processes, selective compliance practices, periods of stagnation, and even backsliding indicate the need for a broader, more multi-dimensional analytical framework. Therefore, this thesis adopts an eclectic framework that integrates Europeanization and de-Europeanization with a wider set of explanatory variables, namely internal and non-EU external factors. This chapter first examines the main theoretical approaches to Europeanization, followed by an analysis of how this process unfolds in the context of candidate countries. The following section discusses the concept of selective Europeanization to explain cases where full compliance does not occur. This is followed by an exploration of de-Europeanization, which refers to the weakening or reversal of the Europeanization process. Finally, the chapter analyzes the impact of internal dynamics and non-EU external factors on the reform process in Turkey.

2.2. Europeanization

Europeanization refers to the process through which member, candidate, or third countries become more "European" due to their relationship with the EU. This term,

which has been used to explain the EU's transformative power since the 1990s, has been interpreted in different ways across the literature.[11]

Ladrech provided one of the earliest definitions of Europeanization, framing it as "an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making".[12] Similarly, Börzel defines Europeanization as "a process by which domestic policy areas become increasingly subject to European policy-making".[13] Building on these perspectives, Radaelli offers one of the most comprehensive and widely cited definitions, framing Europeanization as "the processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things', and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies".[14]

In the literature, Europeanization is categorized under two headings: top-down and bottom-up.[15] Top-down Europeanization corresponds to the type of Europeanization defined by Ladrech, Börzel, and Radaelli. In this approach, member states, candidate countries, or third countries download EU policies and institutional models into their systems. In bottom-up Europeanization, the direction of influence is reversed.

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[11] Başak Alpan, "Europeanization and EU–Turkey Relations: Three Domains, Four Periods," in *EU-Turkey Relations*, ed. Wulf Reiners and Ebru Turhan (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2021), 107, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-70890-0_5.

[12] Robert Ladrech, "Europeanization of Domestic Politics and Institutions: The Case of France," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 32, no. 1 (1994): 69, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.1994.tb00485.x.

[13] Tanja A. Börzel, "Towards Convergence in Europe? Institutional Adaptation to Europeanization in Germany and Spain," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 37, no. 4 (1999): 30, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00197.

[14] Claudio M. Radaelli, "The Europeanization of Public Policy," in *The Politics of Europeanization*, 1st ed., ed. Kevin Featherstone and Claudio M. Radaelli (Oxford University PressOxford, 2003), 30, https://doi.org/10.1093/0199252092.003.0002.

[15] Tanja A. Börzel and Diana Panke, "Europeanization," in *European Union Politics*, ed. Michelle Cini and Nieves Pérez-Solórzano Borragán (Oxford University Press, 2022), 113, https://doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780198862239.003.0008.

Member states upload their domestic interests to the EU level and actively shape the Union's policies and institutions. Schmidt refers to this dynamic as European integration. Member states construct the EU by projecting their preferences and institutional arrangements onto the Union level. Furthermore, she argues that European integration and Europeanization form a mutual feedback loop, meaning that the preferences and models carried by member states are then returned downward to form rules and practices at the national level.[16] Since this thesis aims to examine the extent to which the EU induces change in a candidate country that has no capacity to project its preferences to the Union, it adopts a top-down Europeanization perspective. The following sections will therefore explore how this process unfolds.

Risse, Cowles, and Caporaso argue that two necessary conditions exist for Europeanization to create structural change at the national level.[17] The first condition is the degree of "goodness of fit" between EU-level norms and existing domestic structures. If there is a high level of compatibility between the two, the need for adaptation remains low. The same applies vice versa: if a significant misfit exists, the pressure for domestic change increases. However, the authors emphasize that misfit alone cannot trigger transformation.[18] This brings in the second condition, which is the presence of mediating factors that respond to pressure and shape the outcome. The authors identify five mediating factors, three of which are structural (multiple veto points, formal institutions, and political or organizational cultures) and two of which are agency-based (differential empowerment of actors and processes of learning).[19] These factors help explain how and to what extent EU-led reforms are adopted at the national level.

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[16] Vivien A. Schmidt, "The EU and Its Member States: From Bottom Up to Top Down," in *Reflections on European Integration: 50 Years of the Treaty of Rome*, ed. David Phinnemore and Alex Warleigh-Lack (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), 194, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230232839_11.

[17] Thomas Risse et al., "Europeanization and Domestic Change: Introduction," in *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change*, ed. Maria Green Cowles et al. (Cornell University Press, 2001), 2, https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501723575-002.

[18] Ibid., 7.

[19] Ibid., 9–12.

Focusing on how Europeanization occurs, Börzel and Risse explain this process through two different institutionalist approaches.[20] The authors analyze how domestic actors respond to pressures from the EU by utilizing the perspectives of rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism. Rational choice institutionalism assumes that actors make cost-benefit calculations to achieve their interests and act in accordance with these calculations.[21] In this context, the EU is considered a source of opportunity and constraint for actors. EU norms and the pressure to comply with them enable actors who support reforms to achieve their interests while posing a threat to others who advocate for the continuation of the status quo. Therefore, whether a change will occur at the local level depends on the actors' ability to utilize opportunities and constraints. There are two main mediating factors that shape domestic responses. The first is the existence of multiple veto points. If there are multiple veto mechanisms in a country, actors whose interests are threatened will have the capacity to resist change. The second is formal institutions, which can provide the necessary resources to actors for transformation.

In contrast to rational choice institutionalism, sociological institutionalism explains local change not through interest calculations but through the adoption of appropriate or legitimate norms, persuasion, and social learning.[22] Local actors adopt change because they see it as acceptable, desirable, or legitimate. Two mediating factors shape this process. The first is the existence of change agents who internalize EU norms and ensure their adoption and dissemination at the local level. The second is the existence of a political culture open to compromise and supportive of informal institutions. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive theoretical frameworks, as local change often involves strategic adaptation and social learning.[23] The concept of misfit and the two institutionalist approaches provide a basic framework for explaining how Europeanization occurs in member states. However,

[20] Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, "Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe," in *The Politics of Europeanization*, ed. Kevin Featherstone and Claudio M. Radaelli (Oxford University Press, 2003), 58, https://doi.org/10.1093/0199252092.003.0003.

[21] Ibid., 63–65.

[22] Ibid., 65–68.

[23] Ibid., 74–75.

due to the power asymmetry between candidate countries and the EU and the membership conditionality, the Union's influence is much more substantial in candidate countries compared to member states. Consequently, different factors come into play in the Europeanization of candidate countries.[24] Therefore, the next section will focus on the Europeanization of the candidate countries to better understand the EU's impact on Turkey.

2.2.1. Enlargement-led Europeanization

Enlargement-led Europeanization came to the forefront with the EU's eastern enlargement. This line of research focuses on how and under what conditions the EU has brought about change in candidate countries. Within this framework, conditionality and the Copenhagen criteria emerged as the main transformation tools by revealing how the membership prospect can lead to domestic reforms.[25] According to Grabbe, the Europeanization of candidate countries occurs through five mechanisms.[26] First, the EU provides models for candidate countries to help them align their legal and institutional structures with Union standards. Second, it supports technical harmonization and shapes domestic policy priorities by attaching conditions to funds. Third, it evaluates candidate countries' progress through benchmarking and monitoring, thus increasing the effectiveness of membership conditionality. Fourth, it contributes to administrative capacity building by facilitating knowledge transfer through advice and twinning. Finally, the EU gatekeeps access to different stages of the negotiation process, which functions as both a deterrent and an incentive. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier adapted the rational choice and sociological institutionalist approaches discussed in the previous section to the context of candidate countries. The authors identify three distinct models of Europeanization.[27]

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[24] Heather Grabbe, "Europeanization Goes East: Power and Uncertainty in the EU Accession Process," in *The Politics of Europeanization*, ed. Kevin Featherstone and Claudio M. Radaelli (Oxford University Press, 2003), 304, https://doi.org/10.1093/0199252092.003.0013.

[25] Alpan, "Europeanization and EU–Turkey Relations," 110.

[26] Grabbe, "Europeanization Goes East," 312–16.

[27] Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, "Governance by Conditionality: EU Rule Transfer to the Candidate Countries of Central and Eastern Europe," *Journal of European Public Policy* 11, no. 4 (2004): 670, https://doi.org/10.1080/1350176042000248089.

The first model, the External Incentives Model (EIM), is based on a rationalist approach, which assumes that actors are rational and make cost-benefit calculations to achieve their interests.[28] According to this model, the main driving force behind Europeanization is the EU's conditionality mechanism. The authors identify two types of conditionality: democratic conditionality and acquis conditionality.[29] While democratic conditionality refers to compliance with the fundamental values of the EU, such as democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, acquis conditionality covers the transposition of the EU acquis into domestic legislation. In this model, actors adapt to the EU when the expected benefits of adaptation outweigh the associated costs. There are four interconnected factors that determine whether adaptation to the EU will occur. For authors, if the conditions are clearly defined, the rewards are substantial and quickly attainable, the EU's threats and promises are perceived as credible, and the costs of adaptation are low, the likelihood of Europeanization increases.[30] The second model, the social learning model, is based on a sociological approach, in which norms are internalized through normative persuasion processes. That is, candidate countries adopt EU rules when they see them as legitimate and compatible with shared values. Finally, the third model, the lesson drawing model, suggests that countries voluntarily draw inspiration from EU practices while seeking solutions to their own domestic problems.[31] These three models reveal the theoretical paths of Europeanization.

Vachudova examines the EU's transformative power in Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) within the context of the membership perspective and conditionality mechanisms. She argues that the EU promotes reforms in two ways.[32] The first involves the geopolitical, sociocultural, and economic benefits the EU membership holds. Candidate countries voluntarily implement reforms, without

[28] Ibid., 671.

[29] Ibid., 677.

[30] Ibid., 672.

[31] Ibid., 675–76.

[32] Milada Anna Vachudova, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration After Communism* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 63, https://doi.org/10.1093/0199241198.001.0001.

direct EU pressure, to achieve these rewards. The author defines this as passive leverage. The second refers to the direct pressure the EU exerts on candidate countries through its conditionality mechanism. The author defines this as active leverage. Active leverage is exercised through two sets of instruments.[33] The first group includes tools that determine the progression of accession, such as the screening process, the signing of the accession treaty, and progress reports. The other group consists of technical assistance and guidance tools, including financial support, Accession Partnerships (APs), National Programs for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAAs), and Twinning.

Europeanization does not always unfold in a complete and comprehensive manner. In some cases, countries adopt EU norms selectively. This means that while reforms are implemented in certain areas, they are neglected in others. The literature states that this is primarily due to domestic political priorities.[34] Such harmonization processes are called selective Europeanization or instrumental Europeanization. In addition, there are instances where reforms are adopted but not fully implemented. In the literature, this type of superficial alignment is referred to as shallow Europeanization, "Potemkin harmonization," or "world of dead letters."[35]

The EIM is one of the most widely used approaches to explain candidate countries' Europeanization processes.[36] In her study, where she examines the Europeanization of CEECs, Börzel states that this is due to the asymmetrical dynamic between

[33] Ibid., 126–32.

[34] Aneta B. Spendzharova and Milada Anna Vachudova, "Catching Up? Consolidating Liberal Democracy in Bulgaria and Romania after EU Accession," *West European Politics* 35, no. 1 (2020): 39–58, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2012.631312; Gergana Noutcheva and Senem Aydın-Düzgit, "Lost in Europeanisation: The Western Balkans and Turkey," *West European Politics* 35, no. 1 (2012): 59–78, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2012.631313.

[35] Malgorzata Czernielewska et al., "The Regionalization Process in Poland: An Example of 'Shallow' Europeanization?," *Regional & Federal Studies* 14, no. 3 (2004): 461–95, https://doi.org/10.1080/1359756042000261397; Gerda Falkner and Oliver Treib, "Three Worlds of Compliance or Four? The EU-15 Compared to New Member States," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 46, no. 2 (2008): 293–313, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2007.00777.x; Wade Jacoby, "Priest and Penitent: The European Union as a Force in the Domestic Politics of Eastern Europe," *East European Constitutional Review* 8, nos. 1–2 (1999): 62–67.

[36] Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, "Candidate Countries and Conditionality," in *Europeanization: New Research Agendas*, ed. Paolo Graziano and Maarten P. Vink (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008), 90, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230584525_7.

candidate countries and the EU.[37] She argues that excluding candidate countries from the rule-making process prevents the effective implementation of sociological mechanisms such as social learning and norm internalization.[38] Likewise, for the Turkish case, the literature emphasizes the role of EU incentives in triggering reforms.[39] Therefore, this thesis adopts EIM to examine the impact of the EU on Turkey's gender equality policies since 1999. Between 1999 and 2005, when comprehensive reforms were implemented, conditions were clearly defined, rewards were big and attainable, the EU's credibility was high, and the costs of reform were relatively low. However, after 2005, the reduced accessibility of EU rewards and the decline in the EU's credibility led to a slowdown in the reform process. The enlargement fatigue within the EU, the rise to power of leaders in key member states such as Germany and France who were skeptical of Turkey's accession, the unresolved Cyprus issue, and the blockage of negotiation chapters played a significant role in this context.[40] After 2011, in addition to these existing challenges, increasing democratic backsliding in Turkey, tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the de facto suspension of accession negotiations further undermined the membership perspective.[41] The costs of alignment began to outweigh the expected benefits, and reforms aimed at EU compliance largely came to a standstill. This general pattern has also been observed in the field of gender equality.

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[37] Tanja A. Börzel, "Deep Impact? Europeanisation Meets Eastern Enlargement," in *Deepening and Widening in an Enlarged Europe: The Impact of the Eastern Enlargement*, ed. Attila Ágh and Alexandra Ferencz (Together for Europe Research Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2006), 166.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ziya Öniş, "Conservative Globalists versus Defensive Nationalists: Political Parties and Paradoxes of Europeanization in Turkey," *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 9, no. 3 (2007): 247–61, https://doi.org/10.1080/14613190701689902; Meltem Müftüler Baç, "Turkey's Political Reforms and the Impact of the European Union," *South European Society and Politics* 10, no. 1 (2005): 17–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/13608740500037916.

[40] See Gülnur Aybet, "Turkey and the EU After the First Year of Negotiations: Reconciling Internal and External Policy Challenges," *Security Dialogue* 37, no. 4 (2006): 529–49, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010606072947; Frank Schimmelfennig, "Entrapped Again: The Way to EU Membership Negotiations with Turkey," *International Politics* 46, no. 4 (2009): 413–31, https://doi.org/10.1057/ip.2009.5.

[41] See Nefise Ela Gökalp Aras, "A Game Changer in EU-Turkey Relations: The Opportunities and Pitfalls of Migration Policy," *The International Spectator* 54, no. 4 (2019): 47–61, https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2019.1670481; Mehmet Bardakçı, *Turkey and the Major Powers in the Eastern Mediterranean Crisis from the 2010s to the 2020s*, Comparative Southeast European Studies, vol. 70, no. 3 (2022): 516–39, https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-2021-0071.

2.2.2. De-Europeanization

De-Europeanization refers to the weakening or reversal of the Europeanization process. Since the 2010s, the concept has gained scholarly prominence due to growing concerns over democratic backsliding, erosion of the rule of law, and rising authoritarianism in both EU member and candidate states.

A prominent conceptualization of de-Europeanization is offered by Copeland, who defines it as "a process of disengagement combined with the intentional decision to reverse the impact of Europeanization."[42] He argues that de-Europeanization is not simply about reducing interaction with the EU, but rather a strategic and deliberate effort to reverse the effects of Europeanization that have already occurred. Therefore, to understand whether de-Europeanization has occurred, it is necessary first to determine whether Europeanization has happened in the area in question, and if so, to what extent. Building on Copeland's argument that de-Europeanization entails more than reduced engagement with the EU, Müller, Pomorska, and Tonra offer an operational framework to distinguish de-Europeanization from ordinary policy divergence. They propose three diagnostic criteria: if the political discourse undermines the EU's foundational norms, if the divergence is not confined to isolated policy areas but occurs systematically, and if the policy position falls outside mainstream approaches within the EU, then the process can be characterized as de-Europeanization.[43] The authors also highlight three dimensions through which de-Europeanization unfolds.[44] First, at the discursive level, this process involves the reconstruction of professional and political narratives based on national rather than European foundations. Second, at the normative level, de-Europeanization is characterized by the rejection of the fundamental values of the EU, such as human rights, pluralism, and the rule of law. Third, on the institutional level, de-

[42] Paul Copeland, "Europeanization and De-Europeanization in UK Employment Policy: Changing Governments and Shifting Agendas," *Public Administration* 94, no. 4 (2016): 1126, https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12283.

[43] Patrick Müller et al., "The Domestic Challenge to EU Foreign Policy-Making: From Europeanisation to de-Europeanisation?," *Journal of European Integration* 43, no. 5 (2021): 522–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.1927015.

[44] Ibid., 524–26.

Europeanization manifests through the withdrawal from EU-related mechanisms and frameworks. Dyduch and Müller complement this structural perspective by shifting the focus to the political strategies employed by populist governments to shape and drive the process of de-Europeanization. They identify four mechanisms through which this process is enacted.[45] The first is renationalization, which refers to prioritizing national interests over those of the EU. The second is disengagement, defined as the withdrawal from institutional structures associated with the EU. The third is circumvention, which involves seeking alternative partnerships or models outside the EU framework. Finally, resistance entails the open rejection of EU norms and rules.

These frameworks primarily focus on how political actors construct de-Europeanization through strategic mechanisms. In contrast, Aydın-Düzgit and Kaliber draw attention to a more passive form of de-Europeanization based on the erosion of the normative and symbolic presence of the EU. They conceptualize de-Europeanization as "the loss or weakening of the EU/Europe as a normative/political context and as a reference point in domestic settings and national public debates."[46] According to the authors, this process unfolds in two ways in Turkey. First, the influence and attractiveness of European institutions, norms, and values are decreasing, which causes Turkey not to see the EU as a normative and political reference point.[47] Second, the increasing skepticism and indifference of Turkish society towards the EU weakens the normative legitimacy of the EU, despite the continued implementation of EU norms.[48]

This conceptual framework is helpful in understanding the regression in reforms that became more pronounced in Turkey after 2011. During this period, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) government increasingly shifted away from EU-driven

[45] Ibid., 572–73.

[46] Senem Aydın-Düzgit and Alper Kaliber, "Encounters with Europe in an Era of Domestic and International Turmoil: Is Turkey a De-Europeanising Candidate Country?," *South European Society and Politics* 21, no. 1 (2016): 5, https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2016.1155282.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., 6.

reform priorities by focusing on its own political agenda, implementing selective reforms without consultation or inclusive dialogue, and adopting policies that signaled normative and institutional disengagement from the European framework.[49] This perspective offers valuable insight into the dynamics of reform stagnation and will be used in Chapter 4 to examine how de-Europeanization has affected gender equality reforms in Turkey during the post-2011 period.

2.3. Other Explanators of Change

In candidate countries, domestic transformation processes are often explained through EIM and the concept of misfit.[50] In other words, it is assumed that the candidate country adopts EU norms as a result of cost-benefit calculations. The basis of this approach is the asymmetric power relationship between the EU and the candidate countries: while the EU is a game maker that offers strong rewards such as membership and sets the rules of the process, the candidate countries are only players in this game.[51] This understanding, which frames Europeanization as a top-down process, reduces reform dynamics to the influence of the EU alone and overlooks the broader context of globalization and endogenous political processes.[52] Therefore, external incentives or EU-centered theoretical approaches are insufficient to explain Turkey's fluctuating reform process. The direction and pace of reforms in Turkey are shaped not only by the conditions and rewards offered by the EU but also by the preferences of domestic political actors, societal dynamics, and the broader international context. The following sections will address the local and non-EU external factors that have affected Turkey's reform process.

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[49] Gözde Yılmaz, "From Europeanization to De-Europeanization: The Europeanization Process of Turkey in 1999–2014," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 24, no. 1 (2016): 94–95, https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2015.1038226.

[50] Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, "The Europeanization of Eastern Europe: The External Incentives Model Revisited," *Journal of European Public Policy* 27, no. 6 (2020): 815, https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2019.1617333.

[51] Didem Buhari-Gulmez, "Locating the Missing Link: From European to Global and Back Again," in *Europeanization in a Global Context : Integrating Turkey into the World Polity* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), 1–2, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95059-1_1.

[52] Paolo R. Graziano and Maarten P. Vink, "Europeanization: Concept, Theory, and Methods," in *The Member States of the European Union*, second, ed. Simon Bulmer and Christian Lesquene (Oxford University Press, 2020), 46, https://doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780198737391.003.0003.

2.3.1. Internal Factors

In Turkey's Europeanization process, dynamics that contradict the progress predicted by frameworks such as conditionality and external incentive models are observed. Between 1999 and 2005, important reforms were implemented in an environment where the prospect of full membership was strong, and the rewards were credible. However, explaining this progress solely through EU incentives is insufficient. More importantly, the fact that reforms continued in certain areas even after 2005, when the EU lost credibility in the eyes of both the public and political elites, the reliability of the conditionality mechanism decreased and reform costs increased, reveals that the explanatory power of external incentives is limited. Numerous studies on Turkey's Europeanization explain this contradictory situation with internal factors.[53]

Among the various internal dynamics discussed in the literature, the most influential factor that has shaped Turkey's fluctuating reform process is the strategic actions of political actors driven by party interests. This dynamic was first observed during the coalition government period consisting of the Democratic Left Party (DSP), the Motherland Party (ANAP), and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). In 1999, Turkey was presented with the prospect of full membership in the EU for the first time, and this development created a strong external incentive for reforms. However, comprehensive reforms could not be implemented until 2001 due to the coalition government's failure to develop a common stance on the EU's political criteria.[54] This lack of consensus stemmed from the coalition parties' appeal to different electorates and different priorities regarding the reform process.

While the coalition period demonstrates how fragmented party interests can constrain the reform process, the most prominent example of party-based strategic behavior

[53] Gözde Yılmaz, "Turkey, Europeanization, and Domestic Change," *Marmara Avrupa Çalışmaları Dergisi* 22, no. 2 (2014): 63–84, https://doi.org/10.29228/mjes.85; Tanja A. Börzel, "Europeanisation Meets Turkey: A Case Sui Generis?," in *Turkey and the European Union*, 1st ed., ed. Çigdem Nas and Yonca Özer (Routledge, 2012); Nathalie Tocci, "Europeanization in Turkey: Trigger or Anchor for Reform?," *South European Society and Politics* 10, no. 1 (2005): 73–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/13608740500037973.

[54] Meltem Müftüler Baç, "Turkey's Political Reforms and the Impact of the European Union," *South European Society and Politics* 10, no. 1 (April 1, 2005): 22, https://doi.org/10.1080/13608740500037916.

emerged when the JDP came to power in 2002. According to Saatçioğlu, the JDP has instrumentalized the EU candidacy in line with its interests, such as consolidating and maintaining its power.[55] During the 2002–2007 period, the JDP was under pressure from secular state institutions due to its Islamist roots and viewed the EU as a source of political security and legitimacy.[56] Accordingly, it adopted EU norms and implemented comprehensive reforms to expand its maneuvering capacity in the domestic political system.[57] However, the party's increasing public support and institutional power following the 2007 elections reduced the need for the EU, which led to a slowdown in the reform process. During this period, reforms were primarily limited to areas compatible with the JDP's political interests and were shaped in line with strategic calculations to expand its voter base.

Following the party's third electoral victory in 2011, the EU agenda was pushed further into the background. Nonetheless, the JDP continued to implement limited reforms to appeal to the voters and support its 2023 vision, while continuing the discourse of modernization and Westernization to generate political legitimacy.[58]

Another internal dynamic frequently emphasized in the literature is the role of civil society and social movements. Following the Cold War, the rising discourses of democracy and human rights worldwide encouraged the development of civil society and social movements in Turkey.[59] During this period, ethnic, environmental, and women's movements and various civil society organizations became important

[55] Beken Saatçioğlu, "AKP's 'Europeanization' in Civilianization, Rule of Law and Fundamental Freedoms: The Primacy of Domestic Politics," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014): 86–101, https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2013.864185.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ihsan D. Dagi, "The Justice and Development Party: Identity, Politics, and Discourse of Human Rights in the Search for Security and Legitimacy," in *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz (Utah University Press, 2006), 95–96.

[58] Buket Ökten Sipahioğlu, "Shifting from Europeanization to De-Europeanization in Turkey: how AKP instrumentalized EU negotiations," *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* 48 (2017): 57–58, https://doi.org/10.1501/intrel_0000000313.

[59] Sefa Şimşek, "The Transformation of Civil Society in Turkey: From Quantity to Quality," *Turkish Studies* 5, no. 3 (September 1, 2004): 46, https://doi.org/10.1080/1468384042000270326; Sefa Şimşek, "New Social Movements in Turkey Since 1980," *Turkish Studies* 5, no. 2 (2004): 111–12, https://doi.org/10.1080/1468384042000228611.

pressure groups.[60] In the context of gender equality, the women's movement played a key role in the creation and adoption of key reforms through advocacy and lobbying activities, and organizations such as the Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation and the Women's Solidarity Foundation played an active role in policy monitoring and advocacy.[61] Civil society and social movements continued to make significant contributions to the reform process until the early 2000s, but their influence has declined significantly in the last decade.[62] For women's CSOs, this is due to the government's promotion of pro-government CSOs that support its policies rather than reformist and independent civil society structures.[63] This makes it difficult for independent civil society organizations to access financial resources, causes them to be oppressed, and limits their contribution to the reform process. In parallel, the women's movement has also been marginalized and repressed by the government, which emphasizes familism and motherhood.[64] The influence of civil society and social movements in Turkey began before EU membership became a concrete target, and became an important internal dynamic for the reform process. However, with increasing authoritarianism in recent years, these actors stopped serving as effective internal factors that encouraged democratization.

The impact of business interest groups and the media on the reform process has also been discussed in the literature. Yılmaz and Soyaltın state that the mainstream media have not positively contributed to the reform process, as it was instrumentalized mainly by the state, suffered from a lack of independence, and operated within a

[60] E. Fuat Keyman and Ahmet Icduygu, "Globalization, Civil Society and Citizenship in Turkey: Actors, Boundaries and Discourses," *Citizenship Studies* 7, no. 2 (2003): 221–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/1362102032000065982.

[61] Marella Bodur, "Modernity, Social Movements and Democracy: Feminist Movements in Post-1980 Turkey" (Carleton University, 2005), 178.

[62] Gözde Yılmaz and Diğdem Soyaltın, "Zooming into the 'Domestic' in Europeanization: Promotion of Fight against Corruption and Minority Rights in Turkey," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014): 18, https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2013.864181.

[63] Jessica Leigh Doyle, "Government Co-Option of Civil Society: Exploring the AKP's Role within Turkish Women's CSOs," *Democratization* 25, no. 3 (2018): 457, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2017.1373096.

[64] Alev Özkazanç, "Gender and Authoritarian Populism in Turkey: The Two Phases of AKP Rule," openDemocracy, accessed July 9, 2025, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/rethinking-populism/gender-and-authoritarian-populism-turkey-two-phases-akp-rule/.

network of clientelist relations. [65] On the other hand, the emergence of alternative media in recent years has fostered a more critical discourse that questions government policies. In doing so, it has indirectly supported the democratization process and contributed to the reform efforts.[66] When it comes to business groups, Yılmaz highlights that the TÜSİAD and İKV have actively pressed for reforms since the 1990s. However, their influence on the adoption of reforms was assessed as questionable until 2002, and after 2004, their influence further declined.[67]

2.3.2. Non-EU External Factors

As explained in previous sections, the Europeanization literature positions the EU as the main driver of reforms. According to this approach, countries internalize and implement EU norms to align themselves with the West. However, this framework tends to view the EU as a singular norm-producer and often overlooks the broader ideological context in which these norms are embedded.

As Buhari-Gülmez emphasizes, the norms promoted by the EU are norms that have been universalized and globally recognized through international processes and actors such as the United Nations (UN).[68] In other words, these norms are a part of the global value system. Therefore, the adoption of these norms by candidate countries not only stems from a desire to adapt to the EU but is also a part of an effort to integrate into the global normative order. In this context, Turkey's progress in the field of gender equality has been shaped by its desire to comply with the global normative order and the influence of international dynamics. International agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and global platforms such as the UN

[65] Yılmaz and Soyaltın, "Zooming into the 'Domestic' in Europeanization," 18.

[66] Gözde Yılmaz, "EU Conditionality Is Not the Only Game in Town! Domestic Drivers of Turkey's Europeanization," *Turkish Studies* 15, no. 2 (2014): 311, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2014.926239.

[67] Ibid., 309.

[68] Didem Buhari-Gulmez and Chris Rumford, "Ombudsmanship and Turkey's Europeanization in 'World Society'," in *New Perspectives on Turkey-EU Relations* (Routledge, 2013), 25–35.

Women's Conferences have played an essential role in adopting norms in this field.[69] In this sense, the overlap between EU-promoted norms and globally accepted values facilitates the legitimacy of EU norms locally and paves the way for smoother reform processes.

While the global dissemination of liberal norms such as democracy, rule of law, and human rights has contributed to their legitimacy and adoption by candidate countries, compliance with these norms is closely linked to the prevailing ideological climate of the international system. Simply put, the existence of globally accepted norms alone does not guarantee the continuity of reform processes. The effectiveness of norms depends on which values are dominant globally in a given historical period. At this point, the concept of zeitgeist, the spirit of the times, provides an important framework for understanding the ideological background that shapes the reform processes. Zeitgeist refers to a historically situated system of values that transcends specific political or geographic contexts and affects various actors, institutions, and societies.[70]

To understand how the zeitgeist has shaped reform dynamics, it is necessary to examine the historical development of the Liberal International Order (LIO). This order was established after World War II and was built on liberal values such as economic openness, multilateral institutions, security cooperation, the rule of law, democracy, and human rights.[71] The LIO can be analytically divided into five dimensions: the trade order, financial order, maritime order, non-proliferation order, and human rights order.[72] The human rights order is based on respect for fundamental freedoms and democratic processes. It encompasses widely accepted

[69] Burcu Özdemir, "The Role of the EU in Turkey's Legislative Reforms for Eliminating Violence against Women: A Bottom-Up Approach," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014): 125–26, https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2013.864187.

[70] Monika Krause, "What Is Zeitgeist? Examining Period-Specific Cultural Patterns," *Poetics* 76 (October 2019): 5, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2019.02.003.

[71] G. John Ikenberry, "The End of Liberal International Order?," *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (2018): 7, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix241.

[72] Daniel M. Kliman and Richard Fontaine, *Global Swing States: Brazil, India, Indonesia, Turkey and the Future of International Order* (Center for a New American Security and German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2012), 8, https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/GlobalSwingStates_KlimanFontaine.pdf.

international norms concerning the rights and freedoms of all individuals, including gender equality.

With the end of the Cold War, these values became more widespread at the global level, and processes of democratization, transition to a market economy, and integration with international institutions accelerated in regions such as Eastern Europe, Latin America, and East Asia.[73] By the early 2000s, liberal values had become the dominant normative reference framework of the international system. However, after the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, deepening structural inequalities, representation problems, and growing economic insecurity triggered social discontent in many countries.[74] This environment has created a suitable ground for the rise of populist leaders with authoritarian tendencies. In many countries, a populist-authoritarian turn took place, and governments began to construct an alternative normative framework that challenged and undermined the universal values of liberal democracy by emphasizing national sovereignty, cultural traditionalism, and security-oriented governance.[75]

Since the 2010s, executive authority in Turkey has been increasingly centralized, fundamental rights and freedoms have been limited, and the discourse of "national will" has been brought to the forefront as the source of legitimacy.[76] Parallel to this authoritarian turn, previous reform steps taken in areas such as democratization, human rights, and gender equality began to lose significance, and in some cases, were even reversed. This transformation in Turkey is part of the broader global trend of rising authoritarianism.[77]

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[73] Ikenberry, "The End of Liberal International Order?," 7.

[74] Uğur Eser, "Otoriterleşen Popülizm Ya Da Yükselen Yeni Otoriterlik," *İktisat ve Toplum Dergisi* 120 (2020): 6–8.

[75] Alexander Cooley, "Authoritarianism Goes Global: Countering Democratic Norms," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 3 (2015): 50–53, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0049.

[76] See Sevinç Öztürk and Thomas Reilly, "Assessing Centralization: On Turkey's Rising Personalist Regime," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 24, no. 1 (2024): 167–85, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2022.2137899; Ali Bilgiç, "Reclaiming the National Will: Resilience of Turkish Authoritarian Neoliberalism after Gezi," *South European Society and Politics* 23, no. 2 (2018): 259–80, https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2018.1477422.

[77] Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, "Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 9 (2016): 1582, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1135732.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter presents an analytical framework that offers a multidimensional perspective on the drivers of Turkey's reform trajectory since 1999. The framework consists of three elements: Europeanization, internal factors, and non-EU external factors.

Europeanization refers to the transfer of EU norms and rules to third countries. The first necessary condition for this transfer is the misfit between EU norms and the existing structures of the recipient country. As discussed in this chapter, Europeanization is driven by both cost-benefit calculations and social learning mechanisms. In the context of candidate countries, Europeanization is frequently explained through the rationalist approach, as these countries hold a weaker position compared to the EU. Thus, EIM is a useful theoretical tool for analyzing the Europeanization of candidate countries.

However, Europeanization does not occur in a linear fashion. Instances are observed where recipients selectively adopt EU rules; at times, they may refrain from implementing those rules even after initially adopting them. The literature highlights that these superficial or selective adaptations are often driven by internal dynamics. In some cases, the process may also reverse. The literature defines the rejection, neutralization, or systematic elimination of previously adopted EU norms and rules as de-Europeanization.

Internal factors include the strategic choices of political actors, the interests of political parties, civil society's capacity to apply pressure, and the influence of institutions such as the media. The literature emphasizes that these factors have also shaped reforms in Turkey in addition to EU incentives. In this context, internal factors are important determinants that both support and hinder reforms.

The third component, non-EU external factors, enables an analysis of Turkey's relationship with global normative structures and their impact on the reform process. International norm-setters such as the UN have influenced various policy areas.

Additionally, the ideological climate of the international system has affected the reform trajectory. Therefore, it is essential to consider global normative trends, alongside EU incentives and domestic dynamics, when analyzing patterns of change.

In conclusion, this framework enables Turkey's reform process to be considered not solely as an EU-centric process but rather as a complex transformation shaped by the interaction of internal and global forces.

CHAPTER 3

THE EUROPEAN UNION AND GENDER EQUALITY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to analyze how the EU promotes gender equality and is comprised of two sections. In the first section, the EU's approach to this principle will be evaluated in three dimensions: legal framework, policy instruments, and financial mechanisms. Under the legal framework heading, the historical development of the Union's gender acquis, how its scope widened, and its current status will be explained. In the policy instruments section, the tools used by the EU to protect and develop this fundamental value will again be approached from a historical perspective. Under the financial mechanisms section, the evolution of funds established for this principle and the current funds will be evaluated. In the second part of the chapter, the EU's promotion of gender equality in candidate countries will be analyzed under the same three headings. This analysis will serve as a conceptual foundation for the next chapter, which focuses on the EU's promotion of gender equality in Turkey.

3.2. EU's Gender Regime

Gender equality is a core value of the European Union. Over the years, the Union's gender equality framework developed from one that solely addressed gender-based inequalities in the labor market to one that aims to ensure equal treatment, promote equal opportunities, and mainstream gender across all policy areas. The following sections examine the historical development and current state of this regime in detail under three headings: legal framework, policy instruments, and financial mechanisms.

3.2.1. Legal Framework

The first provision on gender equality was included in Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome of 1957, which established the European Economic Community.[78] This article established the principle of equal pay for equal work between male and female workers. However, this article was adopted to eliminate competition between France, which was the only European Coal and Steel Community member to adopt the International Labour Organization's (ILO) equal pay convention, and other members. Therefore, this provision was included to protect female-dominated sectors rather than to demonstrate a genuine commitment to gender equality.[79]

Until the 1970s, no legal developments regarding gender equality occurred. However, in the 1970s, key directives addressing gender discrimination in employment and social security marked a shift from equal pay to equal treatment.[80] Council Directive 76/207/EEC prohibited gender-based discrimination in employment, vocational training, promotion, and working conditions, and required member states to abolish discriminatory laws and ensure legal recourse. Council Directive 79/7/EEC extended equal treatment to social security, covering areas like sickness, old age, and unemployment, while allowing some exceptions for pension age and maternity. Furthermore, with the Defrenne II ruling in 1976, the European Court of Justice ruled that equal pay was a fundamental principle that individuals can directly invoke before national courts. This decision strengthened the enforceability of equal pay and laid the foundation for future legal and political developments on gender equality within the EEC.[81]

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[78] Johanna Kantola, *Gender and the European Union* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 27.

[79] Marie-Thérèse Lanquetin et al., "From Equality to Reconciliation in France?," in *Gendered Policies in Europe: Reconciling Employment and Family Life*, ed. Linda Hantrais and Jo Campling (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000), 68, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230378056_4.

[80] Alison E. Woodward, "From Equal Treatment to Gender Mainstreaming and Diversity Management," in *Gendering the European Union: New Approaches to Old Democratic Deficits*, ed. Gabriele Abels and Joyce Marie Mushaben (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012), 90, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230353299_5.

[81] Colm O'Cinneide, "Uniformity or Variation: Should the CJEU 'Carry Over' Its Gender Equality Approach to the Post-2000 Equality Grounds?," in *The European Union as Protector and Promoter of Equality*, ed. Thomas Giegerich (Springer, 2020), 117, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43764-0_6.

In the 1980s, apart from two directives aimed at ensuring equal treatment in occupational social security schemes (Council Directive 86/378/EEC) and self-employed work (Council Directive 86/613/EEC), there were no developments in primary law concerning gender equality. According to van der Vleuten, this stagnation was due to the high implementation costs of previous gender equality directives for Member States.[82] During this period, policy instruments, particularly the multiannual Action Programmes, were used to compensate for the legislative slowdown.[83] In the 1990s, several important developments took place towards achieving gender equality. One of the early steps in this direction was the Maastricht Treaty, also known as the Treaty on European Union (TEU), which was signed in 1992 and entered into force in 1993. TEU redefined the EU's competencies and created a three-pillar structure. One of these pillars, the Justice and Home Affairs pillar, extended the EU's competence beyond economic matters and allowed the Union to act on issues that affect citizens' rights and security, such as violence against women.[84] Moreover, the Treaty's Social Protocol required that the Union would support the efforts of member states in the social sphere, including ensuring equal opportunities between men and women in the labor market.[85] The Treaty also extended Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) to new social policy areas, including equal opportunities.[86] Even though the Treaty did not introduce gender-specific provisions, the changes it brought enhanced the EU's legislative capacity to promote gender equality.

The Treaty of Amsterdam, which was signed in 1997 and entered into force in 1999, marked a turning point in the EU's efforts to ensure gender equality.[87] The Treaty

[82] Anna Van Der Vleuten, *The Price of Gender Equality: Member States and Governance in the European Union* (Routledge, 2016), 117, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315554006.

[83] Ibid., 113.

[84] Mark A. Pollack and Emilie Hafner-Burton, "Mainstreaming Gender in the European Union," *Journal of European Public Policy* 7, no. 3 (2000): 434, https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760050086116.

[85] Gracia Vara Arribas and Laura Carrasco, "Gender Equality and the EU: An Assessment of the Current Issues," *Eipascope* 1 (2003): 22.

[86] Van Der Vleuten, *The Price of Gender Equality*, 9.

[87] Sophie Jacquot, *Transformations in EU Gender Equality: From Emergence to Dismantling* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 95, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137436573.

ended the stagnation in primary law on gender equality since the adoption of Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome.[88] With it, the Union recognized gender equality as one of its fundamental objectives. Furthermore, it introduced the principle of gender mainstreaming, ensuring that gender equality would be considered in both internal and external EU policies and across all areas of governance. In addition, the Treaty granted the EU legal competence to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation. The Treaty also amended Article 119, extending the principle of equal pay to include "work of equal value" and recognizing positive action as a legal tool to promote equal opportunities for women in employment. Before this, EU primary law had only established anti-discrimination principles, without providing a clear legal basis for measures to address structural gender inequalities.

In addition to the treaty-level developments of the 1990s, the EU adopted several directives that strengthened existing gender equality legislation and introduced new areas of regulation. Some of these directives focus on work-life balance and care responsibilities. For instance, Council Directive 92/85/EEC aimed to protect the health and safety of pregnant women, new mothers, and breastfeeding mothers. At the same time, Council Directive 96/34/EC introduced the right to parental leave for both women and men. Other regulations aim to ensure equality in social security and working conditions. Directive 96/97/EC granted equal rights to women and men in pension systems. Directive 97/81/EC guaranteed that part-time workers (primarily women) would be treated equally with full-time employees. Finally, Directive 97/80/EC facilitated employees' ability to pursue their rights by shifting the burden of proof to the employer in discrimination cases.

During this period, the Court of Justice clarified the legal boundaries of positive action measures and determined the conditions under which these measures are considered lawful.[89] The 1997 Marschall decision stated that positive action measures giving priority to female candidates with equal qualifications in areas

[88] Ibid., 23.

[89] Ibid., 100–101.

where women are underrepresented are legal. However, the Court emphasized that such measures must include an exception clause that objectively assesses the conditions of the candidates. The 2000 Badeck ruling further expanded the legal limits of positive action measures. The Court stated that certain practices, such as quotas, are legal in areas where women are underrepresented, as long as they aim to address the problem and comply with the principle of proportionality.

Since the late 1990s, the EU has adopted a broader anti-discrimination framework that also covers gender, race and ethnicity, religion and belief, age, disability, and sexual orientation.[90] For example, Directive 2000/43/EC prohibits racial and ethnic discrimination, while Directive 2000/78/EC prohibits discrimination in employment on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation. In 2000, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union was proclaimed. The Charter brought together key political, social, and economic rights. Although it was not binding when it was adopted, it laid down the fundamental principles of gender equality. The Charter prohibits gender-based discrimination, guarantees equality between women and men, and allows for positive action to promote gender balance. Moreover, it included provisions on protecting family and professional life, recognizing parental leave rights, and guaranteeing access of vulnerable groups to social security and assistance. The Charter gained legal force with the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty.

Following these developments, the EU continued to expand and strengthen its gender equality framework through three directives. Directive 2002/73/EC, for the first time, required Member States to establish or maintain national bodies responsible for analyzing, monitoring, and promoting equal treatment between women and men. Directive 2004/113/EC extended gender equality protections beyond the labor market by prohibiting gender-based discrimination in access to goods and services. Finally, Directive 2006/54/EC, also known as the recast directive, modernized the existing legislation on equal treatment in employment and reaffirmed fundamental

[90] Johanna Kantola and Kevät Nousiainen, "Institutionalizing Intersectionality in Europe," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 11, no. 4 (2009): 465, https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740903237426.

principles such as equal pay, equal access to promotion, and protection against harassment in the workplace. These directives created a more consistent legal framework.

The Treaty of Lisbon, which was signed in 2007 and entered into force in 2009, amended the TEU and the Treaty Establishing the European Community (TEC), renaming the TEC as the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Although the Treaty did not significantly expand the Union's legislative powers on gender equality, it introduced institutional innovations that strengthened the EU's legal and political framework for equality. One of the most significant institutional developments was the expansion of the European Parliament's legislative role. By making the co-decision procedure the ordinary legislative procedure and strengthening the Parliament's competence, the Treaty of Lisbon enhanced the democratic legitimacy and inclusiveness of EU lawmaking.[91] This is particularly relevant to gender equality, as the European Parliament has historically played a progressive role in promoting gender equality and women's rights.[92] In addition, the Treaty has brought a significant change by incorporating gender equality into the EU's external actions. This has strengthened the Union's commitment to protecting and promoting its fundamental values in its external relations. As a result, gender equality has been given a legal basis as a principle that must be supported in foreign policy alongside other fundamental EU principles.

In the post-Lisbon era, the EU adopted several directives, although not exclusively focused on gender equality, which took gender into account. Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating human trafficking adopted a gender sensitive approach. It recognized women and girls as vulnerable to exploitation. Similarly, Directive 2011/99/EU, which established the European Protection Order and Directive 2012/29/EU on the minimum standards of the rights of the victims of crime, included provisions on combating gender-based violence, protection of women, and

[91] Laura Bisio and Alessandra Cataldi, *The Treaty of Lisbon from a Gender Perspective: Changes and Challenges* (WIDE, 2008), 3.

[92] Petra Ahrens and Lise Rolandsen Agustín, "European Parliament," in *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and EU Politics*, ed. Gabriele Abels et al. (Routledge, 2021), 115.

eliminating gender-based discrimination. More recently, the Union adopted Directive (EU) 2022/2381 to improve the gender balance in company boards. This directive set the target of having 40% of non-executive positions and 33% of all management positions filled by women. In 2024, Directive (EU) 2024/1385, the first specific regulation on combating violence against women and domestic violence, was adopted. It defines forced marriage, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, online stalking and harassment, hate speech, and female genital mutilation as crimes. Moreover, it includes detailed provisions for the protection and support services available to victims.

Since 1957, the EU's gender equality legislation has undergone a comprehensive transformation. It went from a narrow, economics-based approach that focused on equal pay to a comprehensive and rights-based approach. Currently, it includes positive action, gender mainstreaming, and intersectional approaches, which are enshrined in treaties, directives, and case law.

3.2.2. Policy Instruments

Gender Equality Programmes: Multiannual action programmes are non-binding instruments developed by the European Commission.[93] They aim to influence member states through networking, sharing good practice, and voluntary participation.[94] These programmes are among the oldest policy tools that the EU has been using to promote gender equality. Since their first introduction in 1982, these programmes have evolved in scope and institutional structure. This evolution reflects broader shifts in global gender policy trends and political commitments at the EU level. The evolution of these programmes can be broadly divided into two phases.

The first phase covers the period from 1982 to 2006. During this period, four Community Action Programs on Equal Opportunities (1982-2000) and the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005) were

[93] Petra Ahrens, *Actors, Institutions, and the Making of EU Gender Equality Programs*, Gender and Politics (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 4.

[94] Ibid., 5.

implemented. All these initiatives had formal political backing and dedicated funding. While the first and second programmes focused primarily on employment-related issues such as equal access, occupational segregation, and work-life balance, subsequent ones introduced gender mainstreaming and addressed areas such as decision-making, civil life, the image of women in the media, and the fight against gender stereotypes.[95]

The second phase lasted from 2006 to 2020. The Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men (2006–2010), unlike its predecessors, lacked strong legal status and dedicated funding. The Roadmap's successor, the Strategy for Gender Equality (2010–2015), similarly had limited weight.[96] However, the Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality (2016–2019) held the lowest status among all the programmes, as it was a non-binding staff working paper that lacked concrete benchmarks and a dedicated budget.[97] The programmes' decline in status and lack of funding signaled a decline in the EU's political and institutional ambitions for gender equality. Weaker implementation mechanisms and a limited capacity to promote fundamental change further weakened the EU's commitment to gender equality.[98]

In 2019, the first female President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, was elected. Her election signaled a potential turning point in the EU's gender equality policy after more than a decade of declining institutional commitment. Von der Leyen placed gender equality at the forefront of her political agenda and made a strong commitment to advance women's rights and representation.[99] She launched

[95] Sara Preti and Enrico di Bella, "Gender Equality as EU Strategy," in *Measuring Gender Equality: A Multidisciplinary Analysis of Some EU Countries*, ed. Enrico di Bella et al. (Springer International Publishing, 2023), 89–90, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-41486-2_4.

[96] Petra Ahrens, "The Birth, Life, and Death of Policy Instruments: 35 Years of EU Gender Equality Policy Programmes," *West European Politics* 42, no. 1 (2019): 58–59, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2018.1490561.

[97] Ibid., 51.

[98] Petra Debusscher, "The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025: The Beginning of a New Season?," in *Social Policy in the European Union: State of Play 2022*, ed. Bart Vanhercke et al. (ETUI, The European Trade Union Institute, 2023), 94.

[99] Gabriele Abels and Joyce M. Mushaben, "Great Expectations, Structural Limitations: Ursula von Der Leyen and the Commission's New Equality Agenda," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 58, no. S1 (2020): 121, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13102.

the Gender Equality Strategy (2020–2025), which aims to create an environment where women and men have equal opportunities to grow, lead, and engage fully in society.[100] Unlike previous programmes, the Gender Equality Strategy was published as a Commission communication, which has institutional weight. Moreover, the implementation of the goals in the strategy is supported by funds provided through various EU programmes such as the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV), the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), and the Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme.[101]

Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Budgeting: The Council of Europe defines gender mainstreaming as "the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policymaking".[102] The EU first acknowledged gender mainstreaming in its Third Action Programme on Equal Opportunities. However, its first institutional commitment was made with the inclusion of this principle in Articles 2 and 3 of the Amsterdam Treaty.[103] In this regard, the EU has committed to integrating a gender perspective into all policy areas, including employment, social inclusion, external action, climate policy, and digitalization.

At first, the EU's efforts to integrate gender mainstreaming within its institutions were positive.[104] However, over time, gender mainstreaming has been uneven and has yielded only limited progress. This is largely due to insufficient resources, a lack

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[100] European Commission, "The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025," European Commission, June 7, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/items/682425/en.

[101] European Commission, *A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions COM(2020) 152 final (2020).

[102] Council of Europe, "What Is Gender Mainstreaming?," Council of Europe, accessed July 11, 2025, https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/what-is-gender-mainstreaming.

[103] Agnes Hubert and Maria Stratigaki, *Twenty Years of EU Gender Mainstreaming: Rebirth out of the Ashes?*, 25, no. 2 (2016): 21–22, https://doi.org/10.25595/3458.

[104] Emilie M Hafner-Burton and Mark A Pollack, "Mainstreaming Gender in the European Union: Getting the Incentives Right," *Comparative European Politics* 7, no. 1 (2009): 115, https://doi.org/10.1057/cep.2008.37.

of political leadership and accountability mechanisms, and the prevalence of an approach that avoids challenging existing power structures and treats gender as a peripheral concern rather than a transformative priority.[105]

One of the EU's tools for operationalizing gender mainstreaming is gender budgeting. According to the Council of Europe, gender budgeting is "an application of gender mainstreaming in the budgetary process. It means a gender-based assessment of budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality."[106] Gender budgeting focuses on assessing how budget decisions affect individuals differently based on gender and aims to reallocate resources to address structural inequalities, rather than creating separate budgets for women and men or requiring additional public spending.[107]

The EU began promoting gender budgeting in 2001 as part of its wider framework on equal opportunities.[108] Since then, the European Commission has prioritized gender equality objectives in the planning of various funds. Additionally, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) provides guidance and tools to support EU institutions and member states in integrating gender into budgetary processes. However, while the importance of gender budgeting has been recognized for years, its implementation remains limited within EU institutions and across member states.[109] Another policy tool used by the EU in the field of gender equality is the Open Method of Coordination (OMC).

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[105] Gill Allwood, "Gender Mainstreaming and Policy Coherence for Development: Unintended Gender Consequences and EU Policy," *Women's Studies International Forum* 39 (2013): 44–48, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.01.008.

[106] Council of Europe, *Gender Budgeting* (Council of Europe, 2005), 10, https://rm.coe.int/1680596143.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Vera Lomazzi and Isabella Crespi, *Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Equality in Europe: Policies, Culture and Public Opinion*, 1st ed. (Bristol University Press, 2019), 69, https://doi.org/10.46692/9781447317722.

[109] European Committee of the Regions, *The Gender Dimension of Structural and Cohesion Funds 2021–2027, with a Focus on the Preparation of the Operational Programmes*, Opinion COTER-VII/014, with Donatella Porzi (2021).

Open Method of Coordination: The OMC is a flexible policy-making method that enables member states to cooperate to find solutions to common challenges. It was first implemented in 1997 and later adopted as part of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000.[110] It is used in areas where the Union has limited competence or where disagreements are common between member states.[111]

Beveridge states that OMC promotes gender equality by encouraging cooperation, mutual learning, and the sharing of best practices. It is mostly used in employment, social inclusion, and education due to the EU's limited powers. With OMC, gender equality goals get incorporated into broader policy documents. Then, these targets are translated into national action plans by member states, which are regularly monitored and updated through mutual evaluation and peer review.[112] Nevertheless, the author argues that this method has several limitations. For example, due to its non-binding nature, gender equality commitments often remain symbolic. Additionally, the OMC's flexibility leads to inconsistent implementation and weak accountability. Furthermore, OMC usually considers gender objectives as a means to improve economic performance, leading to the neglect of more transformative feminist agendas.[113] In addition to these policy tools, the EU also uses financial mechanisms to advance gender equality.

3.2.3. Financial Mechanisms

The EU's targeted funding for gender equality began in 1982 with the launch of the first Community Action Programme on the Promotion of Equal Opportunities for

[110] Martina Prpić, *The Open Method of Coordination*, PE 542.142 (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2014), 1, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-AaG-542142-Open-Method-of-Coordination-FINAL.pdf.

[111] "Open Method of Coordination," EUR-Lex, accessed July 20, 2025, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=legissum:open_method_coordination.

[112] Fiona Beveridge, "Implementing Gender Equality and Mainstreaming in an Enlarged European Union: Prospects and Challenges," in *Gender and the Open Method of Coordination: Perspectives on Law, Governance and Equality in the EU*, ed. Fiona Beveridge and Samantha Velluti (Routledge, 2008), 17–18.

[113] Ibid., 20–30.

Women.[114] This and subsequent Action Programmes provided support for pilot projects, networks, and research that advanced women's rights across the EU. In the 1990s, the Union developed a range of funding instruments aimed at advancing gender equality. For example, the New Opportunities for Women Initiative (NOW), introduced under the Third Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, aimed to increase women's participation in the labor market by supporting vocational training, entrepreneurship, and employment projects. The STOP Programme was launched in 1996 to combat violence against and trafficking in women. In 1997, the Daphne Initiative was launched to counter violence against women and children. This initiative later evolved into a program called Daphne I, which ran from 2000 to 2003. Under Daphne I, NGOs and public authorities received grants to prevent and address gender-based violence. The program was later expanded with Daphne II (2004-2006) and Daphne III (2007-2013), significantly increasing the EU's financial commitment to tackling violence against women and children. In 2001, the EQUAL Community Initiative was launched under the European Social Fund (ESF). It aimed to promote social inclusion and combat all forms of discrimination in the labor market. Gender equality was one of EQUAL's five pillars, with activities aimed at mainstreaming equality into employment policies, reducing occupational segregation, challenging gender stereotypes, and creating equal opportunities for men and women in professional life.

In 2006, the ESF Regulation marked a major shift in the EU's approach to gender equality funding. Instead of maintaining separate funding streams like NOW and EQUAL with dedicated budgets and objectives, gender equality was redefined as a horizontal objective to be integrated across all ESF priorities (Articles 3 and 6).[115] As a result of this shift, the EU introduced the PROGRESS program (Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity) in 2007, which consolidated several previously separate funding lines under a single umbrella. In addition to gender equality, the

[114] Jacquot, *Transformations in EU Gender Equality*, 36.

[115] Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and Repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999, Pub. L. No. Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006, OJ L 210 (2006), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32006R1081.

program covered four other areas: employment, social protection and inclusion, working conditions, and diversity and combating discrimination. The consolidation trend continued in the 2014-2020 Multinational Financial Framework (MFF). During this period, the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014–2020) combined several funding streams under a single framework. It replaced three previous programmes that had ceased in 2013: the Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme, the Daphne III Programme, and the PROGRESS program. Jacquot highlights that the economic crisis is one of the main factors behind this consolidation trend. Stating that the official justification for the merger was simplification, rationalization, and reduction of administrative costs, the author emphasized that this process led to a reduction in the overall budget allocated to gender equality initiatives and resulted in a loss of visibility for gender equality targets within these programs.[116]

Currently, the 2021-2027 MFF is in place. This framework aligns with the Gender Equality Strategy (2020–2025), and as such, gender equality is being promoted as a horizontal priority in several key funds. The ESF+ directly supports gender equality with €4.3 billion and integrates gender equality into all its measures with a budget of €80.8 billion.[117] The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Just Transition Fund (JTF) also contribute approximately €20 billion and €6 billion, respectively, to gender-sensitive projects, taking gender equality into account.[118] CERV Programme replaced the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme.

CERV is the EU's main funding instrument dedicated to advancing gender equality and combating gender-based violence. It provides direct support to civil society organizations and public authorities working in these areas. The program is

[116] Sophie Jacquot, "A Policy in Crisis: The Dismantling of the EU Gender Equality Policy," in *Gender and the Economic Crisis in Europe: Politics, Institutions and Intersectionality*, ed. Johanna Kantola and Emanuela Lombardo (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2017), 32, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50778-1_2.

[117] European Commission, *2025 Report on Gender Equality in the EU* (Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, 2025), 62, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/055fdbab-5786-425e-a072-652bf53d8fe4_en?filename=Gender%20Equality%20Report.pdf.

[118] Ibid.

structured under four strands, two of which are related to gender equality. The Equality, Rights, and Gender Equality strand focuses on goals such as preventing discrimination, ensuring equal treatment, and gender mainstreaming across all policies. The Daphne strand, on the other hand, focuses on combating gender-based violence and violence against children.[119] In 2024 alone, the Daphne strand allocated €24.5 million to projects addressing these issues.[120]

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), part of the EU's COVID-19 recovery package, has embedded gender-sensitive reforms and investments in national plans, with 136 gender-related measures identified across Member States. The Horizon Europe program, which is the Union's main fund for research and innovation, mandates the adoption of Gender Equality Plans for public institutions and requires the integration of gender analysis in research proposals.

As part of the Gender Equality Strategy (2020–2025), the European Commission committed to integrating a gender perspective into all stages of policymaking and budgeting.[121] In line with this commitment, a dedicated methodology has been developed under the 2021–2027 MFF to monitor and evaluate the contribution of EU funds to gender equality.[122] This methodology provides for the assignment of gender-related scores to funded interventions to determine the extent to which the EU budget supports gender equality objectives. This methodology, first implemented in the context of the 2023 draft budget for the 2021 financial year, also mandates the collection of gender-disaggregated data through performance reports.[123]

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[119] "Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme - Overview," European Commission, accessed July 12, 2025, https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/citizens-equality-rights-and-values-programme/citizens-equality-rights-and-values-programme-overview_en.

[120] European Commission, *2025 Report on Gender Equality in the EU*, 6.

[121] European Commission, "The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025," 2.

[122] Martinius Enzell Tangen et al., *European Union Gender Budgeting – State of Play 2024*, PE 767.348, Policy Department for Budgetary Affairs, Directorate-General for Internal Policies (European Parliament, n.d.), 1–2, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/767348/IPOL_BRI(2024)767348_EN.pdf.

[123] European Commission, *2025 Report on Gender Equality in the EU*, 60–61.

3.3. Promoting Gender Equality in Candidate Countries

The EU's enlargement policy aims to promote stability, security, and prosperity in its neighboring regions. This policy encourages candidate countries to adhere to the Union's fundamental values, such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. The EU experienced seven waves of enlargement to date, and the nature of its enlargement policy has evolved with each round.

The establishment of the Copenhagen criteria in 1993 marked a turning point in the Union's enlargement policy. Chiva states that before the introduction of the Copenhagen criteria, no mechanism existed to export EU values to candidate countries, and being geographically located in Europe and adhering to basic democratic principles were sufficient. The Union expected candidate countries to adopt the Acquis Communautaire only after becoming full members.[124] However, following the Cold War, the membership possibility of the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) emerged. The Union recognized the need for a mechanism to guide and evaluate, and the importance of ensuring political stability, democratic governance, and the rule of law in these transitioning societies. As a result, the Copenhagen criteria were established at the 1993 European Council in Copenhagen. The Copenhagen criteria consist of three main pillars: the political criteria, requiring stable institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and the protection of minorities; the economic criteria, referring to the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to withstand competitive pressure within the Union; and the administrative and institutional capacity, ensuring the ability to adopt, implement, and enforce the EU acquis and fulfill the obligations of membership.[125] Candidate countries must meet all of these criteria to be eligible for EU accession.

The Copenhagen Criteria made conditionality a fundamental element of the EU's enlargement process. Conditionality refers to the set of requirements and standards

[124] Cristina Chiva, "Enlargement," in *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and EU Politics*, ed. Gabriele Abels et al. (Routledge, 2021), 183.

[125] "How EU Enlargement Works," Council of the European Union, accessed July 12, 2025, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/how-enlargement-works/.

that candidate countries must meet to become EU members. Through conditionality, the EU encourages candidate countries to comply with EU law, institutions, and core values. In this context, gender equality has become one of the fundamental standards the EU expects of candidate countries during the accession process. Gender equality is included in both the political and administrative pillars of the Copenhagen Criteria.[126] In terms of the political criteria, the Union expects candidate countries to guarantee and adhere to gender equality, while in terms of administrative criteria, it expects candidate countries to adopt and enforce the gender acquis.

To analyze how the EU supports gender equality in candidate countries, the three main dimensions used in the previous section, namely legal framework, policy instruments, and financial mechanisms, will be used in this section as well. Together, these three dimensions represent the structural, strategic, and material tools the EU uses to promote compliance with the principle of gender equality. The following subsections address each of these dimensions, beginning with the legal framework.

3.3.1. Legal Framework

As previously emphasized, gender equality is among the fundamental values of the European Union and is guaranteed by the Union's main legal texts. Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union defines equality between women and men as one of the founding values of the Union. Article 3(3) lists the fight against discrimination and the promotion of social justice and gender equality as among the Union's aims. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union further strengthens this foundation. Article 8 requires the Union to aim to eliminate gender inequalities in all its activities, and Article 157 guarantees the principle of equal pay for equal work. Furthermore, Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union prohibits discrimination, while Article 23 guarantees equality between women and men in all areas and permits positive action to address the underrepresentation of certain genders. Additionally, a wide range of directives promote gender equality across multiple domains, including employment, vocational training, access to goods and services, social security, and participation in decision-making. The requirement

[126] Chiva, "Enlargement," 186.

for candidate countries to align their national laws with EU gender equality legislation is a fundamental pillar of the Union's strategy to promote gender equality through its enlargement process.

The Copenhagen political criteria play a crucial role in advancing gender equality in candidate countries, as they require the establishment of stable institutions that uphold democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and the protection of minorities. For instance, Article 20 of Directive 2006/54/EC (the Recast Directive) requires member states to designate a body or bodies responsible for promoting, monitoring, and supporting equal treatment between women and men in the field of employment. These bodies must be able to provide independent assistance to victims, conduct surveys, publish reports, offer policy recommendations, and share information with relevant EU-level entities. Similarly, Article 12 of Directive 2004/113/EC, which applies to access to goods and services, imposes a parallel obligation on member states. It calls for the establishment of equality bodies with competencies to assist victims, carry out independent research, and issue recommendations related to gender-based discrimination.

Although candidate countries are required to adopt EU gender equality laws and establish equality bodies, their compliance varies.[127] This inconsistency reveals deeper structural shortcomings in the EU's enlargement approach. Aybars notes that, despite official commitments, gender equality is not a top priority in the EU's accession agenda.[128] This limited prioritization is exacerbated by the Union's weak enforcement mechanisms.[129] As Sedelmeier has shown, the credibility of EU conditionality in the area of social policy is often undermined by inconsistent and ambiguous signals from EU institutions, as in the case of the Czech Republic.[130]

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[127] Olga Avdeyeva, "Enlarging the Club: When Do Candidate States Enforce Gender Equality Laws?," *Comparative European Politics* 7, no. 1 (2009): 160, https://doi.org/10.1057/cep.2008.34.

[128] Ayşe İdil Aybars, "Türkiye-AB İlişkilerinde Kadın Hakları ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği," in *Ankara Anlaşması'nın 60. Yılında Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği İlişkileri: Sorunlar ve Çözüm Önerileri*, ed. Belgin Akçay (Seçkin Yayıncılık, 2025), 645.

[129] Avdeyeva, "Enlarging the Club," 160.

[130] Ulrich Sedelmeier, "Post-Accession Compliance with EU Gender Equality Legislation in Post-Communist New Member States," *European Integration Online Papers* 13, no. 2 (2009): 13, https://doi.org/10.1695/2009023.

3.3.2. Policy Instruments

The European Union uses various policy instruments to promote gender equality in candidate countries. These instruments serve both as incentives and guidance mechanisms by encouraging compliance with the EU's gender acquis. The main instruments used in this context are Accession Partnerships and National Programmes for the Adoption of the Acquis, Progress Reports, Gender Equality Country Reports, and Twinning and TAIEX programmes. With these, the EU aims to influence domestic policy agendas and ensure that gender equality is a priority throughout the accession process.

Accession Partnerships (APs) are non-binding documents signed between candidate countries and the EU. They outline short- and medium-term priorities to be addressed in line with the Copenhagen criteria.[131] APs emerged in 1998 as part of the EU's efforts to guide and facilitate the accession process for candidate countries. These partnerships started to be implemented following the launch of accession negotiations with several CEECs, as well as Cyprus and Malta.[132] Moreover, APs ensure that the financial and technical assistance is aligned with the reforms expected of candidate countries during the accession process.[133]

Candidate countries are required to develop National Programmes for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAAs). NPAAs are strategic planning documents that translate the priorities of the APs into concrete actions. They include detailed timelines, responsible institutions, and estimated human and financial resources for reforms.[134] NPAAs include objectives for legal compliance as well as capacity building for

[131] "Accession Partnership," EUR-Lex, accessed July 12, 2025, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=legissum:accession_partnership.

[132] Heather Grabbe, "A Partnership for Accession? The Implications of Eu Conditionality for the Central and East European Applicants," *European University Institute*, no. 12 (1999): 16, https://hdl.handle.net/1814/1617.

[133] Ibid., 17.

[134] "National Programme for Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA)," Government of the Republic of Serbia the Ministry of European Integration, accessed July 23, 2025, https://www.mei.gov.rs//eng/information/questions-and-answers/national-programme-for-adoption-of-the-acquis-npaa/.

implementation and enforcement.[135] They serve to increase transparency, promote institutional coordination, and inform local stakeholders and the public about the integration process.[136]

Progress Reports are documents that contain the European Commission's assessments of the progress made by candidate countries regarding the Copenhagen criteria. They have been published annually since 1998. However, since 2016, they have been renamed as Country Reports.[137] In addition to evaluating candidate countries' progress, these reports also provide feedback on compliance with EU norms and outline the reform priorities. With these, progress reports create both transparency and accountability in the accession process. They identify legislative and institutional shortcomings, highlight implementation gaps, and recommend targeted reforms, thereby placing consistent pressure on national governments to advance their reform agenda in line with EU accession requirements. Furthermore, the reports help sustain pressure from civil society and international actors, reinforcing the expectation that candidate countries uphold EU standards not only on paper but also in practice.

In Progress Reports, gender equality is addressed under broader thematic headings rather than as a standalone section. Legal and institutional frameworks related to the protection of women's rights, equal treatment, and the fight against discrimination are included under the heading "Fundamental Rights". Under this heading, gender-based violence is frequently addressed and is often linked to the implementation of international instruments such as the Istanbul Convention. Analyses of women's participation in political and public life are included under the heading "Functioning of Democratic Institutions". These analyses highlight gaps in gender representation or inadequacies in institutional support mechanisms. Additionally, analyses on women's participation in political and public life are sometimes included under the

[135] EUR-Lex, "Accession Partnership."

[136] "NPAAs," Republic of North Macedonia Ministry for European Affairs, accessed July 23, 2025, https://www.mep.gov.mk/en/post/?id=13.

[137] "Türkiye Reports Prepared by the European Commission," Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Directorate for EU Affairs, accessed July 12, 2025, https://www.ab.gov.tr/regular-progress-reports_46224_en.html.

heading “Functioning of Democratic Institutions”. These analyses highlight shortcomings in gender representation or inadequacies in institutional support mechanisms for equality. Within the scope of the enlargement process, Chapter 23, Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, explicitly includes compliance with EU anti-discrimination standards, including gender equality. Moreover, under Chapter 19 on Social Policy and Employment, reports evaluate gender-based issues in the labor market, such as the gender wage gap, female labor force participation, access to childcare, and work-life balance measures.

The Country Reports on Gender Equality, commissioned by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, evaluate how the EU’s gender acquis is transposed and implemented. These reports are prepared by national legal experts and cover a wide range of topics, including equal treatment, anti-discrimination law, and the functioning of national legal and institutional frameworks. They analyze the implementation of the laws, the role of equality bodies, the availability of legal remedies, and the broader political and institutional environment. By identifying legislative shortcomings, implementation challenges, and examples of progress and resistance, these reports serve as an important tool for monitoring alignment with EU norms and guiding future reforms.

Twinning and TAIEX (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange) are tools used by the European Union to support administrative reform and policy alignment in candidate countries. Twinning facilitates long-term institutional partnerships between public administrations in EU Member States and those in candidate countries. The EU transfers technical knowledge, administrative practices, and institutional expertise to candidate countries through Twinning projects. These projects typically last three years.[138] TAIEX projects, on the other hand, are short-term initiatives. Through TAIEX, the EU deploys experts to organize workshops, expert visits, and study visits.[139]

[138] “Twinning,” European Commission, July 9, 2025, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-technical-assistance/twinning_en.

[139] “TAIEX,” European Commission, July 9, 2025, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-technical-assistance/taiex_en.

3.3.3. Financial Instruments

The EU has been providing financial assistance to candidate countries since 1989. The main aim of this assistance is to help candidates adapt to EU standards in legal, political, economic, and social areas.[140] It also serves as a conditionality tool, as the distribution of funds is contingent on progress in aligning with EU norms. Currently, the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) is the EU's primary financial and technical assistance tool for supporting candidate and potential candidate countries in their path toward membership.

IPA was established in 2007 to unify earlier EU assistance programs PHARE, ISPA, SAPARD, and CARDS. The primary aim of IPA is to help countries in the enlargement region align their political, institutional, social, and economic systems with those of the Union. This includes aligning national legislation with the EU acquis, strengthening institutional capacity to effectively implement reforms, and preparing public administrations for the obligations of EU membership.[141] IPA is structured in line with the EU's MFF and has been implemented in successive phases: IPA I (2007–2013), IPA II (2014–2020), and IPA III (2021–2027).

IPA I had a budget of €11.5 billion. It was structured around five components: transition assistance and institution building, cross-border cooperation, regional development, human resource development, and rural development.[142] Within this framework, gender equality was identified as a key objective of pre-accession assistance, as highlighted in Recital (13) of the preamble, and was explicitly included as a thematic funding priority under Article 2(1)(b), which lists the promotion of gender equality and non-discrimination among the core areas eligible for support.

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[140] "Pre-Accession Assistance," European Commission, accessed July 24, 2025, https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/pre-accession-assistance_en.

[141] "What Is the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance," IPA, accessed July 12, 2025, https://ipa.gov.tr/en/what-is-ipa/.

[142] "Overview - Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance," European Commission, March 18, 2024, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/overview-instrument-pre-accession-assistance_en.

IPA II had a budget of €12.8 billion, and it adopted a sectoral approach, unlike its predecessor. Under this approach, specific sectors eligible for funding were identified, along with the responsible institutions tasked with designing and implementing projects within those sectors.[143] Gender equality was listed as a guiding principle of IPA II (Recital 7), a specific objective (Art. 2(1)(a)(ii)), a measurable indicator of accession progress (Art. 2(2)(a)), and a stand-alone policy area eligible for direct funding (Art. 3(1)(c)).

IPA III's budget is €14.1 billion, and it adopts a performance-based approach.[144] IPA III replaced country-specific budgets at the outset with a performance-based approach. pooling funds centrally and distributing them according to each beneficiary's progress in implementing reforms.[145] It also introduced the "fundamentals first" principle, which reinforces the rule of law, fundamental rights, and good governance as prerequisites for financial assistance.[146] Gender equality is highlighted in Recitals (12) and (27), listed as a specific objective in Article 3(2)(a), and designated as a thematic priority in Article 3(3)(j), Annex II, and Annex III, making it eligible for targeted funding and mainstreaming across all projects (Article 6(2)).

3.4. Conclusion

The first part of this chapter examined how the EU promotes gender equality under three main headings. The legal framework revealed how the EU has made gender equality a core value over time. Its narrow understanding, based solely on the

[143] "IPA I ve IPA II Dönemi Programlama," T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, accessed July 12, 2025, https://www.ab.gov.tr/ipa-i-ve-ipa-ii-donemi-programlama_45627.html.

[144] European Commission, "Overview - Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance."

[145] "Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) III - Performance," European Commission, accessed July 12, 2025, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/programme-performance-statements/instrument-pre-accession-assistance-ipa-iii-performance_en.

[146] Bilge Özer and Yıldırım Gündüç, *Avrupa Birliği Finansmanlı Teknik Yardım Sözleşmeleri ve Hibe Programlarının Yönetimi* (Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, n.d.), 32–33, https://www.ab.gov.tr/siteimages/pub/avrupa_birligi_finansmanli_teknik_yardim_sozlemeleri_ve_hibe_programlarinin_yonetimi_mart_2024.pdf.

principle of equal pay in 1957, has evolved into a rights-based and multidimensional legal system through treaty reforms, the expansion of secondary legislation, and decisions of the Court of Justice. In terms of policy instruments, the EU has developed non-binding strategic documents, programs, and institutional mechanisms. Tools such as multiannual action programs, the OMC, and gender mainstreaming aim to implement the principle of equality not only at the legal level but also at the administrative level. Financial mechanisms, on the other hand, have supported the implementation of this value. Funding programs have provided both direct and indirect support for this process, which evolved from specific programs for gender equality to a horizontal priority, incorporated into all EU funds.

The second part of the chapter evaluated how the EU promotes gender equality in candidate countries across the same three dimensions. From a legal perspective, candidate countries are expected to implement legal reforms promoting gender equality as part of the harmonization process with the EU acquis. This principle is considered a component of both the political and administrative Copenhagen criteria. In particular, the establishment of equality institutions and the transposition of directives on combating discrimination are fundamental building blocks of this process. Policy instruments encompass the guiding and monitoring mechanisms the EU has established with candidate countries. APs, NPAAs, Progress Reports, and Gender Equality Country Reports serve both to assess the current situation and to shape reform priorities. Technical tools such as Twinning and TAIEX also play important roles in administrative capacity building. Financial mechanisms are the area where the EU concretely supports gender equality policies in candidate countries. IPA funds are the primary means of this support. During the transition from IPA I to IPA III, gender equality became both a horizontal priority and an area of direct support. The next section will examine how the Union’s promotion of a fundamental value functions in the case of Turkey.

CHAPTER 4

UNDERSTANDING GENDER EQUALITY REFORMS IN TURKEY

4.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to explain the progress and setbacks in gender equality in Turkey since 1999. It consists of two sections. In the first part, the structure from Chapter 3 will be applied to Turkey to analyze how the EU promotes gender equality. Under the "Legal Framework" heading, the country's legal and institutional developments will be discussed. Under the "Policy Instruments" and "Financial Mechanisms" headings, the tools used by the EU will be examined. In the second section, the periods of progress and regression in gender equality reforms will be explained in three dimensions, in line with the analytical framework developed in Chapter 2: Europeanization and de-Europeanization, internal factors, and non-EU external factors. This framework aims to reveal how reforms are shaped not only by the pressure of the EU, but also by domestic politics, ideological orientations, and the international normative context.

4.2. Legal Framework

Since Turkey gained candidate country status in 1999, the course of gender equality reforms can be divided into three periods, although not marked by strict dates. In the first period, which lasted from 1999 to 2007, extensive reforms were carried out in various areas. In the second period, which lasted from 2007 to 2011, reforms continued in more limited areas and their intensity decreased. In the third period, which lasted from 2011 to the present, stagnation and regression in reforms are observed.[147]

[147] Aybars, "Türkiye-AB İlişkilerinde Kadın Hakları ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği," 659–61.

Between 1999 and 2007, Turkey adopted EU membership as a strategic objective.[148] Both the coalition government in power from 1999 to 2002 and the Justice and Development Party (JDP), which came to power in 2002, demonstrated a strong political will to comply with EU norms and standards. During this period, extensive amendments were made to the Constitution, Civil Code, Labor Code, and Penal Code to bring Turkish law into line with international human rights treaties and EU directives on gender equality.

With the constitutional amendment in 2001, Articles 41 and 66 of the Constitution were revised to provide constitutional guarantees for gender equality within the family. With the constitutional amendment in 2004, the provision "Men and women have equal rights, and the State is responsible for the measures to implement those rights" was added to Article 10 of the Constitution, which clearly stated that the state is obliged to ensure gender equality. With the same amendment package, a provision was added to Article 90 stating that in the case of a conflict between domestic legislation and international treaties concerning fundamental rights and freedoms, the provisions of the international treaties shall prevail. This amendment paved the way for Turkey's international commitments on gender equality, especially its commitments regarding CEDAW, to be implemented more effectively in the domestic legal order.[149]

With the adoption of the Civil Code No. 4721 on November 22, 2001, gender equality between women and men was legally guaranteed in many areas. The new code introduced joint representation and management of the marital union and allowed both spouses to contribute to family expenses through both assets and their labor. It also ensured equal participation in decision-making processes such as choosing a shared residence. The requirement for women to obtain permission from their husbands to pursue a profession or choose a job was abolished. In the context of divorce law, degrading treatment was recognized as a legitimate ground for divorce,

[148] Ibid., 661.

[149] Meltem Müftüler Baç, *Gender Equality in Turkey*, PE 462.428 (European Parliament, 2012), 5, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2012/462428/IPOL-FEMM_NT(2012)462428_EN.pdf.

thereby expanding legal protection against psychological violence. An important change was also made in terms of identity rights, and women were granted the right to use their maiden names alongside their husbands' surnames after marriage. Furthermore, the legal age of marriage for women was equalized with that of men, thus strengthening the principle of gender equality.

The Labor Law No. 4857, adopted on 22 May 2003, introduced important regulations to comply with EU directives and to strengthen gender equality in the workplace. The law prohibited all forms of gender-based discrimination in employment and legally guaranteed the principle of "equal pay for equal work". It also strengthened legal safeguards against discrimination by prohibiting the use of gender, marital status, pregnancy, or childbirth as grounds for dismissal. In cases of sexual harassment in the workplace, the law granted employees the right to terminate their employment contracts immediately and for just cause if the employer did not take the necessary measures. This created an effective mechanism for combating gender-based violence. In addition, protective regulations regarding maternity were expanded with rights such as paid leave before and after childbirth, additional unpaid leave, and breastfeeding leave.

The Turkish Penal Code No. 5237, adopted on 26 September 2004, represents an important turning point in ensuring gender equality and combating violence against women. In the new code, the marital status of the perpetrator was no longer considered a mitigating or delaying factor in sexual assault crimes. In addition, expressions that discriminated between married or single women, virgins or non-virgins were completely removed from the text. Furthermore, the requirement for a formal complaint in cases of spousal abuse was removed from the code. This enabled the state to directly investigate such crimes and strengthened the state's capacity to intervene.

These legal reforms not only brought Turkey's legal framework into line with EU standards but also triggered institutional developments that supported the implementation of gender equality commitments. In this context, two institutional mechanisms were introduced to strengthen the state's capacity to design, coordinate, and monitor gender equality policies.

First, the name of the General Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women, which was established in 1990 within the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, was changed to the General Directorate on the Status of Women (KSGM) in 2004 and was granted legal personality under the Prime Ministry. Moreover, its scope of duty was expanded, its personnel structure was strengthened, and it began to receive regular financial support.[150] Second, an ad hoc Parliamentary Committee on Customs and Honour Killings and Violence Against Women and Children was established within the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) in 2005 to conduct research, prepare reports, and develop policy recommendations. Various legal and administrative reforms were carried out in the following years based on the reports prepared by this committee.[151]

As seen, important legal and institutional steps have been taken in the field of gender equality during this period. However, a development raised questions about whether this principle was truly internalized. During the preparation process of the Penal Code, the JDP proposed a regulation that would re-criminalize adultery. This proposal was harshly criticized by women's rights organizations, European Union institutions, and some member states, and the EU stated that the enactment of the proposal would negatively affect Turkey's negotiation process. Following these intense reactions, the proposal was withdrawn.[152]

Between 2007 and 2011, Turkey's political commitment to EU membership began to weaken, and the JDP government's previously pro-European and reform-oriented discourse gradually started to disappear.[153] During this period, a normative break with the principle of gender equality was observed, and references to religious and traditional values increased. Instead of gender equality, the concept of "gender

[150] Tore Fougner and Ayça Kurtoğlu, "Gender Policy: A Case of Instrumental Europeanization?," in *The Europeanization of Turkish Public Policies*, ed. Aylin Güney and Ali Tekin (Routledge, 2015), 150.

[151] Ibid.

[152] Melinda Negrón-Gonzales, "The Feminist Movement during the AKP Era in Turkey: Challenges and Opportunities," *Middle Eastern Studies* 52, no. 2 (2016): 202, https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2015.1125339.

[153] Aybars et al., "Europeanization without Substance?," 787.

justice", which derives its legitimacy from Islamic values and is based on biological differences and the complementarity of genders, has begun to come to the fore.[154] Alongside this, women's roles within the family and their identity as mothers started to get emphasized instead of their rights in the public and private spheres. However, despite this normative distancing, the JDP government continued to implement reforms in areas that were compatible with its own political goals.[155]

In 2009, the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men was established within the TGNA. The main duties of this commission include examining draft legislation from a gender equality perspective, promoting mechanisms to eliminate gender-based discrimination in all areas of public life, addressing individual complaints related to such discrimination, and ensuring Turkey's compliance with its international obligations, especially CEDAW.[156]

With the constitutional amendment made in 2010, the provision "Measures taken by the state to ensure equality between women and men shall not be interpreted as contrary to the principle of equality" was added to Article 10 of the Constitution. With this amendment, constitutional protection was provided to positive action measures aimed at eliminating structural gender-based inequalities.[157] In 2011, a series of legal regulations were introduced to strengthen gender equality in the workplace. Under the Labor Law, maternity leave regulations were made more flexible, female employment was promoted, and the social security rights of part-time workers were enhanced. Under the Civil Servants Law, maternity leave was reorganized to account for premature births, breastfeeding, and paternity leave were extended, night shifts were restricted, and unpaid leave was granted in cases of adoption.

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[154] Marella Bodur Ün, "Contesting Global Gender Equality Norms: The Case of Turkey," *Review of International Studies* 45, no. 5 (2019): 831–33, https://doi.org/10.1017/s026021051900024x.

[155] Alpan, "Europeanization and EU–Turkey Relations," 120–21.

[156] Müftüler Baç, *Gender Equality in Turkey*, 6.

[157] Ali Ayata and Hande Saadet Takkaç, "AB-Türkiye İlişkileri Bağlamında Toplumsal Cinsiyet Politikaları AB İlerleme Raporları Perspektifinden Bir Değerlendirme," *Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 20, no. 2 (2020): 205, https://doi.org/10.18037/ausbd.758060.

Between 2009 and 2011, Turkey played an active role in the drafting process of the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (commonly known as the Istanbul Convention), and it became the first country to ratify the treaty without reservations.[158] The convention aims to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. In doing so, it sets legally binding standards and defines violence against women as both a human rights violation and a form of gender-based discrimination. It promotes a gender-sensitive and intersectional approach and emphasizes the responsibility of the state in combating violence, protecting victims, and prosecuting perpetrators.[159] Turkey's move to be the first country to ratify the convention was considered a response to the criticisms voiced in the European Commission Progress Reports on violence against women and domestic violence, and a strategy to enhance the country's international image and credibility.[160]

In order to implement the protection and support obligations of the Istanbul Convention, Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and the Prevention of Violence against Women was adopted in 2012. This law is the most comprehensive legal regulation Turkey has adopted to combat violence against women, establishing a holistic approach aimed at both preventing violence and protecting victims. The law guarantees the protection of all individuals subjected to violence, regardless of whether they are married or not, and clearly defines the state's obligation to prevent, protect, and support violence occurring in the private sphere. Furthermore, judges are empowered to issue protection orders in cases of violence ex officio, without requiring any evidence or documentation, when deemed necessary. This regulation aims to ensure the swift and effective protection of victims of violence. The law also strengthens sanctions for violations of these orders by imposing forced imprisonment

[158] Ayşe Güneş-Ayata and Gökten Doğangün, "Gender Politics of the AKP: Restoration of a Religio-Conservative Gender Climate," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 19, no. 6 (2017): 613–14, https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2017.1328887.

[159] Andrea Krizsán and Conny Roggeband, "The Politics of Violence Against Women: Theoretical Considerations," in *Politicizing Gender and Democracy in the Context of the Istanbul Convention*, ed. Andrea Krizsán and Conny Roggeband (Palgrave Pivot, Cham, 2021), 26–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-79069-1_2.

[160] Bodur Ün and Arıkan, "Europeanization and De-Europeanization of Turkey's Gender Equality Policy," 952.

on perpetrators. Within the framework of the law, Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers (ŞÖNİMs) were established to help individuals exposed to or at risk of violence and ensure the implementation of protective and preventive measures.[161]

Since 2011, Turkey has moved further away from the EU's normative framework, and the Union has ceased to be seen as a point of reference in domestic politics.[162] References to religious and traditional values have increased in political discourse. One example is the growing emphasis on "fıtrat", a concept that suggests men and women are fundamentally different by nature.[163] Moreover, women began to be primarily defined as mothers, and increasing emphasis was placed on their roles within the family. Parallel to this ideological transformation, previous progress in gender equality began to decline.

In 2011, the Ministry of State for Women and Family Affairs was abolished and replaced by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, which covers various policy areas. The restructuring of the ministry and the removal of the word "woman" from the title of the new ministry were seen as a step backwards in terms of gender equality by women's rights advocates.[164] At the same time, the General Directorate for the Status and Problems of Women was restructured under this new ministry, and its capacity to shape public policy was reduced.[165]

In 2012, then-Prime Minister Erdoğan described abortion as "murder" and strongly opposed cesarean births.[166] He argued that cesarean deliveries are a threat to Turkey's

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[161] "İstanbul Sözleşmesi ve 6284 Sayılı Kanun," Kadının İnsan Hakları Derneği, accessed July 25, 2025, https://istanbulsozlesmesi.org/istanbul-sozlesmesi-ve-6284-sayili-kanun/.

[162] Bodur Ün and Arıkan, "Europeanization and De-Europeanization of Turkey's Gender Equality Policy," 950–52.

[163] Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün, "Gender Politics of the AKP," 617.

[164] Müftüler Baç, *Gender Equality in Turkey*, 6.

[165] Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün, "Gender Politics of the AKP," 620.

[166] "Erdoğan'a göre sezaryen, Türkiye'ye karşı bir komplo!," soL haber, June 2, 2012, https://haber.sol.org.tr/devlet-ve-siyaset/erdogana-gore-sezaryen-turkiyeye-karsi-bir-komplo-haberi-55512; "Başbakan 'Her Kürtaj Bir Uludere'dir' Dedi," Bianet, May 26, 2012, https://bianet.org/haber/basbakan-her-kurtaj-bir-uludere-dir-dedi-138644.

population growth as they limit women to having no more than two children. Following these statements, a draft law was prepared to limit abortion and caesarean sections, but it was not enacted.[167] Nevertheless, while abortion is legal today, many public hospitals refuse to provide this service, citing various excuses.[168]

In 2015, the 5th and 6th paragraphs of the Turkish Penal Code, which criminalized performing or having religious marriages without a civil marriage, were annulled on the grounds of unconstitutionality.[169] This decision was criticized as it has the potential to leave women and children without legal protection and to create a social environment that could encourage early and unregistered marriages.[170] In 2017, Article 22 of Law No. 5490 was amended to grant muftis the authority to perform marriages. This law drew strong objections, as it was undermining secular marriage practices, potentially increasing unregistered or child marriages, and leading to the increasing integration of religious values into state policies.[171]

In 2020, allegations emerged that the JDP was preparing a bill that would grant amnesty to men who sexually abuse underage girls if they married their victims.[172]

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[167] Erdoğan's statements and the draft bill prepared by the JDP sparked widespread public outrage. Thousands of women marched in Istanbul, under the slogans "My Body, My Decision" and "Don't Touch My Body." Furthermore, as part of the "My Decision" campaign, women and men shared photos highlighting their rights over their own bodies as an act of solidarity. Following these protests, which received wide coverage in both national and international media, the bill was not brought forward. See Ali Gharıb, "Thousands Rally Against Anti-Abortion Law in Turkey 'My Body, My Decision,'" September 7, 2012, https://bianet.org/haber/my-body-my-decision-138850; Constanze Letsch, "Turkish Women Join Pro-Choice Rally as Fears Grow of Abortion Ban," World News, *The Guardian*, June 3, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jun/03/turkish-women-rally-abortion-ban.

[168] Mary Lou O'Neil et al., *Yasal Ancak Ulaşılabilir Değil: Türkiye'deki Kamu Hastanelerinde Kürtaj Hizmetleri - 2020* (Kadir Has Üniversitesi Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Kadın Çalşmaları Araştırma Merkezi, 2020), 96, https://gender.khas.edu.tr/sites/gender.khas.edu.tr/files/docs/2020-12/2020-kurtaj-arastirmasi-raporu.pdf.

[169] Ferdi Türkten, "Anayasa Mahkemesi'nden 'Imam Nikahı' Kararı," *Anadolu Ajansı*, May 29, 2015, https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/anayasa-mahkemesinden-imam-nikahi-karari/42134.

[170] Çiçek Tahaoğlu, "AYM'nin Dini Nikah Kararı Ne Anlama Geliyor?," May 29, 2015, https://bianet.org/haber/aym-nin-dini-nikah-karari-ne-anlama-geliyor-164921.

[171] Kareem Shaheen and Gokce Saracoglu, "Turkish Marriage Law a Blow to Women's Rights, Say Activists," World News, *The Guardian*, November 14, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/14/turkish-marriage-law-a-blow-to-womens-rights-say-activists.

[172] "Kadınlardan istismar düzenlemesine itiraz," Bianet, June 15, 2020, https://bianet.org/haber/kadinlardan-istismar-duzenlemesine-itiraz-225711.

The bill was criticized for being linked to the government's conservative population policy, which aims to shape girls' lives around early motherhood and fertility, encouraging population growth.[173] This alleged effort was met with a nationwide backlash, and the bill was blocked from becoming law.

In 2021, Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention by presidential decree. The withdrawal was justified on the grounds that the Convention contradicted Turkish family values and emphasized LGBTQ+ rights and sexual orientation.[174] This decision marked a retreat from international commitments to combat violence against women and also indicated that an anti-gender ideology shaped by conservative values had been incorporated into official state policy.[175] The decision was seen as constitutionally controversial and as an expression of a broader political stance that marginalized and suppressed feminist and LGBTQ+ movements and thus drew widespread criticism both domestically and internationally.[176]

In 2025, elective cesarean births were banned in private healthcare institutions. As previously mentioned, abortion is legal in Turkey but inaccessible in most of the public hospitals. Based on this experience, concerns have been raised that a Caesarean ban could lead to a de facto restriction of planned caesarean births. As with abortion, the erosion of legally recognized rights through restrictive practices poses a serious threat to women's reproductive health and rights.[177]

As observed, since 2011, there has been a regression in Turkey's legal and institutional framework concerning gender equality. During this period, women-

[173] *TCK 103 Çocuk Cinsel İstismarı Affına Karşı Kadın Platformu Bilgi Dosyası* (TCK 103 Çocuk Cinsel İstismarı Affına Karşı Kadın Platformu, 2020), 1, https://esik.org.tr/s/2547/i/TCK103PlatformuBilgiDosyasi2020.pdf.

[174] Ayşe Güneş and Çağlar Ezikoğlu, "Legal and Political Challenges of Gender Equality and Crimes Against Women in Turkey: The Question of Istanbul Convention," *Women & Criminal Justice* 33, no. 1 (2023): 21, https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2022.2040695.

[175] Ibid., 22.

[176] Zeynep Direk, "On Turkey's Withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention," *Zeitschrift Für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* 17, no. 4 (2023): 415, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12286-023-00588-2.

[177] Sinem Esengen, "Planlı sezaryen yasağı devlet eliyle obstetrik şiddetin önünü açar," Bianet, April 26, 2025, https://bianet.org/yazi/planli-sezaryen-yasagi-devlet-eliyle-obstetrik-siddetin-onunu-acar-306800.

focused institutional structures were weakened, steps were taken back from international obligations, and the official discourse became increasingly conservative.

4.3. Policy Instruments

In this section, the policy instruments that the EU uses to promote gender equality in candidate countries, namely the Accession Partnerships (APs), National Programmes for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAAs), Progress Reports, Gender Equality Country Reports, Twinning, and TAIEX, will be examined in the context of Turkey.

To date, four Accession Partnership documents have been issued for Turkey: in 2001, 2003, 2006, and 2008. These documents set out the steps Turkey was expected to take within the framework of its EU membership process and the priority areas for reform. Each document has been updated over time, depending on Turkey's progress in meeting the political and economic criteria and in aligning with the EU acquis.[178]

In the first AP document published in 2001, targets related to gender equality were included among the medium-term priorities. The document emphasized the need to eliminate discrimination against women and to transpose the EU acquis on gender equality into national legislation.[179] In the 2003 AP document, eliminating gender-based discrimination was addressed within the scope of political criteria and a broader human rights framework.[180] In the document, the transposition of the EU acquis on equal treatment between women and men into national legislation and the effective implementation of these regulations were shown among the priority reform

[178] "Katılım Ortaklığı Belgeleri," T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, accessed July 26, 2025, https://www.ab.gov.tr/katilim-ortakligi-belgeleri_46226.html.

[179] *Council Decision of 8 March 2001 on the Principles, Priorities, Intermediate Objectives and Conditions Contained in the Accession Partnership with the Republic of Turkey*, 2001/235/EC, Official Journal of the European Communities (2001), 20, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32001D0235.

[180] *Council Decision of 19 May 2003 on the Principles, Priorities, Intermediate Objectives and Conditions Contained in the Accession Partnership with Turkey*, 2003/398/EC, Official Journal of the European Union (2003), 43, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32003D0398.

areas expected from Turkey.[181] The 2006 AP document was the first to include a separate section on women's rights. The document prioritized the implementation of legislation on women's rights, combating violence against women, and increasing women's participation in education, the labor market, and political and social life.[182] Furthermore, unlike previous documents, this document focused not only on legal compliance but also on implementation, training, and strengthening infrastructure and institutional capacity at the local level. The last AP document, published in 2008, reiterated the priorities set out in the previous documents. Additionally, it emphasized the expansion of women's shelters, particularly in metropolitan municipalities, and the promotion of gender awareness in society, particularly among men.[183]

Turkey published National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis in 2001, 2003, and 2008 to address the priorities and objectives set forth in the Accession Partnership Documents. These programs outlined the new regulations aligned with the relevant EU directives, their adoption dates, expected entry into force dates, and the estimated financial resources required for legal compliance.

The 2001 NPAA included several commitments to promote gender equality. It set a date for the entry into force of the Draft Turkish Civil Code and the adoption of a draft law to institutionalize the General Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women and the Family Research Institute. The program also envisaged the signing of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW. The adoption of the Draft Social Security Law was scheduled. This draft law included measures for equal treatment between men and women working as self-employed or in the agricultural sector, and self-employed women during pregnancy and the postnatal period. Finally, the NPAA proposed the preparation of a "Draft Social Security Law for Harmonization with EU Legislation"

[181] Ibid., 47,52.

[182] *Council Decision of 23 January 2006 on the Principles, Priorities and Conditions Contained in the Accession Partnership with Turkey*, 2006/35/EC, Official Journal of the European Union (2006), 38, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32006D0035.

[183] *Council Decision of 18 February 2008 on the Principles, Priorities and Conditions Contained in the Accession Partnership with the Republic of Turkey and Repealing Decision 2006/35/EC*, 2008/157/EC, Official Journal of the European Union (2008), 8–9, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32008D0157.

to change the existing Social Security Laws, which were inconsistent with the principle of equal treatment.

The 2003 NPAA reaffirmed gender equality as a core principle and identified the promotion of equal treatment between men and women as a specific priority. It emphasized the need to strengthen institutional capacity to enable Turkey's participation in the EU Community Programme on gender equality. In this regard, it set the enhancement of the institutional and legal infrastructure of the General Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women as a key objective. It also included a series of legal reforms to align national legislation with the EU acquis in areas such as equal pay for equal work, equal opportunities in employment and vocational training, equal working conditions, equal treatment in social security, and the protection of self-employed women. Lastly, it highlighted Turkey's signing of the CEDAW and its Optional Protocol as an important step under the political criteria.

The 2008 NPAA emphasized strengthening the status of women in society and increasing their participation in education, employment, politics, and social life. It envisaged continued support for women's organizations and the provision of specialized training on women's rights to relevant public institutions. It also included commitments to create shelters for women who are at risk of violence, to run programs to raise awareness among law enforcement and health workers, and to do research on the causes and effects of violence against women. The government also committed to implementing the recommendations of the Parliamentary Committee on Customs and Honour Killings and Violence Against Women and Children. Furthermore, a legislative amendment was proposed to introduce unpaid parental leave to promote the shared responsibility of women and men for childcare, in line with EU Directives 96/34/EC and 92/85/EC.

Following the NPAAs published in 2001, 2003, and 2008, Turkey later prepared National Action Plans for EU Accession covering the periods 2016–2019 and 2021–2023. The 2016–2019 Plan maintained gender equality as one of the main priorities and focused particularly on legal harmonization, strengthening institutional capacity, and preventing violence against women. In this context, the adoption of the Law on

the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey was planned. In addition, it aimed to strengthen compliance with Directive 2006/54/EC, which guarantees equality between women and men in employment and occupation. Compliance with Directive 2004/113/EC, which regulates the principle of equal treatment for women and men in access to goods and services, was also among the priorities of the program. In the field of combating violence against women, it was envisaged to establish protective and preventive mechanisms in line with the Regulation on Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers and to develop a strategic framework through the National Action Plan on Combating Violence Against Women. To protect and develop human rights, it aimed to increase the effectiveness of key mechanisms such as the Human Rights Inquiry Committee of the TGNA, the Ombudsman Institution, and the Human Rights Institution of Turkey.

The 2021–2023 Plan continued to support gender equality. It particularly focused on women's participation in economic life, the development of institutional capacity, and the strengthening of protective mechanisms. It proposed supporting women's cooperatives to increase their involvement in the economy. The program also included new steps to improve the institutional capacity of the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey and to strengthen alignment with Directive 2006/54/EC on equal treatment in employment. In the area of violence prevention, the program outlined concrete measures such as the preparation of a new National Action Plan on Combating Violence Against Women and the enhancement of institutional capacities of women's shelters and ŞÖNİMs.

Since 1998, the European Commission's Progress Reports have regularly evaluated Turkey's efforts and shortcomings in the field of gender equality as part of its EU accession process and alignment with the acquis communautaire. Progress Reports for the 1998-2004 period focused on the legislative reforms Turkey implemented to promote gender equality in key legal texts such as the Civil Code, the Penal Code, and the Labor Code. Positive developments included the removal of reservations to CEDAW, the removal of the concept of male headship in the Civil Code, and the introduction of a constitutional guarantee for women's rights. However, the reports also highlighted persistent problems such as low female participation in employment

and education, the lack of de facto equality, and the prevalence of so-called “honor killings”. Progress Reports published between 2005 and 2010 acknowledged that the legal framework for women’s rights and gender equality had been expanded, but highlighted that a significant gap in implementation remained. Low female participation in the workforce, limited political representation, and violence against women were all problems that repeatedly came up as major concerns. The reports particularly emphasized the urgent need to effectively enforce existing laws and develop comprehensive social support mechanisms to address these challenges.

Since 2011, the language of the Progress Reports has become increasingly critical, with growing signs of regression in the field of gender equality. Although Turkey’s early ratification of the Istanbul Convention was initially welcomed as a positive step, subsequent reports strongly criticized the country for serious shortcomings in implementation, persistently high levels of violence against women, early marriages, and low female employment rates. Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021 was explicitly described by the European Commission as a clear backsliding in the area of women’s rights and gender equality. In the following years, the reports pointed to a number of alarming developments, including the removal of gender equality language from official documents, the targeting of independent civil society organizations working on women’s rights, and the inadequacy of available support services.

In addition to the Progress Reports, the European Commission has published a series of expert-based monitoring reports assessing the extent to which Turkey has transposed and implemented EU gender equality legislation. Between 2016 and 2022, seven Country Reports on Gender Equality for Turkey were released. The reports note that significant progress was observed in aligning with the EU gender acquis between 2005 and 2010, but that progress has stagnated since 2011. They emphasize that the mere adoption of legislation is insufficient and must be accompanied by effective implementation mechanisms, social mobilization, and education. The reports also highlight the lack of reliable data on discrimination complaints and legal processes as a significant obstacle. This lack of data both

hinders the development of evidence-based policies and complicates the assessment of the effectiveness of the existing legal framework.

Twinning is a long-term institutional cooperation mechanism designed to support public sector reform and capacity building in candidate countries. Twinning projects in Turkey have been implemented since 2002 and are funded through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). The main beneficiaries of Twinning are central public institutions, but local administrations may participate in certain project activities even if they are not direct beneficiaries.[184] A total of 160 Twinning Projects were carried out between 2002 and 2023 in a wide range of sectors, such as justice, agriculture, environment, and public administration, promoting institutional cooperation between Turkish public institutions and 20 different EU Member States.[185] Several Twinning projects have included gender-related measures, especially in the fields of social policy and justice. The "Promoting Gender Equality" project (TR0501.06-01), for example, concentrated on enhancing institutional capacity in the area of gender equality. In order to combat domestic violence against women and advance women's rights, this project sought to strengthen the relationship between civil society organizations and central and local authorities.[186]

TAIEX is a short-term technical assistance tool designed to help candidate countries align their national legislation with the EU acquis and ensure effective implementation. Turkey has benefited from the TAIEX mechanism since 2002. Similar to the Twinning, central public institutions are the primary beneficiaries. However, local governments are outside the scope of this mechanism.[187] TAIEX has supported a number of initiatives related to gender equality. Regarding Directive

[184] "Eşleştirme," T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, accessed July 27, 2025, https://www.ab.gov.tr/eslestirme_204.html.

[185] "Statistics Concerning the Twinning Projects in Türkiye," T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, accessed July 27, 2025, https://www.ab.gov.tr/53704_en.html.

[186] B&S Europe, *Ex Post Evaluation of the Assistance Provided by the EU's Turkish Pre-Accession Instrument, 2002–2006*, Specific Contract N° 2012/306685 (European Union, 2013), 27, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/ex-post-evaluation-assistance-provided-eus-turkish-pre-aaccesion-instrument-2002-2006_en?prefLang=ga#files.

[187] "TAIEX," T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, accessed July 27, 2025, https://www.ab.gov.tr/taiex-hakkinda-genel-bilgi_42118.html.

86/613/EEC, for instance, a workshop titled “Undeclared Female Labour in Informal Employment” was held in Ankara in 2008. Through the introduction of comparative insights and practices from EU Member States, the event sought to support Turkey’s efforts to increase female employment. During the event, Turkish respondents presented data, pointed out legal and policy gaps, and talked about domestic issues, while EU experts shared strategies for addressing unregistered female labor. The workshop underlined the need for empowerment-based training and alignment with EU employment objectives, while also highlighting the high rate of informal female employment in Turkey, especially in the agricultural sector.[188] Another relevant TAIEX event was the “Regional Seminar on Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women” in İzmir in 2013. The goal of the seminar was to improve the application of EU law, particularly at the provincial level, in the fields of justice and domestic affairs. It brought together academics, civil society representatives, public officials, and EU experts to discuss institutional practices and increase awareness about gender-based violence prevention. The event also emphasized the importance of promoting respect and communication within families as a foundation for advancing democratic standards and human rights.[189]

To sum up, the EU has used various policy instruments to promote gender equality in Turkey. Accession Partnership Documents and National Programs assess the priorities and legal reforms that the country needs to adapt, while Progress Reports and Gender Equality Reports evaluate the progress of reforms at both the legal and implementation levels. In addition, practice-oriented tools such as Twinning and TAIEX focus on developing institutional capacity. However, these tools appear to have been less effective in the post-2011 period. Progress Reports and Gender Equality Country Reports have highlighted a clear regression in gender equality. These documents frequently criticized the ineffective implementation of laws, the rise in violence, the marginalization of women’s organizations, and the elimination of gender equality language from official documents. Furthermore, gender-focused

[188] “İnformal Istihdamda Kayıt Dışı Kadın Işgücü Konulu Çalıştay,” İŞKUR, accessed July 27, 2025, https://media.iskur.gov.tr/13440/taiex-programi-kapsaminda-informal-istihdamda-kayit-disi-kadin-isgucu-konulu-calistay-projesi.pdf.

[189] “Aile İçi Şiddet ve Kadına Yönelik Şiddet Başlıklı TAIEX Bölgesel Semineri,” T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, accessed July 27, 2025, https://www.ab.gov.tr/49010.html.

Twinning and TAIEX projects have not produced sustainable transformations. These developments show that the EU's policy instruments alone are not sufficient to end the decline of gender equality in Turkey.

4.4. Financial Mechanisms

The EU restructured its financial assistance to support the country's accession process after Turkey was recognized as a candidate country in 1999. In this regard, a framework agreement on pre-accession financial assistance was adopted in 2001.[190] Following the adoption of said agreement, Turkey began to receive EU grants under a single financial framework. In this initial phase, the EU's primary objective was to facilitate the country's alignment with the Copenhagen Criteria and the acquis. The EU allocated approximately €1.3 billion and supported the implementation of 164 projects in 4 years, starting from 2002.[191] These projects were guided by the priorities outlined in the APs and NPAAs.[192]

Later, from 2007 onwards, Turkey began to receive financial assistance through the IPA, as discussed in the previous chapter. The first phase, IPA I, lasted until 2013 and aimed to strengthen the country's alignment with the EU acquis and institutional capacity for implementing new laws. Additionally, it sought to develop Turkey's structural capacity to ensure its economic and social cohesion.[193]

Under IPA I, a total of €4.7 billion was allocated to Turkey, and a total of 385 large-scale projects were funded under this instrument.[194] This fund was distributed across five components, namely Transition Assistance and Institution Building, Cross-

[190] "Mali İşbirliği," T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, accessed July 27, 2025, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/mali-isbirligi.tr.mfa.

[191] T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, *Türkiye - EU Financial Cooperation Projects* (n.d.), 1, https://www.ab.gov.tr/siteimages/abyayinpdf/EN%20-%20IPA.pdf.

[192] Hale Akay, *10 Years with the European Union: Financial Assistance, Civil Society and Participation* (Türkiye Avrupa Vakfı, n.d.), 9, https://turkiyeavrupavakfi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/10-Years-with-EU-Financial-Assistance-Civil-Society-and-Participation.pdf.

[193] T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, "IPA I ve IPA II Dönemi Programlama."

[194] "Katılım Öncesi Yardım Aracı (IPA) I. Dönemi (2007-2013)," *IPA*, n.d., accessed July 27, 2025, https://ipa.gov.tr/ipa-i-2007-2013/.

border Cooperation, Regional Development, Human Resources Development, and Rural Development.[195] Gender equality projects were largely implemented under two of them, Transition Assistance and Institution Building, and Human Resources Development components. These projects focused on empowering women, enhancing women's participation in the labor market, and combating violence against women. For example, under IPA I, the "Promoting Gender Equality in Education (ProGEE)" (IPA 2010/022518.04) project was implemented by the Ministry of National Education. This project aimed to raise awareness of gender equality through changing societal attitudes. In this regard, activities such as reviewing the school curriculum in terms of gender sensitivity, developing a Gender Equality Assurance Tool for Schools, and organizing training programs for teachers, inspectors, and administrators were carried out.[196] Another project focused on gender equality was "Prevention of Domestic Violence against Women" (TR2010/0136.03). This project aimed to combat domestic violence and honour killings by strengthening the institutional and technical capacity of gendarmerie personnel and encouraging women to seek protection from the gendarmerie. Within the scope of the project, capacity-building activities, training programs, and awareness-raising initiatives were carried out.[197]

The IPA II period covered the years 2014 to 2020. Approximately €4.45 billion was allocated to Turkey under IPA II.[198] IPA II abandoned IPA I's component approach and instead adopted a sectoral approach. This structural change aimed to increase the

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[195] "IPA I & IPA II Programming," Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs Directorate for EU Affairs, accessed July 27, 2025, https://www.ab.gov.tr/ipa-i-amp-ipa-ii-programming_45627_en.html.

[196] Central Finance and Contracting Unit (CFCU) and Ministry of National Education, *PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION (PROGEE)*, Standard Summary Project Fiche – IPA Decentralized National Programmes TR2010/0136.04 (n.d.), 26, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/0afb4081-0ff9-41d1-bd36-c944d6bf5f76_en?filename=125_tr2010013604_gender_equality_in_education.pdf.

[197] Central Finance and Contracts Unit (CFCU) and Ministry of Family and Social Policies (Turkey), *Prevention of Domestic Violence against Women*, Standard Summary Project Fiche – IPA decentralised National programmes TR2010/0136.03 (n.d.), https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/13cee876-9519-4cb6-89a9-b44a7154e0b2_en?filename=122_tr2010013603_prevention_of_domestic_violence_against_women.pdf.

[198] "IPA II," T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, accessed July 28, 2025, https://www.ab.gov.tr/ipa-ii_51881.html.

effectiveness of the EU's assistance and the national ownership and leadership of the recipient country.[199] In this period, gender equality was mainstreamed in all stages of programming and implementation. In this context, stakeholders were expected to assess the different needs of women and men, translate these differences into concrete goals and actions, justify the absence of gender components in any project, conduct gender analysis, and use gender-sensitive data throughout the process.[200]

Within the scope of IPA II, five policy areas and ten sectors related to these areas were supported in Turkey. A total of €3.2 billion was allocated during this period.[201] The promotion of gender equality was addressed under the policy area "Employment, Education and Social Policies", which covers many sub-headings such as employment, social policies, education, and human resources development.[202] A total of €275.1 million was allocated to this area.[203] One notable project under this area is "Supporting Registered Women's Employment through Institutional Childcare Services", which was implemented between 2019 and 2022. The project aimed to facilitate the formal employment of women with young children by providing financial support for their access to institutional childcare services.[204]

Although most of the gender equality projects were implemented under the "Employment, Education and Social Policies" area, some projects were supported

[199] Akay, *10 Years with the European Union: Financial Assistance, Civil Society and Participation*, 3.

[200] European Commission, *ANNEX to the Commission Implementing Decision Amending Commission Decision C(2014) 5998 of 26 August 2014 Adopting the Indicative Strategy Paper for Turkey for the Period 2014-2020*, C(2018) 5067 final (European Commission, 2018), 21, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-12/20180817-revised-indicative-strategy-paper-2014-2020-for-turkey.pdf.

[201] T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, *Türkiye - EU Financial Cooperation Projects*, 6.

[202] Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs Directorate for EU Affairs, "IPA I & IPA II Programming."

[203] T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, *Türkiye - AB Mali İşbirliği Projeleri* (n.d.), 7, https://ipa.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/TR-IPA.pdf.

[204] "Kurumsal Çocuk Bakımı Hizmetleri Yoluyla Kayıtlı Kadın İstihdamının Desteklenmesi Projesi," *IPA*, August 21, 2022, https://ipa.gov.tr/kurumsal-cocuk-bakimi-hizmetleri-yoluyla-kayitli-kadin-istihdaminin-desteklenmesi-projesi/.

under other policy areas. For instance, the "Implementation of Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting in Turkey" project was carried out within the scope of the "Fundamental Rights" sector, which was addressed under "Preparatory Reforms for Union Membership". This project lasted from 2020 to 2023. Throughout the project, members of parliament and senior public officials received training on gender equality, and the budgets of the four municipalities and four public institutions were analyzed through a gender lens. As a result of this, gender equality principles got included in the 2022–2024 Budget Preparation Guide issued by the Presidency's Directorate of Strategy and Budget and the 2023–2025 Municipal Budget Preparation Guide published by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change. Following this project, Turkey adopted a national Strategy Document and Action Plan with gender considerations and became one of 23 OECD countries that actively implement gender-responsive budgeting.[205]

However, during the IPA II period, some of the financial assistance allocated to Turkey was cut on the grounds that the country moved away from fundamental EU values, such as democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. In this context, €175 million was cut for 2018, €146.7 million for 2019, and €85 million for 2020.[206] These cuts reflected the EU's conditional assistance and highlighted the increasing importance of performance-based assessments in assistance allocation.

The IPA III period began in 2021 and will last until 2027. For this phase, the EU abandoned the country-specific budget allocation it implemented in previous periods and instead adopted a performance-based approach. That is, beneficiary countries must first submit their draft projects to the European Commission. Only countries whose proposals successfully pass the Commission's relevance check and technical maturity assessment become eligible for funding.[207] Under IPA III, a total budget of

[205] "Türkiye'de Kadın-Erkek Eşitliğine Duyarlı Planlama ve Bütçelemenin Uygulanması," IPA Temel Haklar, accessed July 28, 2025, https://ipatemelhaklar.ab.gov.tr/turkiyede-kadin-erkek-esitligine-duyarli-planlama-ve-butcelemenin-uygulanmasi/.

[206] Alexander Bürgin, "The European Commission's Role in EU–Turkey Relations," in *EU-Turkey Relations: Theories, Institutions, and Policies*, ed. Wulf Reiners and Ebru Turhan (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2021), 223–24, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-70890-0_9.

[207] T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, *Türkiye - AB Mali İşbirliği Projeleri*, 9.

€14.2 billion has been made available for all beneficiary countries. In this period, the areas to be funded have been grouped under five thematic windows instead of sectors.[208] Gender equality has been adopted as a mainstream principle in IPA III, meaning that gender assessments are expected to be systematically integrated across all thematic windows. This approach aims to ensure that gender issues are considered in both the design and implementation of projects financed under the fund. One of the projects that promoted gender equality in Turkey within the scope of IPA III is the "Strengthening Rights and Conditions of Women in Prisons in Turkey in line with International and EU Standards" project, which is being carried out by the Council of Europe and the Ministry of Justice. This project aims to improve the living conditions of women prisoners in line with human rights and to develop and disseminate a gender-sensitive prison management model.[209]

Between 2007 and 2020, Turkey received more than €9 billion in financial assistance under the IPA and became its largest beneficiary. As illustrated by some of the examples mentioned above, many projects in the field of gender equality were carried out during this period. However, the impact of IPA-funded projects remains limited due to the approaches of both the EU and Turkey. A 2016 report by the European Parliament stated that monitoring and evaluation processes in IPA projects implemented in Turkey were weak, project data were not shared with the public, and strategic planning was inadequate.[210] Similarly, the European Court of Auditors emphasized that even though the projects produced some concrete results, the sustainability of these results was at risk due to low political will in Turkey in its report published in 2018.[211] In addition to political and institutional obstacles

[208] Ibid.

[209] *Action Document for Strengthening Rights and Conditions of Women in Prisons in Türkiye in Line with International and EU Standards*, ACT-62301; JAD.1311172 (European Commission, n.d.).

[210] Blomeyer & Sanz et al., *Turkey: How the Pre-Accession Funds Have Been Spent, Managed, Controlled and the Monitoring System?*, PE 572.699 (European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, 2016), 130–33, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/572699/IPOL_STU%282016%2957269 9_EN.pdf.

[211] *EU Pre-Accession Assistance to Turkey: Only Limited Results so Far*, Special Report No. 07/2018 (European Court of Auditors, 2018), 25,35, https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR18_07/SR_TURKEY_EN.pdf.

originating from Turkey, the European Union's approach to the gender equality framework also limits the effectiveness of these projects.

In addition to political and institutional obstacles in Turkey, the EU's limited commitment to gender equality also weakens the effectiveness of the projects. Boşnak states that the EU's commitment to gender equality remains rhetorical and has not been sufficiently reflected in practice. She further argues that the EU has instrumentalized gender equality to achieve broader policy goals and, as a result, has failed to trigger comprehensive transformations in this area.[212] Bal emphasizes that the scope of IPA projects on gender equality is mostly limited to areas such as employment, education, and combating violence against women, and that these projects lack a holistic approach.[213] In addition, she states that conservative government policies, local governments' disinterest in the projects, insufficient consideration of cultural differences, and sustainability problems prevent the adoption of gender equality norms.[214]

4.5. Explaining the Trajectory of Turkey's Gender Equality Reforms

This section aims to explain the progress and setbacks in gender equality in Turkey since 1999, using the analytical framework presented in Chapter 2. While the previous sections examined the country's legal and institutional situation regarding gender equality, as well as the policy instruments and financial assistance used by the EU to promote gender equality, this section will analyze these factors, explaining the ups and downs of Turkey's gender equality policies through three dimensions: EU influence, internal factors, and non-EU external factors.

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[212] Büke Boşnak, "Construction of a Gender Equality Regime? The Case of European Union Assistance in Turkey," in *Feminist Framing of Europeanisation: Gender Equality Policies in Turkey and the EU*, ed. Rahime Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm and F. Melis Cin (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 93, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-52770-9_5.

[213] Sinem Bal, "Clash of Norms: The Limits of EU's Normative Power in Gender Equality," *Marmara Üniversitesi Avrupa Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi* 27, no. 1 (2019): 125, https://doi.org/10.29228/mjes.27.

[214] Ibid., 130–36.

4.5.1. Europeanization and De-Europeanization

As explained in Chapter 2, the External Incentives Model (EIM) provides the most appropriate theoretical framework to explain the influence of the EU on the reform process. According to this model, the adoption of EU norms in candidate countries depends on the clarity of the EU's demands, the size, credibility, and speed of the incentives, and the costs that candidate countries associate with adopting EU rules.

Regarding Turkey's reform process between 1999 and 2005, the conditions outlined by the model were met. First, the EU's demands became clear after Turkey was granted candidate country status.[215] Turkey was required to meet the Copenhagen criteria as well as the short- and medium-term priorities outlined in the Accession Partnership documents. In addition, the European Commission's Progress Reports regularly monitored areas where reforms were sufficient and where shortcomings remained. Second, the incentives were substantial, credible, and quickly attainable. Following the Helsinki Summit, Turkey was promised full membership in the EU. Moreover, enlargement was on the EU's agenda, and several member states supported Turkey's accession. With these developments, EU membership was perceived as a reliable and accessible reward for Turkey. Third, adoption costs were low during this period. Public, state institutions, and political parties supported EU reforms, meaning there was no significant veto player.[216] In line with this overall context, the adoption costs of gender equality reforms were also low. The reforms demanded by the EU had already been on the agenda of the women's movement since the 1980s. In addition, the fact that gender equality was not a politically controversial issue like the Kurdish issue and had been valued since the early years of the Republic reduced the objections to reforms in this area.[217]

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[215] Senem Aydın and E. Fuat Keyman, *European Integration and the Transformation of Turkish Democracy*, No. 2, EU-Turkey Working Papers (Centre for European Policy Studies, 2004), 15.

[216] Paul Kubicek, "The EU and Political Reform in Turkey: Moving Beyond Conditionality," in *Turkey and the European Union: Facing New Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. Firat Cengiz and Lars Hoffmann (Routledge, 2014), 197.

[217] Yeşim Arat, "Democratic Backsliding and the Instrumentalization of Women's Rights in Turkey," *Politics & Gender* 18, no. 4 (2022): 922, Cambridge Core, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X21000192.

Following the launch of accession negotiations in 2005, however, the positive environment following the Helsinki Summit disappeared, and the conditions of the EIM were no longer fulfilled. During this period, Turkey's geopolitical size and predominantly Muslim population led to criticisms regarding its potential EU membership.[218] Some member states, such as France, Germany, and Austria, opposed Turkey's full accession and proposed alternative frameworks such as "privileged partnership."[219] The EU blocked the opening of negotiations on some acquis chapters because of the Cyprus problem.[220] Moreover, the EU's enlargement fatigue and absorption capacity started to be used as a justification for objections to Turkey's membership.[221] These developments weakened the EU's credibility in Turkey, made the membership goal seem unattainable, and reduced external incentives for reform. In terms of domestic dynamics, the struggle for hegemony among political parties and the EU perspective falling behind foreign policy priorities have increased the cost of reforms.[222]

The EIM provides a useful analytical framework for explaining gender equality reforms between 1999 and 2005. However, as discussed under the Legal Framework section, some reforms in line with the EU's legal framework continued after 2005. Yet, during this period, the conditions specified in the model were no longer met. The literature emphasizes that Turkey's EU membership objective was the strongest external incentive for the adoption of EU norms.[223] The model is inadequate to

[218] Erhan İçener, "Privileged Partnership: An Alternative Final Destination for Turkey's Integration with the European Union?," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 8, no. 4 (2007): 420, https://doi.org/10.1080/15705850701640777.

[219] Ibid.

[220] Senem Aydın-Düzgit and E. Fuat Keyman, "EU-Turkey Relations and the Stagnation of Turkish Democracy," in *Global Turkey in Europe: Political, Economic, and Foreign Policy Dimensions of Turkey's Evolving Relationship with the EU*, ed. Senem Aydın-Düzgit et al. (Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2013), 106.

[221] Ibid.

[222] Ziya Öniş, "Contesting for Turkey's Political 'Centre': Domestic Politics, Identity Conflicts and the Controversy over EU Membership," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 18, no. 3 (2010): 369, https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2010.507919.

[223] Rahime Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm and F. Melis Cin, "Introduction: Why Gender and the EU?," in *Feminist Framing of Europeanisation: Gender Equality Policies in Turkey and the EU*, ed. Rahime Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm and F. Melis Cin (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2021), 4, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-52770-9_1.

explain the continuity of reforms after many strong incentives, including the membership objective, lost their credibility.

In the literature, the period from the mid-2000s to the mid-2010s is defined as a phase of selective Europeanization in Turkey. Although some reforms were implemented in the field of gender equality during this period, a deviation from EU norms was observed. As detailed in Chapter 2, the selective Europeanization process is shaped by governments' desire to access EU incentives as well as their domestic political interests.

In this context, the JDP government has turned to low-cost reforms that are compatible with its own political agenda to access EU incentives and to appear committed to the reform process. For example, Turkey became a party to the Istanbul Convention, which aims to combat gender-based violence, an issue that has been frequently criticized in the European Commission Progress Reports. Similarly, steps such as lifting the headscarf ban and the inclusion of a positive action clause in the 2010 constitutional amendment indicate a strategic and selective adoption of EU norms. To better understand why the reforms during this period continued, it is necessary to consider the role of internal dynamics. These dynamics will be examined in the coming sections.

The developments, such as the establishment of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, enabling religious marriages, the de facto ban on abortion in public hospitals, and the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, indicate that Turkey has been moving away from the EU at legal and institutional levels since 2011. In this context, the literature states that Turkey has entered a process of de-Europeanization. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 reveals that this process manifests itself in three ways: the development of an open opposition to EU norms, the erosion of these norms over time, and their replacement by alternative norms and the decline of the EU as a political and normative point of reference.

Since 2010, the government has positioned the EU as an untrustworthy and culturally different actor that interferes in Turkey's internal affairs, and has emphasized that

Turkey is morally, culturally, and politically superior to the EU.[224] This rupture is also clearly observed in the domain of gender equality. The party's leadership and senior officials make Islamic and conservative references in their speeches and promote traditional gender roles.[225] For instance, President Erdoğan framed gender equality as a Western concept that is foreign to Turkish society in several speeches. In a statement he made in 2014, he said, "Views that are not native to this land have dominated the field of women's rights for years," and in 2025, he claimed that the idea of gender equality "targets the institution of the family" and is "not compatible with Turkish culture and beliefs".[226] He has been reducing women to the role of motherhood through religious references, stating that "A woman who rejects motherhood is deficient and incomplete" "Our religion grants women a sacred status, which is motherhood" and "The greatest privilege Allah has given to women is motherhood."[227] During this period, the concept of gender justice, which is rooted in Islamic principles and presented as culturally and locally authentic, emerged as an alternative to gender equality.[228] Aydın Yılmaz, who is one of the founders of the government-organized NGO KADEM, defines gender justice as a holistic understanding of justice that considers the inherent differences and social roles of women and men. [229] At the same time, after 2011, the EU ceased to be seen as a

[224] Senem Aydın-Düzgit, "De-Europeanisation through Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of AKP's Election Speeches," *South European Society and Politics* 21, no. 1 (2016): 52–55, https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2016.1147717.

[225] Çimen Günay-Erkol and Nurseli Yeşim Sünbüloğlu, "KADEM's Vision of Gender Justice and Neopatriarchal Masculinity in Illiberal Turkey," *International Review of Sociology* 34, no. 3 (2024): 416, https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2024.2383633.

[226] Mikail Bıyıklı et al., "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Kadınları Dışlayan Hiçbir Siyasi Hareket Muvaffak Olamaz," *Anadolu Ajansı*, February 2, 2025, https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-kadinlari-dislayan-hicbir-siyasi-hareket-muvaffak-olamaz/3469286; "Erdoğan: Anneliği Reddeden Kadın Yarımdır," Bianet, June 5, 2016, https://bianet.org/haber/erdogan-anneligi-reddeden-kadin-yarimdir-175532.

[227] Bianet, "Erdoğan: Anneliği Reddeden Kadın Yarımdır"; "Erdoğan: Kadınla Erkeği Eşit Konuma Getirmek Fıtrata Terstir," Bianet, November 24, 2014, https://bianet.org/haber/erdogan-kadinla-erkegi-esit-konuma-getirmek-fitrata-terstir-160184; "Erdoğan: Allah'ın Kadınlara Verdiği En Büyük Ayrıcalık Annelik Vasfıdır," Bianet, March 8, 2018, https://bianet.org/haber/erdogan-allah-in-kadinlara-verdigi-en-buyuk-ayricalik-annelik-vasfidir-194995.

[228] Bodur Ün, "Contesting Global Gender Equality Norms," 841.

[229] E. Sare Aydın Yılmaz, "Cinsiyet Eşitliği ve Adalet Perspektifinden Türkiye'de Kadının Siyasal Alana Katılımı," *KADEM Kadın Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1, no. 1 (2015): 113–14, https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2016.1147717.

normative and political reference point. The EU and EU norms were rarely mentioned in the JDP's official documents.[230] As the government moved further away from its goal of EU membership, NGOs also stopped using the EU as a source of legitimacy.[231] This also applies to business organizations. For example, TÜSİAD mostly avoided referring to EU norms when criticizing Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and preferred to base its criticism on national legal principles and human rights discourse.[232]

In light of this analysis, while the EIM provides a useful framework for explaining early gender equality reforms in Turkey, it falls short of explaining the reform process after 2005. The selective Europeanization phase reveals how domestic political interests led to the strategic and partial adoption of EU norms. The subsequent de-Europeanization phase, however, signals a deeper normative and institutional rupture shaped by the ruling party's ideological orientation and deliberate alienation from the EU. These developments demonstrate how the domestic political environment, which will be evaluated in more detail in the following section through an examination of internal dynamics, greatly impacts the EU's capacity to promote gender equality.

4.5.2. Internal Factors

The EU's external incentives played a significant role in accelerating Turkey's gender equality reforms in the early 2000s. However, EU incentives alone are insufficient to explain this reform process. The reforms that the Union demanded were already on the agenda and had been advocated by the women's movement for many years. Furthermore, the reforms were aligned with the JDP's agenda of promoting itself as a democratic and progressive actor. In this context, social

[230] Aydın-Düzgit, "De-Europeanisation through Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of AKP's Election Speeches," 50.

[231] Bahar Rumelili and Büke Boşnak, "Taking Stock of the Europeanization of Civil Society in Turkey: The Case of NGOs," in *The Europeanization of Turkey: Polity and Politics*, ed. Ali Tekin and Aylin Güney (Routledge, 2015), 139.

[232] Bodur Ün and Arıkan, "Europeanization and De-Europeanization of Turkey's Gender Equality Policy," 955.

movements and domestic actors played a key role in shaping and legitimizing the reform process. Similarly, the slowdown and regression observed since the 2010s cannot be explained solely by the weakening of EU incentives. During this period, the ruling party became increasingly authoritarian and conservative, which led to the decline of gender equality. As a result of this shift, independent civil society actors who had the power to influence the reform process previously were excluded from decision-making processes and replaced by organizations closer to the government. Therefore, this section will evaluate the two key internal factors that shaped the reforms, namely the JDP's use of gender policies to support its political goals, and the changing role of the women's movement and civil society.

4.5.2.1. Instrumentalization of Gender

Arat states that the JDP instrumentalized gender equality in different ways in three periods.[233] The first period corresponds to the party's first term in power between 2002 and 2007. When the JDP came to power, it tried to differentiate itself from its predecessor Islamist and religious parties. The main reason for this was that the previous Islamist parties were closed by secular state institutions.[234] To avoid a similar fate, the JDP adopted a more moderate political line and prioritized liberal values, the rule of law, democracy, and EU membership.[235] With this approach, it positioned itself as a democratic alternative to the Kemalist tutelage and gained support from various circles by presenting the ideal of a liberal, pluralistic society within its vision of a "new Turkey".[236] The reforms implemented in this period helped the party to gain credibility as a democratic party from both domestic and international actors. As part of this strategy, gender equality reforms were instrumentalized to strengthen the party's legitimacy and consolidate its position within the political regime.

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[233] Arat, "Democratic Backsliding and the Instrumentalization of Women's Rights in Turkey."

[234] Moira Goff-Taylor, *The Shifting Drivers of the AKP's EU Policy*, Middle East Program Occasional Paper Series (Wilson Center, 2017), 3.

[235] Marcie J. Patton, "AKP Reform Fatigue in Turkey: What Has Happened to the EU Process?," *Mediterranean Politics* 12, no. 3 (2007): 343, https://doi.org/10.1080/13629390701622382.

[236] M. Hakan Yavuz and Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, "Turkish Secularism and Islam under the Reign of Erdoğan," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 19, no. 1 (2019): 5, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2019.1580828.

Between 2007 and 2010, the JDP used gender equality reforms to consolidate its power. During the 2007 presidential elections, the e-memorandum issued by the military and the Constitutional Court's decision on the number of votes required for the presidential election posed a serious threat to the party and put its political survival at risk. In response to these developments, the JDP organized a constitutional amendment referendum in 2010 to weaken secular influence over the judiciary. As a result, significant structural changes were made to the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK). Although these constitutional amendments were part of an authoritarian shift, they were framed and presented as part of democratization.[237] For instance, the amendment package included a revision to Article 10, which stipulates equality before the law. The amendment ensured that positive action measures are not considered contrary to the principle of equality and opened the door to such measures. Similarly, the lifting of the headscarf ban was framed by the JDP with discourses of democratization and equality, but served as a tool to mobilize conservative voters.[238] Thus, the JDP used gender equality reforms to give the impression that it was still pursuing a democratic agenda and to conceal its authoritarian transformation. In addition, the party instrumentalized women's rights to strengthen its religiously based conservative ideology, thus ideologically challenging the dominant secular and egalitarian understanding of gender.[239]

The third period refers to the phase when the JDP became increasingly authoritarian after the 2010 referendum and the 2011 general elections. In this period, gender equality was instrumentalized to mobilize the conservative base of the government, to draw an ideological boundary with the opposition, and to strengthen its political regime. As Mutluer states, through the fake Kabataş incident,[240] President Erdoğan

[237] Ece Göztepe, "How to Lose a War through Small Defeats: The Case of Turkey's Democratic Backsliding," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (2021): 422, https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2021.0020.

[238] Ali Çarkoğlu, "Public Attitudes towards the Türban Ban in Turkey," *Utrecht Law Review* 6, no. 2 (2010): 155–56, https://doi.org/10.18352/ulr.128.

[239] Arat, "Democratic Backsliding and the Instrumentalization of Women's Rights in Turkey," 936.

[240] During the Gezi Park protests, pro-government media circulated claims that a headscarved woman carrying her baby was attacked by a group of half-naked, leather-gloved men in Istanbul's Kabataş

portrayed a headscarved mother as a victim of sexual violence by secular male protestors and constructed a contrast between religious women and secular individuals.[241] The secular and feminist women were framed as other women who are associated with immorality and anti-family values.[242] In addition, JDP replaced existing institutions with new ones that would serve its ideology. For example, with the abolition of the Ministry of State for Women and Family and the establishment of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, women's policies were placed on a family-centered axis. As a result, women's individual rights and freedoms were pushed to the background, while motherhood and traditional gender roles were emphasized. Furthermore, by supporting pro-government women's organizations, the JDP aimed to mobilize conservative women and spread the gender regime throughout society.[243]

During the JDP's rule, Turkey's gender policies have been shaped around neoliberal, conservative, and religious values. When the party first came to power in 2002, although it implemented liberal gender equality reforms in line with the goals of democratization and EU membership, a conservative understanding has always been evident in its approach.[244] From 2007 onwards, patriarchal and conservative values framed by religious references have become prominent in the party's discourse, which has led to a religious and conservative gender climate.[245] Within this climate, as Acar and Altunok describe with the concept of the "politics of the intimate," the

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district on June 1, 2013. Then Prime Minister Erdoğan repeatedly referred to this alleged incident as an example of secular violence against religious women. However, a police investigation and the review of more than 2,500 hours of CCTV cameras and security camera footage found no evidence of such an attack. In February 2014, the released footage confirmed that the incident had not occurred. See "Polis Kabataş'ta Çıplak, Deri Eldivenli Kimseyi Bulamadı," March 9, 2015, https://bianet.org/haber/polis-kabatas-ta-ciplak-deri-eldivenli-kimseyi-bulamadi-162878.

[241] Nil Mutluer, "The Intersectionality of Gender, Sexuality, and Religion: Novelties and Continuities in Turkey during the AKP Era," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 19, no. 1 (2019): 110, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2019.1578049.

[242] Ibid., 111.

[243] Arat, "Democratic Backsliding and the Instrumentalization of Women's Rights in Turkey," 933–34.

[244] Pınar Melis Yelsalı Parmaksız, "The Paradox of the AKP's Gender Regime: Gender Identity of Religious Women in Türkiye," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, ahead of print, January 20, 2025, 4, https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxae033.

[245] Ibid.

JDP has been regulating women's bodies, sexuality, fertility, and roles within the family with a neoliberal and conservative understanding.[246] The family is at the center of the new gender regime created by the JDP. The party sees the family as the solution to Turkey's political and economic problems.[247] Economically, the withdrawal of the state from the field of social services, together with neoliberal policies, has brought about the filling of this gap through the family.[248] In this context, responsibilities such as childcare, elder care, and care for the sick have been removed from the public domain and redefined as the "natural" duties of women within the family.[249] Thus, care work has been invisibly placed on women's shoulders. The combination of the social service gap created by neoliberal policies with a conservative approach has restricted women's access to education and employment.[250] The JDP has initiated initiatives such as women's entrepreneurship and microcredit programs aimed at increasing women's participation in the workforce. However, instead of ensuring gender equality in employment, these initiatives have directed women towards informal and insecure work models.[251]

The JDP also sees the family institution as sacred and aims to ensure that citizens develop a moral and political commitment to this structure.[252] In this context, it

[246] Feride Acar and Gülbanu Altunok, "The 'Politics of Intimate' at the Intersection of Neo-Liberalism and Neo-Conservatism in Contemporary Turkey," *Women's Studies International Forum* 41 (November 2013): 15, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2012.10.001.

[247] Hikmet Kocamaner, "The Politics of Family Values in Erdogan's New Turkey," *Middle East Report*, no. 288 (Fall 2018): 37.

[248] Zehra Yılmaz, "The AKP and Its Family Policy in the Re-Establishment Process of Authoritativeness in Turkey," in *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Before and After the Arab Uprisings*, ed. Jülide Karakoç (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 156, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137445551_7.

[249] Ülker Yükselbaba, "AKP'nin Kadına Yönelik Söylem ve Politikaları: Neoliberalizm, Ilımlı İslam ve Kadın," *Kadın/Woman 2000* 14, no. 2 (2013): 76.

[250] Simten Coşar and Metin Yeğenoğlu, "New Grounds for Patriarchy in Turkey? Gender Policy in the Age of AKP," *South European Society and Politics* 16, no. 4 (2011): 560, https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2011.571919.

[251] Gülay Toksöz, "Transition from 'Woman' to 'Family': An Analysis of AKP Era Employment Policies from a Gender Perspective," *Journal Für Entwicklungspolitik* 32, no. 1/2 (2016): 76, https://doi.org/10.20446/JEP-2414-3197-32-1-64.

[252] Dilek Cindoglu and Didem Unal, "Gender and Sexuality in the Authoritarian Discursive Strategies of 'New Turkey,'" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 24, no. 1 (2017): 43, https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506816679003.

launched projects such as “My Family is Turkey” in 2005 and “Being a Family” in 2013 to protect the family and prevent its dissolution. The Party also sees population growth as a prerequisite for economic growth and the foundation of a strong nation. Accordingly, President Erdoğan has adopted a pronatalist discourse, emphasizing “at least three children” and encouraging early marriages.[253] The party has introduced various incentives to promote fertility, such as financial support for mothers, interest-free loans for newlyweds, extended maternity leave, free childcare services, and state-funded IVF treatments.[254] This understanding that prioritizes population growth has brought debates on abortion, birth control, and the position of women within the family.[255]

The Directorate of Religious Affairs stands out as a key actor in the dissemination of the JDP’s gender regime based on religious and conservative values in the social sphere. Through its Family and Religious Guidance Bureaus established in 2011, the Directorate penetrates the private sphere with activities ranging from home visits to marriage schools and reshapes gender relations through religious values.[256] The institution also closely cooperates with ministries. For instance, with the protocol it signed with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, the Directorate of Religious Affairs personnel have been assigned to social service institutions to provide religious-moral guidance.[257]

Another prominent actor in the dissemination of the JDP’s gender policy is the pro-government women’s organizations. These organizations criticize Western feminism and advocate the concept of “gender justice” instead of gender equality. They reach out to disadvantaged women through fieldwork and social projects and promote a family-centered understanding of femininity. As Çakıl Dinçer notes, these

[253] Kocamaner, “The Politics of Family Values in Erdogan’s New Turkey,” 37.

[254] Ibid., 38.

[255] Zafer Yilmaz, “‘Strengthening the Family’ Policies in Turkey: Managing the Social Question and Armoring Conservative–Neoliberal Populism,” *Turkish Studies* 16, no. 3 (2015): 372, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2015.1067863.

[256] Sevgi Adak, “Expansion of the Diyanet and the Politics of Family in Turkey under AKP Rule,” *Turkish Studies* 22, no. 2 (2021): 210–11, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2020.1813579.

[257] Ibid., 205.

organizations are also instrumental for constructing cultural hegemony. Through literary events, conferences, youth activities, and various cultural and artistic projects, they aim to reproduce conservative values.[258] In doing so, they support women's participation in modern life while reinforcing a conservative, morality-based framework and facilitating the internalization of the JDP's gender regime.

Gender policies have gone through a significant transformation during the JDP era. At the beginning, the party used gender equality reforms as a means of legitimization within the framework of democratization and EU accession. However, the party's understanding of gender equality has gradually been reshaped within a conservative, religious, and family-based framework. In this process, women's rights and gender equality have become a tool that consolidates the ideological boundaries of the regime and confines women to traditional roles.

4.5.2.2. Women's Movement and Civil Society

In the literature, it is emphasized that the women's movement was influential in the reform process. In the 1980s, the feminist movement began to voice that existing laws did not sufficiently protect women and that problems such as violence and discrimination in the private sphere were ignored, and brought these issues to the agenda.[259] By the 1990s, the movement became more organized and influential and began to play a more active role in legislative processes. During this period, women's organizations mobilized public opinion on issues such as virginity testing, sexual harassment, and honor killings, and pressured lawmakers. As a result of these efforts, important legal changes were made to the main texts to ensure gender equality.[260] During this period, women's movement and civil society actively engaged with transnational feminist networks and international organizations such as the UN. For instance, Turkish women's organizations participated in global norm-making

[258] Gülşen Çakıl Dinçer, "Kültürel Hegemonya ve İslamcı Kadın Dernekleri: Hazar ve Kadem Örneği," *Mülkiye Dergisi*, no. 1 (September 2024): 77–103.

[259] Burcu Özdemir Sarıgil, "Combating Gender-Based Discrimination Against Women in Turkey: Achievements and the Challenges Ahead," in *Non-Discrimination in Turkey*, ed. Gözde Yılmaz (Springer International Publishing, 2022), 62, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08399-0_4.

[260] Şirin Tekeli, *Feminizmi Düşünmek* (İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2017), 400.

processes in international platforms such as the UN's Women Conferences held in Mexico in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995.[261]

However, women's organizations started to lose their national influence and international engagement towards the end of the 2000s. First, the financial constraint brought by the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and security-based concerns restricted international cooperation and narrowed the space for civil society.[262] Second, following the second electoral victory of the JDP in 2007, feminist organizations began to be excluded from policy-making processes. During this period, GONGOs (Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations) replaced independent organizations. Çelebi defines GONGOs as organizations that emerge in non-democratic environments, operate closely with the government, support the state's discourse and policies, and receive state funding.[263] One of the most prominent examples of GONGOs in Turkey is KADEM (The Women and Democracy Association). KADEM was founded in 2013, and the daughter of President Erdoğan, Sümeyye Erdoğan Bayraktar, is among its founding members.[264] KADEM particularly appeals to young and educated religious women. The organization advocates for the protection of women's roles in the family within an Islamic framework while encouraging their visibility in the workplace and the public sphere.[265] The rise of KADEM has limited the visibility and influence of independent feminist organizations in both the national and international spheres. Moreover, the authoritarian turn that gained momentum with the Gezi Park protests[266] deepened

[261] Özdemir Sarıgil, "Combating Gender-Based Discrimination Against Women in Turkey: Achievements and the Challenges Ahead," 63.

[262] Zeynep Alemdar, "Gender Equality in Turkey," in *Turkey's Challenges and Transformation: Politics and Society on the Centennial of the Republic*, ed. Harun Arıkan and Zeynep Alemdar (Springer International Publishing, 2023), 97, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-25799-5_7.

[263] Elifcan Çelebi, "How Do Women's GONGOs Influence Policymaking Processes in Turkey?," *Journal of Civil Society* 18, no. 3 (2022): 330, https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2022.2125417.

[264] Çakıl Dinçer, "Kültürel Hegemonya ve İslamcı Kadın Dernekleri: Hazar ve Kadem Örneği," 92–93.

[265] İbid., 93.

[266] In May 2013, a small environmentalist sit-in protest launched against plans to build a shopping mall and barracks project in Istanbul's Gezi Park quickly turned into mass protests across the country following harsh police intervention. With the participation of tens of thousands, demonstrations in 80

further after the failed coup attempt in 2016. In line with this transformation, the JDP has implemented various legal and administrative regulations, carried out smear campaigns, and promoted GONGOs to limit independent civil society and marginalize the women's movement.[267] Beyond KADEM, other Islamic women's organizations have also been active. Most of these organizations emerged in the post-1980s with the Islamic women's party activism and the headscarf movement. They have played a decisive role in the Islamization of both personal relationships and daily life by participating in the political and public spheres.[268] Among these organizations, several stand out, including KASAD-D, AK-DER, HAZAR, and the Capital City Women's Platform (Başkent Kadın Platformu). KASAD-D has focused on the professional challenges of religious women working in the health sector, while AK-DER has provided legal support for the grievances caused by the headscarf ban. On the other hand, HAZAR and the Capital City Women's Platform have contributed to the agency of religious women in the public sphere through education, awareness-raising, and the critical reading of religious texts.[269]

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provinces evolved into a reaction not only to urban development policies but also to lifestyle interventions and increasing authoritative governance. Gezi has been recognized as a major turning point in the history of social movements in Turkey. The protests shook the hegemonic power of the JDP government and brought together thousands of people from diverse backgrounds. However, after this mobilization, the government moved to reassert control over the streets, intensified its populist discourse, and used police violence and judicial processes to suppress civil society. It labeled the demonstrators as "looters" and "immoral", thereby deepening social polarization. During the protests, the police employed excessive force: national and international humans rights organizations reported at least 11 people lost their lives, more than 8,000 were injured, and thousands were detained. In 2019, a 657-page indictment was prepared against Osman Kavala and 15 others on charges of "attempting to overthrow the government." However, national and international organizations stated that the case was politically motivated and that the indictment contained no concrete evidence to substantiate the accusations. The Gezi Park protests were not merely an environmental struggle; they became a symbol of opposition to authoritarianism, interference in lifestyles, and the restriction of democratic rights in Turkey. See Seyla Benhabib, "Turkey's Authoritarian Turn," *The New York Times*, June 3, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/04/opinion/turkeys-authoritarian-turn.html; "Turkey: Baseless Charges Over Landmark 2013 Protests," *Human Rights Watch*, March 25, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/25/turkey-baseless-charges-over-landmark-2013-protests; Burcu Karakas, "Ten Years after Turkey's Gezi Protests, Some Say Vote a Chance for Justice," Middle East, *Reuters*, May 26, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/ten-years-after-turkeys-gezi-protests-some-say-vote-chance-justice-2023-05-26/.

[267] Merve Kütük-Kuriş, "The Rise and Fall of Support for the Istanbul Convention: Understanding the Case of KADEM," *Women's Studies International Forum* 93 (July 2022): 7, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2022.102601.

[268] Canan Aslan Akman, "Sivil Toplumun Yeni Aktörleri Olarak İslami Eğilimli Kadın Dernekleri," *Toplum ve Demokrasi Dergisi* 2, no. 4 (2008): 72.

[269] Ibid., 77–86.

The transformation of the civil society sphere has been reflected in NGOs' access to public resources. While NGOs can receive funding from Turkey's national budget, independent NGOs have faced increasing restrictions during the JDP's rule. As explained, under the JDP rule, NGOs have been increasingly suppressed and excluded from policy-making processes. This gap has been filled by GONGOs that act in parallel to the government's ideology and position themselves according to government interests. In this environment where independent NGOs are hindered, it has also become difficult for independent organizations to access public funds. According to the Civil Society Development Center's (STGM) 2023 report on civil society in Turkey, only 6% of the NGOs that participated in their field search received funding from national or local authorities.[270] The same report also highlights that there are problems with transparency and accountability regarding public resources provided to NGOs. It is not clear how much support is given to which institution and how this support is used, which makes it difficult to determine the amount and impact of public funds.[271]

That said, the literature highlights that CSOs with organic ties to the government, such as KADEM, receive substantial financial support.[272] KADEM has implemented various projects with public funding and cooperated closely with public institutions. For example, KADEM implemented the "Joint Steps with Youth for a Stronger Future" project in 2023. The project, which aimed to strengthen the psychological and social resilience of young people, was funded by the Ministry of Youth and Sports.[273] Another example of KADEM's publicly supported projects is the "Enhancing Women's Employment in Innovative Food Supply Practices" project. This project aimed to support the employment of low-income women in the agricultural sector by providing vocational training and promoting cooperative-based

[270] Ezgi Karataş et al., *Civil Society Organisations in Türkiye: Freedom of Association and Right to Participation Chapter I: Freedom of Association*, ed. Tezcan Eralp Abay (STGM (The Association of Civil Society Development Center), 2023), 116.

[271] Ibid.

[272] Günay-Erkol and Sünbüloğlu, "KADEM's Vision of Gender Justice and Neopatriarchal Masculinity in Illiberal Turkey," 416.

[273] "Gençlerle Ortak Adımlar Güçlü Yarınlar Projesi," *KADEM*, March 26, 2025, https://kadem.org.tr/genclerle-ortak-adimlar-guclu-yarinlar/.

production. This project was supported by the Sarıçam District Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry and the Adana Provincial Directorate of National Education.[274]

From the 1980s to the mid-2000s, the women's movement was influential in policymaking. During this period, women's organizations played a decisive role in many important developments, such as the legalization of abortion in 1983, the adoption of Turkey's first law on violence against women in 1998, the decriminalization of adultery in 2000, and the withdrawal of the bill that would re-criminalize adultery in 2004. They were also actively involved in the constitutional amendments and the reforms made to fundamental laws such as the Civil Code and the Penal Code in the early 2000s. However, with increasing authoritarian tendencies after 2011 and the government's emphasis on religious values and a family-centered approach significantly weakened the women's movement's influence on policymaking and its cooperation with the government have decreased.[275] With the rise of GONGOs like KADEM, independent feminist organizations got excluded from decision-making mechanisms and faced severe restrictions on their access to public funding. Thus, the strong alliance between reformist actors and civil society in the early 2000s gave way to a narrowed structure of civil space that operated in line with the government.

4.5.3. External Factors

In the 1980s, gender equality became a central component of the global development and human rights agenda, and a global gender regime emerged during this period. Kardam notes that the UN system played a decisive role in the emergence and institutionalization of this regime. The UN World Conferences on Women held in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995) contributed to the formation of international norms by bringing together state representatives,

[274] "Yenilikçi Gıda Tedarik Uygulamalarında Kadın İstihdamının Artırılması," *KADEM*, September 27, 2023, https://kadem.org.tr/sogep-projesinde-egitimini-tamamlayan-23-kadin-istihdam-edildi/.

[275] Hande Eslen-Ziya and Nazlı Kazanoğlu, "De-Democratization under the New Turkey? Challenges for Women's Organizations," *Mediterranean Politics* 27, no. 1 (2022): 104, https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2020.1765524.

civil society actors, and women's organizations. Groundbreaking developments, such as CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action, were adopted at these conferences. These initiatives defined women's rights as an integral part of the global human rights regime and imposed concrete obligations on states.[276]

Turkey ratified CEDAW in 1985 with some reservations and became a part of the global gender regime.[277] Arat highlights that CEDAW and UN Conferences on Women enabled Turkish women to voice their demands. With these initiatives, women's rights became visible, and women began to demand legal reform. They also launched campaigns on issues such as domestic violence and sexual harassment. In response to the pressure of the women's movement and its international obligations, the Turkish state implemented several reforms. In 1990, the General Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women was established, and constitutional and penal code amendments on gender equality were introduced. At the 1995 Beijing Conference, Turkey committed to lifting its reservations to CEDAW by 2000. Furthermore, amendments to fundamental laws such as the Civil Code were put on the agenda.[278] As this trajectory shows, the international gender regime has strengthened the women's movement in Turkey. It enabled women to demand their rights more loudly and to put pressure on the state. At the same time, it forced the state to make reforms in line with its commitments. Therefore, the global gender regime played an important role in shaping the positive developments that took place in the early 2000s.[279]

However, in the 2010s, Turkey started to move away from the Liberal International Order (LIO) and the global gender regime within this order. According to Yabancı and Maritato, the stagnation and regression in Turkey's gender equality reforms

[276] Nüket Kardam, *Turkey's Engagement with Global Women's Human Rights* (Routledge, 2022).

[277] Nüket Kardam, "Turkey's Response to the Global Gender Regime," *GEMC Journal*, no. Special Issue 1 (2011): 14.

[278] Yeşim Arat, "Women's Rights as Human Rights: The Turkish Case," *Human Rights Review* 3, no. 1 (2001): 31–33, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-001-1003-9.

[279] Marella Bodur Ün, "From 'Gender Equality' to 'Gender Justice': De-Europeanization of Gender Equality Policies in Turkey," in *EU/Turkey Relations in the Shadows of Crisis: A Break-Up or Revival?*, ed. A. Aslı Bilgin (Lexington Books, 2021), 139.

cannot be evaluated separately from the increasing populist and authoritarian responses to gender equality and women's rights worldwide.[280] In addition, Kirişçi highlights that Turkey's disengagement from the Liberal International Order is a result of the country's fallout with the West.[281] There are three main reasons for this rift: the disruption of Turkey's EU accession process, instability in the Middle East, especially in Syria, and the failed coup attempt in 2016.[282] In the context of the Syrian crisis, Turkey's opposition to the Assad regime and its weak border security weakened its credibility in the West. Additionally, the US's cooperation with the YPG has caused Ankara to lose trust and become more disconnected from the West.[283] Regarding the failed coup, President Erdoğan claimed that Fethullah Gülen was behind the attempt and requested his extradition from the US. However, US authorities found the accusations against Gülen unconvincing. This situation caused serious damage to relations between the two countries.[284] Thus, Turkey's regression in gender equality has also been shaped by its deteriorating relations with the Western world. In addition to the international climate, Turkey has received financial support from various international organizations in the field of gender equality. However, addressing all these sources will exceed the scope of this thesis. Therefore, the focus will be limited to two UN agencies, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women, as well as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): UNDP seeks to support sustainable development, decrease poverty, and increase inclusivity. The agency sees

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[280] Bilge Yabanci and Chiara Maritato, "Gender Politics under Autocratization and Two Decades of Women's Movement in Turkey," in *Religion, Gender, and Populism in the Mediterranean*, ed. Alberta Giorgi et al. (Routledge, 2023), 151.

[281] Kemal Kirişçi, "Turkey and the West: A Troubled Alliance," in *Turkey and the West: Fault Lines in a Troubled Alliance* (Brookings Institution Press, 2018).

[282] Kemal Kirişçi and Amanda Sloat, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Democracy in Turkey: Implications for the West* (Brookings Institution, 2019), 6–7, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-rise-and-fall-of-liberal-democracy-in-turkey-implications-for-the-west/.

[283] Ibid., 7.

[284] Soner Cagaptay, "If Tensions Increase with the West, Erdogan Might Find a Friend in Putin," *The Guardian*, July 23, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/23/turkey-failed-coup-erdogan-america-europe-putin.

gender equality as a key component of sustainable human development, and therefore, achieving gender equality is among its top priorities. Since 1965, the agency has been collaborating with Turkey on development, governance, environment, and crisis response and has implemented projects that focus on gender equality across different sectors.

Between 2016 and 2021, the agency implemented the "Turkey's Engineer Girls" project with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. The project was funded by the Limak Foundation. It aimed to strengthen gender equality by increasing female representation in the fields of engineering, creating qualified employment, and developing inclusive business models in the private sector.[285] In 2022, the "Engineer Girls of Türkiye Project Phase-II" project was launched with the same partners. In this phase, in addition to the objectives of the previous phase, the aim was to transform the initiative into an independent platform and to expand it at national and international levels.[286] However, the cooperation between UNDP and Limak Foundation was terminated in 2023.[287]

Another project the agency implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Family and Social policies is the "NEET Women Project." The project was funded by the Sabancı Foundation. It started in 2022 and was completed in June 2025. The project aimed to address the challenges faced by young women not in employment, education, or training (NEET), by making their needs more visible and creating

[285] "Turkeys Engineer Girls," UNDP Transparency Portal, accessed July 29, 2025, https://open.undp.org/projects/00097574.

[286] "Engineer Girls of Türkiye Project Phase-II," UNDP, accessed September 20, 2025, https://www.undp.org/turkiye/projects/engineer-girls-turkiye-project-phase-ii.

[287] The termination of the partnership arose following the deforestation of the Akbelen Forest in Muğla's Milas district, where Limak Holding and IC İçtaş's joint venture, YK Enerji, has been operating since 2014 to supply coal for the Yeniköy and Kemerköy thermal power plants. The İkizköy Environmental Committee, a local grassroots movement opposing these activities, sent a letter to UNDP highlighting the environmental and social damage caused by YK Enerji. The Committee argued that Limak's actions violated the UN Global Compact and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and that the partnership risked granting the company undue legitimacy and amounted to "social washing". Following these criticisms, UNDP decided to end its cooperation with Limak in 2023. See "UNDP, Limak Vakfı ile Ortaklığını Sona Erdirme Kararı Aldı," *İklim Haber*, August 20, 2023, https://www.iklimhaber.org/undp-limak-vakfi-ile-ortakligini-sona-erdirme-karari-aldi/; Bulut Bagatır, "Akbelen'den BM'ye Limak ile İşbirliğini Sonlandırma Çağrısı," *İklim Haber*, August 18, 2023, https://www.iklimhaber.org/akbelenden-bmye-limak-ile-isbirligini-sonlandirma-cagrisi/.

mechanisms to address these challenges. It specifically focused on assisting women who are completely disconnected from the labor market and still have the potential to enter employment or education. Within the project, vocational trainings, capacity-building activities and awareness campaigns were carried out, and a digital portal called "Opportunities Map" was created.[288]

UN Women: UN Women is dedicated to improving gender equality and empowering women. The agency began its operations in Turkey in 2012.[289] Since then, UN Women has been implementing projects with the Turkish government, civil society organizations, the private sector, and academia to promote gender equality with funding from the European Commission, UN members, the Turkish private sector, and other UN agencies. In 2022 and 2023, the agency received a total of 11.15 million USD in funding from various partners for its projects. More than 6 million USD of this funding was provided by the European Commission.

Between 2021 and 2024, the "Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Leadership in Political and Business Life" project was implemented with funding from Sweden. The project aimed to increase solidarity between women with different political standings, establish gender sensitive governance practices, increase women's role in leadership and decision-making, and promote male engagement on gender equality. Its stakeholders included the TGNA, the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, CSOs, academia, and the private sector.[290] Another project, "Strengthening women's access to justice" project with the Ministry of Justice, was implemented between 2022 and 2023. The project was funded by Sweden and UN Women. It aimed to improve women and girls' access to justice and the implementation of Law No. 6284.[291]

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[288] "Neet Women Project," UNDP Transparency Portal, accessed July 29, 2025, https://open.undp.org/projects/00135795.

[289] "Leadership and Political Participation," UN Women – Europe and Central Asia, accessed August 6, 2025, https://eca.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/turkey/leadership-and-political-participation.

[290] "Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Leadership in Political and Business Life Project Brief," UNWOMEN, 2022, https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Women%20Lead%20project%20brifing%20note.pdf.

[291] "Strengthening Women's Access to Justice Brief," UNWOMEN, 2022, https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/AtJ%20project-brief_7067021.pdf.

International Labour Organization (ILO): The ILO aims to ensure social justice and protect human and labor rights. In this regard, it determines international standards regarding working life, develops policy recommendations, and supports countries through various programs.[292] Gender equality is one of the fundamental principles of the organization. Several conventions of the ILO, such as Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156), and Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183), focus on ensuring equal access to decent work for women and men. Moreover, the ILO has been integrating gender mainstreaming in all its activities since 1999.[293] The organization cooperates both financially and operationally with actors such as governments, the UN, the EU, civil society, the private sector, and international financial institutions to promote gender equality and related priorities.[294] Turkey has been a member of the ILO since 1932. The country ratified four conventions on gender equality: the Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111) in 1967, the Employment Policy Convention (No. 122) in 1977, and the Human Resources Development Convention (No. 142) in 1993. ILO has implemented several projects to advance gender equality in Turkey.

Between 2009 and 2010, the "Pilot Project on Active Labor Market Policies to Promote Gender Equality through Decent Employment for Women" was implemented with İŞKUR. The project was funded by the Norwegian Government. The project aimed to strengthen institutional capacity at the local level, promote women-focused employment policies, and support the participation of unemployed women in the labor market.[295] Another project carried out in partnership with İŞKUR

[292] "About the ILO," International Labour Organization, accessed July 29, 2025, https://www.ilo.org/about-ilo#:~:text=The%20International%20Labour%20Organization%20(ILO,to%20universal%20and%20lasting%20peace.

[293] "ILO and Gender Equality," International Labour Organization, n.d., accessed December 6, 2025, https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@gender/documents/sitestudiocontentelements/wcms_con_txt_gen_abo_ige_en.pdf.

[294] "Partnering for Development," International Labour Organization, January 28, 2024, https://www.ilo.org/partnering-development.

[295] "Pilot Project on Active Labour Market Policies for Advancing Gender Equality through Decent Employment for Women in Turkey," International Labour Organization, October 13, 2015,

is “More and Better Jobs for Women: Women’s Empowerment through Decent Work in Turkey”. This project was implemented between 2013 and 2018 and funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The project aimed to support women’s access to decent work and to develop gender-sensitive employment policies. In this context, Turkey’s first women’s employment action plan was prepared, and institutional mechanisms were established within İŞKUR to monitor gender equality.[296]

World Bank: The World Bank is a financial organization that aims to decrease poverty and promote sustainable development through financial support, technical assistance, data production, and dialogue. It views achieving gender equality as crucial to ending poverty; therefore, it aims to eliminate gender-based violence, enhance human capital, increase economic opportunities, and promote female leadership.[297] In line with its goals, the World Bank provides funding and plays an active role in designing, coordinating, and implementing projects with gender equality targets in Turkey.

The “Small Industrial Estates Reconstruction and Regional Economic Recovery Project”, which is being implemented by the Ministry of Industry and Technology and the Directorate General of Industrial Zones, is financed through a World Bank loan. The project started in September 2024 and will last approximately 4.5 years. Gender equality is one of the priorities of the project.[298] Another project with the goal of gender equality is the “Social Entrepreneurship, Empowerment and Cohesion in Refugee and Host Communities Project (SEECO)”. This project is implemented by

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https://www.ilo.org/projects-and-partnerships/projects/pilot-project-active-labour-market-policies-advancing-gender-equality.

[296] “‘More and Better Jobs for Women: Women’s Empowerment through Decent Work in Turkey’ Project – PHASE I,” International Labour Organization, February 15, 2013, https://www.ilo.org/projects-and-partnerships/projects/more-and-better-jobs-women-womens-empowerment-through-decent-work-turkey.

[297] *World Bank Group Gender Strategy 2024–2030: Accelerate Gender Equality to End Poverty on a Livable Planet*, no. 191013 (World Bank, 2024), 50.

[298] “Development Projects : Türkiye Small Industrial Estates Reconstruction and Regional Economic Recovery Project - P502837,” World Bank, accessed July 29, 2025, https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P502837.

the Ministry of Industry and Technology, financed by the EU, and administered by the World Bank. It started in 2021 and is still ongoing. One of the main objectives of the project is to promote women's participation in economic life.[299]

International organizations have been assisting Turkey both financially and technically. Actors like UNDP, UN Women, ILO, and the World Bank have carried out various projects in collaboration with the public sector, private sector, and civil society to advance gender equality. However, systematic and accessible final evaluation reports are lacking for a significant portion of these projects. This makes it difficult to comprehensively assess the concrete outcomes and long-term impacts of these projects. Nevertheless, the limited evaluations that do exist point to significant shortcomings. For example, UNDP's Development Results Assessment Report notes that the agency's efforts in Turkey have failed to bring sustainable transformation. The report highlights that the reasons for this are the lack of local capacity and institutional ownership, and the failure to establish strong national participation. It also states that UNDP's monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were weak.[300] Similarly, the ILO Interim Evaluation Report for "More and Better Jobs for Women: Women's Empowerment through Decent Work in Turkey" notes that the sustainability of the training programs has been limited and their impact on the field has been weak. Furthermore, low institutional ownership and the inadequate integration of women's NGOs into the process limited the project's potential to create a lasting impact.[301] Overall, the findings show that limitations in the monitoring, evaluation, and localization capacities of international organizations, as well as a lack of institutional ownership, weak local capacity, and insufficient public participation in Turkey, have hindered sustainable and lasting progress in gender equality. For lasting progress, external funding must be designed more holistically

[299] *Terms of Reference: IT Specialist – Social Entrepreneurship, Empowerment and Cohesion in Refugee and Host Communities in Turkey (SEECO) Project* (World Bank, n.d.), accessed June 14, 2025, https://seeco.org.tr/upload_cms/files/ihale/1941/SEECOIT_Specialist_2R.pdf.

[300] *Kalkınma Sonuçlarının Değerlendirmesi: Türkiye*, Draft Report (United Nations Development Programme, 2010), 5–7, https://www.undp.org/turkiye/publications/assessment-development-results-turkey-evaluation-undp-contribution.

[301] Gökçe Baykal, *Mid-Term Evaluation of the "More and Better Jobs for Women: Women's Empowerment through Decent Work in Turkey" Project Phase II*, TUR/18/03/SWE (International Labour Organization, 2022), 9–13.

and in strong collaboration with local actors, while the Turkish public and private sectors must actively and willingly participate in these processes.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter explains the progress and setbacks in gender equality in Turkey since 1999 and analyzes the multidimensional dynamics behind this process. It consists of two sections. The first section explores the EU's influence in this area, using the same structure as the previous chapter: legal framework, policy instruments, and financial mechanisms.

Under "Legal Framework", the legal and institutional advances and setbacks in gender equality over the last 26 years were examined. Between 1999 and 2005, comprehensive reforms were implemented in fundamental regulations, including the constitution, civil code, penal code, and labor law. This period was characterized by a strong political will in line with the goal of EU membership. Between 2005 and 2011, the reform process continued, albeit with a narrower scope. During this period, gender equality became increasingly shaped by religious and conservative values. After 2011, this trend intensified, and a significant decline started to be observed. The closure of the Ministry of State for Women and Family Affairs and the downgrading of the General Directorate for the Status and Problems of Women are notable indicators of this process. Furthermore, Turkey's unilateral withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and conservative discourses surrounding issues such as Caesarean section births and abortion are examples of the transformation in the understanding of gender equality.

Under the "Policy Instruments" section, tools such as APs, National Programs, Progress Reports, Gender Equality Country Reports, Twinning, and TAIEX were examined. While documents such as APs, Progress Reports, and Gender Equality Country Reports, which provide feedback to Turkey, emphasized the integration of EU laws into the country's domestic system in the early years of Turkey's candidacy, the focus shifted to law enforcement and the need for capacity building from 2005 onward. Since 2011, as Turkey began to move away from gender equality, increasing

criticism has been observed in these documents. In the context of National Programs, attention has been drawn to the reforms implemented and foreseen as part of the accession process. Lastly, the Twinning and TAIEX mechanisms were discussed, and exemplary projects were presented.

In “Financial Mechanisms”, it is observed that the EU supports gender equality through IPA funds and has financed numerous projects in this area. However, gender equality is not a standalone funding area in any phase of the IPA. Instead, the Union supports gender equality in various sectors or components. Furthermore, the EU’s commitment to this area is mostly rhetorical. This, combined with the lack of political will in Turkey, has prevented projects from achieving lasting transformation. Reports reveal that project sustainability is weak, local actors are largely disengaged, and the EU’s approach to gender equality lacks a holistic framework.

The second section examines the factors shaping the course of reforms in the field of gender equality. The influence of the EU and its incentives alone is insufficient to explain the direction of reforms. To understand the scope and direction of reforms, it is essential to consider Europeanization, internal factors, and non-EU external factors in conjunction. Within this framework, in line with the three-dimensional analytical structure presented in Chapter 2, progress and regression in reform processes are analyzed through Europeanization/de-Europeanization, internal factors, and non-EU external factors.

Between 1999 and 2005, the external incentives offered by the EU were strong, clear, and accessible. The prospect of full membership created a powerful Europeanization dynamic in Turkey, encouraging the country to adopt EU norms. However, in addition to this, the JDP had the initial strategy of legitimizing itself as a democratic actor that supported EU accession, and the party instrumentalized gender equality reforms. At the same time, the women’s movement, which had been pushing for reforms since the 1980s, significantly influenced the process. Furthermore, Turkey’s affiliation with international organizations and its desire to align with the global gender regime were also important external factors fueling the reforms.

Between 2007 and 2011, despite the EU's waning influence, the JDP government continued low-cost and symbolic reforms. The signing of the Istanbul Convention and the positive action provision of the constitution can be considered within this framework. However, to explain the continuation of reforms, it is also necessary to examine the internal dynamics. During this period, the JDP consolidated its power while still needing to project a reformist image. Meanwhile, the influence of the independent women's movement began to wane compared to previous years. At the global level, while the international gender regime persisted, new threats, such as the rise of authoritarian populism, began to emerge.

The post-2011 period saw a decline in Turkey's reforms in gender equality and its commitment to this norm. During this period, the EU ceased to be a political or normative reference. At the same time, alternative terms like gender justice emerged, and religiously motivated concepts gained prominence. During this period, in which the JDP completely dominated its own political and ideological agenda, gender equality reforms were abandoned, and the discourse on women's rights was transformed into a family-centered, conservative, and fertility-focused regime. Independent women's organizations were excluded from decision-making processes, and public funds were transferred to GONGOs. In this context, internal dynamics played a key role in the setback of reforms. Meanwhile, due to domestic crises such as the 2016 coup attempt and foreign policy challenges such as the Syrian crisis, Turkey distanced itself from the Liberal International Order.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, the course of gender equality reforms in Turkey since 1999 and the reasons behind the ups and downs are examined. The main goal of the study is to reveal the conditions under which gender equality developments in Turkey progress, slow down, or regress. In this regard, two research questions were identified: 1) What explains the trajectory of gender equality reforms in Turkey since 1999? 2) Is Europeanization alone sufficient to explain the progress and regression in this policy area?

A three-dimensional analytical framework was employed to answer these questions. The first pillar of this framework is the Europeanization theory, which was chosen to understand the extent of the EU's influence in Turkey. Candidate countries' Europeanization is widely explained through the External Incentives Model. According to this model, clearly defined conditions, large and quickly achievable rewards, credible promises and threats from the EU, and low compliance costs are necessary conditions for the transformation. However, Europeanization does not always unfold fully. Sometimes, reforms are selectively adopted, or compliance remains superficial. In this context, de-Europeanization, the weakening or reversal of Europeanization, emerges. This phenomenon manifests in three ways: openly opposing EU norms, the erosion of these norms, and replacing them with alternative norms, and the weakening of the EU as a political and normative reference point. The second pillar is the internal factors that shaped the course of reforms. It covers domestic dynamics such as the strategic preferences and interests of political parties and the role of social movements and civil society. The last pillar, non-EU external factors, addresses the impact of the global normative order and international ideological climate on reform processes. By considering these three pillars together,

the direction of Turkey's gender reforms has been analyzed through a holistic perspective.

The study first examines the Union's gender regime under the headings of legal framework, policy instruments, and financial mechanisms. This structure reveals both the normative base of this regime and the tools that enable its implementation. The EU's gender equality legislation has transformed from the "equal pay" principle into a rights-based and multidimensional structure. With the Amsterdam Treaty, the principle of gender mainstreaming was adopted, and since the 2000s, legislation has been developed to cover a wide range of issues from equal representation to combating violence against women. The Union also has non-binding but guiding policy tools, such as the multi-annual action programs, gender equality strategies, gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting, and the Open Method of Coordination. These tools ensure that the equality objective is integrated into areas such as employment, education, the environment, digitalization, and research and development. Financially, while the Union previously supported gender equality through dedicated funds, in recent years, it has begun to integrate this objective into various funds as a horizontal priority.

The EU's approach to gender equality is reflected in candidate countries through the Copenhagen criteria, which form the basis of its enlargement policy. Candidate countries are required to transpose the EU gender acquis into law, establish independent equality bodies, and ensure implementation. Accession Partnerships, National Programs, Progress Reports, and Gender Equality Country Reports are used to guide this process. Tools such as Twinning and TAIEX provide technical support to strengthen administrative capacity. Through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, the Union provides funds to facilitate and support countries' alignment. Gender equality is both a horizontal priority integrated into these funds and directly financed through specific projects.

Turkey, between 1999 and 2007, adopted EU membership as a strategic goal and carried out comprehensive reforms in fundamental legal texts. During this period, gender equality was constitutionally guaranteed, and equal representation in the

family, prohibition of discrimination, and strengthened legal mechanisms against sexual and domestic violence were introduced. Institutional steps such as the strengthening of the General Directorate on the Status of Women (KSGM) and the establishment of a research committee in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) were taken. Between 2007 and 2011, the pace of reforms slowed, and the concept of "gender justice" replaced "gender equality" in discourse. Nevertheless, important steps, such as the establishment of KEFEK, the introduction of a constitutional provision on positive discrimination, and the signing of the Istanbul Convention, were taken. Law No. 6284, adopted in 2012, is a significant development in the fight against gender-based violence. After 2011, however, there was a shift away from European norms, a rise in conservative/religious discourse, and a weakening of institutional capacity. The status of women-focused institutions has declined, family-based policies have come to the fore, reproductive health rights such as abortion and caesarean section have been restricted, and the authority to perform religious marriages has been expanded. In 2021, the decision was made to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention.

Following these discussions, this thesis analyzes Turkey's gender equality reform process through the three-dimensional analytical framework. In the 1999-2005 period, the fulfillment of the conditions of the External Incentive Model accelerated the reforms. The clarity of the EU's demands, the reliability of full membership, and the low cost of compliance facilitated comprehensive legal changes. Additionally, internal dynamics also supported this process. Gender equality reforms had been on the agenda of the women's movement. Moreover, JDP instrumentalized gender reforms to secure its place in the regime and draw a democratic and secular image. Furthermore, the global gender regime also shaped the reform trajectory. International mechanisms such as the CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action strengthened the women's movement, held the state accountable, and accelerated the reforms of the early 2000s.

Between 2005 and 2011, the decreasing reliability of Turkey's full accession, increasing anti-membership rhetoric in EU member states, and enlargement fatigue weakened the Union's incentives. During this period, the government adopted low-

cost reforms that were aligned with its political agenda. Being party to the İstanbul Convention and the introduction of a provision on guaranteeing positive actions in the constitution are examples of this approach. Developments that took place in this period, as the lifting of the headscarf ban, were presented as democratization but also served to please the conservative electorate.

In the post-2011 period, Turkey's de-Europeanization became more pronounced. The Union lost its place as a political and normative reference point. The JDP started to reshape its gender policies within a family-centered and religiously oriented framework. The establishment of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, withdrawal from the İstanbul Convention, the emphasis on motherhood and traditional roles, the strengthening of women's organizations close to the government, the active role of the Directorate of Religious Affairs in gender discourse, and the marginalization of independent civil society are among the most obvious elements of this transformation. Moreover, NGOs close to the government grew stronger while the independent feminist organizations were marginalized financially and politically. Thus, the influence of the women's movement decreased. At the same time, Turkey started to move away from the Liberal International Order and the global gender regime. The stagnation in the EU accession process, the crises in the Middle East, and political tensions with the West are among the reasons for this trend.

These findings, in response to the first research question, reveal that the ups and downs in Turkey's gender reforms cannot be explained by a single factor. The comprehensive reforms of the 1999-2005 period were made possible through the EU's strong external incentives, the long-standing demands of the women's movement, the JDP's pursuit of legitimacy through its democratization rhetoric, and the pressures of the global gender regime. Similarly, the selective reforms following 2005 and the decline observed since the 2010s are explained by the interaction between the weakening of the EU's incentive capacity, the JDP's ideological transformation, the shrinking of civil society, the shift away from the Liberal International Order, and the global wave of authoritarianism.

In response to the second research question, the study demonstrates that Europeanization theory provides a critical dimension for understanding the course of reforms, but it is not sufficient on its own. The progress and decline of gender equality reforms in Turkey can be understood multidimensionally through the interplay of Europeanization and de-Europeanization, internal factors, and non-EU external factors. This shows that the Union's capacity to promote reforms in candidate countries can only be effective when it intersects with local dynamics and the international conjuncture, and that these intersections determine the direction of reforms in the long run.

These findings show that gender equality reforms in Turkey are shaped by multidimensional dynamics. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the study's contributions to the literature and broader discussions. The significance of this research lies in its ability to go beyond one-dimensional approaches and address the influence of the EU, internal dynamics, and global factors together. The thesis offers three key contributions for future research. First, it adds a new dimension to Europeanization debates by showing that the normative power of the EU can only be effective when it intersects with internal factors and the international conjuncture. Second, it contributes to gender studies by making the ideological dimension of gender policies visible through examples of the women's movement, conservative transformation, and the rise of GONGOs. Third, by examining the reflections of the departure from the Liberal International Order and the wave of global authoritarianism on gender policies in Turkey, it relates a national case to global debates. In these respects, the study offers a multidimensional and comparative analytical framework for both European Union studies and gender studies.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, bireylerin cinsiyetlerinden bağımsız olarak eşit hak, fırsat, kaynak ve korumalara sahip olmasını ifade eder ve İnsan Hakları Evrensel Bildirgesi'nde temel bir insan hakkı olarak güvence altına alınmıştır. Bu ilke, hem toplumsal refahın hem de ekonomik büyümenin önkoşulu olup, kapsayıcı ve adil yönetişimin güçlenmesine katkı sağlar. 1999'da Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birliği adaylık statüsü kazanması, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği alanında reformların hızlanmasını beraberinde getirmiştir. Bu dönemde özellikle hukuki ve kurumsal gelişmeler dikkat çekmiştir. Ancak 2000'li yılların ortalarından itibaren bu ivmenin yavaşladığı ve 2010'lu yıllardan itibaren gerileme eğilimlerinin ortaya çıktığı gözlemlenmektedir.

Bu tez, Türkiye'nin 1999'dan bu yana toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği reformlarının arkasındaki dinamikleri incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın odak noktası, ilerleme, duraksama ve gerileme dönemlerini mümkün kılan ya da engelleyen temel sebepleri anlamaktır. Literatürdeki mevcut çalışmalar çoğunlukla Avrupalılaşma çerçevesine dayanarak AB'nin dönüştürücü etkisini vurgulamış olsa da, bu yaklaşım tek başına süreci açıklamakta yetersiz kalmaktadır. Bu nedenle tez, Avrupalılaşma ve Avrupalılaşmadan uzaklaşma ile birlikte iç siyasi-toplumsal dinamikleri ve AB dışındaki uluslararası faktörleri kapsayan üç boyutlu bir analitik çerçeve önermektedir. Bu yaklaşım, Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği reformlarının yalnızca AB etkisiyle değil, aynı zamanda yerel dinamikler ve küresel normatif ortamın etkileşimiyle şekillendiğini ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir. Çalışmanın temel araştırma soruları, "1999'dan bu yana Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği reformlarının arkasındaki nedenler nelerdir?" ve "Bu politika alanındaki ilerleme ve gerilemeyi açıklamak için yalnızca Avrupalılaşma yeterli midir?" şeklindedir. Bu sorulara verilen yanıtlar, literatüre çok boyutlu bir analiz sunarak hem Türkiye'nin

deneyimine ışık tutmayı hem de AB genişleme süreci ve toplumsal cinsiyet politikaları üzerine yapılan tartışmalara katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Bu çalışmada, nitel bir araştırma tasarımına dayalı belge analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bu çerçevede birincil kaynaklar arasında Avrupa Birliği müktesebatı, Katılım Ortaklığı Belgeleri, Birlik Programları, İlerleme Raporları, Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği Raporları, Katılım Öncesi Mali Yardım Aracı (IPA) düzenlemeleri, uygulama rehberleri, proje fişleri ve strateji belgeleri yer almaktadır. Türkiye bağlamında ise anayasal ve yasal değişiklikler, ilgili kanunlar ve eylem planları incelenmiştir. Bunun yanı sıra Birleşmiş Milletler (BM), Dünya Bankası, ILO ve UN Women gibi uluslararası kuruluşların raporları ve politika dokümanları ile güvenilir haber kaynakları değerlendirilmiştir. Çalışmada ayrıca ikincil kaynak olarak akademik kitaplar, hakemli makaleler, tezler ve diğer akademik çalışmalar kullanılmıştır. Tez, literatürdeki tartışmalardan hareketle geliştirilen ve söz konusu birincil ve ikincil belgelerden elde edilen verilerle desteklenen üç boyutlu analitik çerçeveye dayanmaktadır.

Bu tez beş bölümden oluşmaktadır. Birinci bölümde araştırmanın amacı, temel soruları, yöntemi, çalışmanın literatüre yapacağı katkılar ve sınırlılıkları ele alınmaktadır. İkinci bölüm, çalışmanın analitik çerçevesini sunmaktadır. Bu kapsamda Avrupalılaşma, seçici Avrupalılaşma ve Avrupalılaşmadan uzaklaşma kavramları literatür ışığında tartışılmaktadır. Ayrıca iç siyasi-toplumsal dinamikler ile küresel normatif ortamın reform süreçlerindeki rolü de ele alınmaktadır. Üçüncü bölümde, Avrupa Birliği'nin toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini teşvik etmek için geliştirdiği araçlar ele alınmaktadır. Bu kapsamda hukuki çerçeve, politika araçları ve mali mekanizmalar ayrıntılı biçimde incelenmektedir. Dördüncü bölüm, tezin ana analiz kısmını oluşturmaktadır. Bu bölümde önce hukuki çerçeve, politika araçları ve mali mekanizmalar Türkiye bağlamında incelenmektedir. Ardından bu bulgular, ikinci bölümde geliştirilen analitik çerçeve ışığında değerlendirilerek 1999'dan günümüze reformların arkasındaki dinamikler ortaya konmaktadır. Beşinci ve son bölümde ise elde edilen bulgular bir araya getirilmekte, araştırma soruları ışığında kapsamlı sonuçlara ulaşılmakta ve çalışmanın literatüre sunduğu katkılar tartışılmaktadır.

İkinci bölümde, araştırma sorularına yanıt vermek amacıyla geliştirilen üç boyutlu analitik çerçeve sunulmaktadır. Çerçeve, reformların seyrini çok yönlü biçimde açıklayabilmek için Avrupalılaşma/Avrupa'dan uzaklaşma, iç faktörler ve AB dışı küresel faktörler boyutlarını içermektedir.

Üç boyutlu çerçevenin ilk ayağı, AB'nin aday ülkeler üzerindeki dönüştürücü gücünü analiz edebilmek amacıyla kullanılan Avrupalılaşma kavramıdır. Bu kavram, AB normlarının ve kurumlarının aday ülkelerin hukuk, politika ve kimlik sistemlerine aktarılmasını ifade eder. Literatürdeki tanımların ortak noktası, Avrupalılaşmanın hem kurumsal hem de normatif bir yeniden yapılanma süreci olmasıdır. Bu sürecin gerçekleşme olasılığının, AB normları ile ulusal yapılar arasındaki uyumsuzluğun yüksek olduğu durumlarda arttığı ileri sürülmektedir. Ancak sürecin yönü ve başarısı, çoklu veto noktaları, resmî kurumlar, siyasal kültür, aktörlerin güçlendirilmesi ve öğrenme gibi aracı faktörlere bağlıdır. Avrupalılaşmanın nasıl gerçekleştiği farklı kurumsalcı yaklaşımlar üzerinden açıklanmaktadır: rasyonel tercih kurumsalcılığı çıkar hesapları ve maliyet–fayda dengelerine odaklanırken, sosyolojik kurumsalcılık normların meşruiyeti, ikna ve sosyal öğrenmeyi vurgular.

Aday ülkelerin Avrupalılaşması söz konusu olduğunda ise AB koşulluluğu ve Kopenhag kriterleri temel araçlar olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Üye devletlerin Avrupalılaşmasını açıklamak için kullanılan rasyonel tercih kurumsalcılığı ve sosyolojik kurumsalcılık, aday ülkeler için de geçerlidir. Rasyonel tercih kurumsalcılığına dayanan Dışsal Teşvik Modeli (EIM), Türkiye gibi aday ülkelerin deneyimini açıklamada en çok başvurulan çerçevedir. Bu modele göre, AB'nin sunduğu ödüller net, erişilebilir ve inandırıcı olduğunda ve Birlik'e uyumun maliyeti düşük kaldığında Avrupalılaşma süreci hızlanmaktadır.

2010'lu yıllardan itibaren ise literatürde "Avrupa'dan uzaklaşma" kavramı öne çıkmıştır. Bu olgu, AB'ye önceden sağlanan uyumun bilinçli olarak geri çevrilmesi şeklinde tanımlanmaktadır. Literatüre göre süreç, AB karşıtı bir dilin inşa edilmesi, ulusallaşma, AB mekanizmalarından çekilme, AB dışı alternatif arayışları ve AB değerlerine karşı açık direnç stratejileri üzerinden şekillenmektedir. Ayrıca, bazı yaklaşımlar Avrupa'dan uzaklaşmayı, AB'nin toplumsal ve siyasal alanda bir referans noktası olma özelliğini zaman içinde yitirmesi olarak açıklamaktadır.

Çerçevenin ikinci ayağını iç faktörler oluşturmaktadır. Bu boyut, reformların yalnızca AB'nin dışsal baskılarıyla değil, aynı zamanda ulusal düzeydeki siyasi aktörlerin stratejik hesapları, parti çıkarları, sivil toplumun gücü, kadın hareketinin etkisi, medya ve iş dünyasının tutumlarıyla şekillendiğini vurgulamaktadır. Türkiye örneğinde, özellikle iktidar partilerinin AB'ye yönelik tutumları ve üyelik sürecini kendi siyasi öncelikleri doğrultusunda araçsallaştırmaları reform sürecinin yönünü belirlemiştir. Bunun yanı sıra, sivil toplum ve kadın hareketi reformların hazırlanması ve uygulanmasında önemli bir baskı unsuru olmuştur. Ancak zaman içinde baskılar, kaynak kısıtlamaları ve hükümete yakın aktörlerin güçlenmesiyle etkileri zayıflamıştır. Dolayısıyla, iç faktörler AB etkisinin sınırlarını belirleyen ve reformların ivmesini hızlandıran ya da yavaşlatan kritik bir rol oynamaktadır.

Çerçevenin üçüncü ayağını AB dışı küresel faktörler oluşturmaktadır. Bu boyut, Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği reformlarının yalnızca AB'nin baskısıyla değil, aynı zamanda uluslararası normlar ve küresel ideolojik eğilimlerle de şekillendiğini vurgular. Demokrasi, insan hakları ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği gibi değerler AB'ye özgü olmayıp BM gibi uluslararası örgütler tarafından evrenselleştirilmiştir. Kadınlara Karşı Her Türlü Ayrımcılığın Önlenmesi Sözleşmesi (CEDAW) ve BM Kadın Konferansları bu alanda özellikle belirleyici olmuştur. Aynı zamanda reformların sürekliliği, uluslararası sistemin ideolojik iklimine bağlıdır. II. Dünya Savaşı sonrası kurulan Liberal Uluslararası Düzen 2000'lerin başına kadar reformları teşvik ederken, 2008 krizi sonrası yükselen otoriter popülizm ve muhafazakâr değerler süreci tersine çevirmiştir. Türkiye de bu küresel eğilimin parçası olarak 2010'lardan itibaren otoriterleşmiş ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği alanındaki kazanımlar zayıflamıştır. Dolayısıyla reformların ivmesi, AB'nin olduğu kadar küresel normatif düzenin dalgalanmalarının da ürünüdür.

Üçüncü bölümünde, AB'nin toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini nasıl teşvik ettiği sistematik bir şekilde analiz edilmektedir. Bu bölüm, süreci üç temel boyutta incelemektedir: Birlik'in hukuki çerçevesi, politika araçları ve mali mekanizmaları. Her bir boyutun tarihsel gelişimi ve güncel durumu ele alınarak, AB'nin bu alandaki yaklaşımının zaman içindeki dönüşümü ortaya konulmaktadır. Böylece bu bölüm, sonraki

bölümde Türkiye örneğinin değerlendirilmesi için kavramsal ve analitik bir zemin hazırlamaktadır.

Hukuki çerçeve bağlamında, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğinin zamanla AB'nin temel bir değeri haline geldiği ortaya konmaktadır. 1957'de yalnızca eşit işe eşit ücret ilkesine dayanan dar kapsamlı bir anlayış, antlaşma reformları, ikincil mevzuatın genişlemesi ve Avrupa Adalet Divanı kararlarıyla hak temelli, çok boyutlu bir hukuk sistemine dönüşmüştür. Politika araçlar açısından ise AB, bağlayıcı olmayan stratejik belgeler, programlar ve kurumsal mekanizmalar geliştirmiştir. Çok yıllı eylem programları, Açık Koordinasyon Yöntemi (OMC) ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğinin tüm politikalara entegre edilmesi (gender mainstreaming) gibi araçlar, eşitlik ilkesini yalnızca hukuki değil, aynı zamanda idari düzeyde de hayata geçirmeyi hedeflemektedir. Mali mekanizmalar ise bu sürecin uygulanmasını desteklemiştir. Finansman programları, başlangıçta toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine özgü özel projelere odaklanmış, zamanla tüm AB fonlarına yatay bir öncelik olarak entegre edilen daha kapsamlı bir yapıya dönüşmüştür.

Bölümün devamında, AB'nin aday ülkelerde toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini aynı üç boyut üzerinden nasıl teşvik ettiği de değerlendirilmiştir. Hukuki açıdan aday ülkelerin, AB'nin toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği müktesebatına uyum sağlaması gerekmektedir. Bu kapsamda eşitlik kurumlarının kurulması ve gerekli yasal reformların hayata geçirilmesi zorunludur. Politika araçları açısından ise AB, aday ülkelerde toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini yönlendirmek ve denetlemek amacıyla çeşitli mekanizmalar geliştirmiştir. Katılım Ortaklıkları, İlerleme Raporları ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği Ülke Raporları, mevcut durumun değerlendirilmesi ve reform önceliklerinin belirlenmesine katkı sağlamaktadır. Eşleştirme (Twinning) ve TAIEX gibi teknik araçlar ise, idari kapasitenin güçlendirilmesine ve uygulama süreçlerinin desteklenmesine yardımcı olmaktadır. Mali mekanizmalar sayesinde ise Birlik, aday ülkelerde toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini somut bir şekilde desteklemektedir. Katılım Öncesi Mali Yardım Aracı (IPA) fonları bu desteğin temel aracıdır. IPA I'den IPA III'e uzanan süreçte toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, hem yatay bir öncelik olarak programların içine entegre edilmiş hem de doğrudan desteklenen bağımsız bir alan haline gelmiştir.

Dördüncü bölümde, Türkiye'de 1999'dan günümüze toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği reformlarının arkasındaki dinamikler analiz edilmektedir. İlk olarak, AB'nin hukuki çerçevesi, politika araçları ve mali mekanizmalarının Türkiye'de nasıl uygulandığı ele alınmaktadır. Ardından, reform sürecinde görülen ilerleme, yavaşlama ve gerilemenin nedenleri tartışılmaktadır. Analiz, üç boyutlu analitik çerçeve dikkate alınarak yürütülmektedir. Böylece, Türkiye'nin toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği alanındaki dönüşümünü belirleyen çok boyutlu etkenler bütüncül bir bakışla ortaya konmaktadır.

1999'dan bu yana Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği alanındaki hukuki düzenlemeler üç dönemde incelenebilir. 1999–2007 döneminde AB üyeliği stratejik hedef haline gelmiş, hem koalisyon hükümeti hem de AKP güçlü bir uyum iradesi göstermiştir. Anayasa, Medeni Kanun, İş Kanunu ve Ceza Kanunu'nda yapılan kapsamlı değişikliklerle kadın-erkek eşitliği anayasal güvence altına alınmış, uluslararası sözleşmelere üstünlük tanınmış, evlilikte eşitlik sağlanmış ve iş hayatında ayrımcılık yasaklanmıştır. Bu dönemde Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü (KSGM) güçlendirilmiş, TBMM'de kadına yönelik şiddet ve töre cinayetleri üzerine araştırma komisyonu kurulmuştur. Bununla birlikte, zinanın yeniden suç kapsamına alınmasına yönelik girişim, AB ve kadın örgütlerinin güçlü tepkisi sayesinde gündemden kaldırılmıştır. Bu durum, reform sürecinde hem AB'nin hem de kadın hareketinin belirleyici etkisini ortaya koymuştur.

2007–2011 döneminde ise Türkiye'nin AB'ye üyelik perspektifine bağlılığı giderek azalmış ve "toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği" söylemi erozyona uğramaya başlamıştır. Kadınların annelik rolü ön plana çıkarılırken, TBMM Kadın-Erkek Fırsat Eşitliği Komisyonu'nun (KEFEK) kurulması ve 2010 Anayasa değişikliğiyle pozitif ayrımcılığın güvence altına alınması gibi bazı ilerlemeler kaydedilmiştir. Ayrıca Türkiye, İstanbul Sözleşmesi'ni ilk onaylayan ülke olmuştur.

2011 sonrasında ise bu politika alanında gerileme yaşanmaya başlamıştır. Kadın hakları ve eşitlik odaklı kurumsal yapılar zayıflatılmış, muhafazakâr ve dini söylemler giderek güçlenmiştir. Kürtaj ve sezaryene yönelik sınırlayıcı politikalar, dini nikâha yasal zemin kazandıran düzenlemeler ve çocuk yaşta evlilik riskini

artıran adımlar bu dönemde gündeme gelmiştir. Bu dönemde öne çıkan olumsuz gelişmeler arasında, Kadın ve Aile Bakanlığı'nın kapatılarak yerine Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı'nın kurulması ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nden çıkılması yer almaktadır.

AB, Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini teşvik etmek için çeşitli politika araçları kullanmaktadır. Katılım Ortaklığı Belgeleri, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini öncelik alanları arasına dahil ederek uygulama, altyapı ve kapasite geliştirmeye vurgu yapmıştır. Bu belgelerde belirlenen hedefler, Ulusal Programlar aracılığıyla somutlaştırılmış; eşit muamele, sosyal güvenlik, kadın istihdamı ve şiddetle mücadele gibi alanlara odaklanılmıştır. Daha sonraki Eylem Planları ise özellikle kadınların ekonomik hayata katılımının artırılması, kurumsal kapasitenin geliştirilmesi ve kadına yönelik şiddetle mücadele konularına yoğunlaşmıştır.

İlerleme Raporları, 1998'den itibaren Türkiye'nin AB müktesebatına uyumunu düzenli olarak değerlendirmektedir. İlk yıllarda yapılan reformlar olumlu olarak kaydedilmiş, ancak uygulamadaki yetersizlikler ile şiddet, düşük istihdam ve zayıf siyasi temsil gibi kalıcı sorunlar vurgulanmıştır. 2011 sonrasında ise raporlar, özellikle gerilemeye ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nden çekilme kararına sert eleştiriler yöneltmiştir. Benzer şekilde, Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği Ülke Raporları da 2011 sonrası dönemde ilerlemenin durduğunu, yasal düzenlemelerin uygulanmadığını ve veri eksikliğinin politika geliştirmeyi zorlaştırdığını vurgulamıştır.

Aynı zamanda, Eşleştirme (Twinning) projeleri, kurumsal kapasitenin artırılmasına yönelik uzun vadeli iş birlikleri sağlamış ve bu projelerin bir kısmına toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği boyutu dâhil edilmiştir. Kısa vadeli teknik destek sağlayan TAIEX etkinlikleri ise kadın istihdamı, kayıt dışı çalışma ve şiddetle mücadele konularında seminerler ve uzman değişim programları yoluyla katkı sunmuştur.

Türkiye, 1999'da aday ülke statüsü kazandıktan sonra AB mali yardımlarından tek bir çerçeve altında yararlanmaya başlamıştır. 2002–2006 döneminde AB tarafından Türkiye'ye yaklaşık 1,3 milyar avro tutarında kaynak sağlanmış ve bu çerçevede 164 proje desteklenmiştir. IPA I (2007–2013) döneminde Türkiye'ye 4,7 milyar avro

tahsis edilmiş, kadınların eğitime ve istihdama katılımı ile kadına yönelik şiddetle mücadeleye odaklanan projeler uygulanmıştır. IPA II (2014–2020) döneminde yaklaşık 4,45 milyar avro aktarılmış ve bu süreçte toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği tüm projelere yatay bir ilke olarak ana akımlaştırılmıştır. Bu dönemde kadın istihdamının artırılması ve toplumsal cinsiyete duyarlı bütçeleme girişimleri öne çıkmıştır. Ancak ülkenin demokratik gerilemesi nedeniyle fonlarda kesilmeler yaşanmıştır. IPA III (2021–2027) döneminde ise tüm yararlanıcı ülkeler için 14,2 milyar avro performansa dayalı olarak tahsis edilmekte ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği tüm tematik alanlarda temel ilke olarak benimsenmektedir. Ancak Avrupa Parlamentosu, AB Sayıştayı ve akademik çalışmalar, AB fonlarıyla yürütülen projelerin izlenmesi ve sürdürülebilirliği konusundaki eksiklikler, düşük siyasi irade ve AB'nin sınırlı kararlılığı nedeniyle bu kaynakların kalıcı dönüşüm yaratmada sınırlı kaldığını vurgulamaktadır.

Bölümün ikinci kısmında, Türkiye'de 1999'dan günümüze toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği alanındaki gelişmeler analitik çerçevenin üç boyutu temel alınarak incelenmektedir. AB etkisini değerlendirmek için Dışsal Teşvik Modeli kullanılmıştır. Bu modele göre aday ülkelerde AB normlarının benimsenmesi, taleplerin açıklığı, teşviklerin büyüklüğü ve güvenilirliği ile reform maliyetlerinin düzeyine bağlıdır. Türkiye'nin 1999'da aday ülke ilan edilmesiyle birlikte AB'nin talepleri netleşmiş, tam üyelik perspektifi güçlü bir teşvik yaratmış ve düşük maliyetli reform ortamı sayesinde toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği alanında önemli ilerlemeler kaydedilmiştir. Ancak 2005 sonrasında müzakere sürecinde yaşanan tıkanmalar, bazı üye devletlerin Türkiye'nin üyeliğine karşı çıkışı ve Birlik'in genişleme yorgunluğu, AB'nin inandırıcılığını zayıflatmıştır. Bu dönemde reformların ivmesi yavaşlamış ve seçici Avrupalılaşma süreci başlamıştır. AKP hem AB'den teşvik elde etmek hem de kendi siyasal ajandasına uygun düşen düşük maliyetli reformları benimsemiştir. İstanbul Sözleşmesi'ne taraf olunması ya da başörtüsü yasağının kaldırılması gibi adımlar bu stratejik uyumun örnekleri arasındadır.

2011 sonrasında ise Türkiye'nin Avrupa'dan uzaklaştığı görülmektedir. AB artık siyasal ve normatif bir referans noktası olmaktan çıkmış, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine yönelik itirazlar artmış ve yerine muhafazakâr-İslami temelli alternatif kavramlar öne

çıkarılmıştır. Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'ın söylemlerinde Batı kaynaklı eşitlik anlayışı "yabancı" olarak tanımlanmış, kadının annelik rolü yüceltilmiş ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nden çekilme gibi adımlar bu süreci pekiştirmiştir. Bu dönemde hükümet, AB'yi güvenilmez ve kültürel olarak farklı bir aktör olarak sunmuş, sivil toplum ve iş çevreleri de AB normlarına daha az atıf yapmaya başlamıştır.

AB'nin Türkiye'deki toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarına etkisi erken dönemde reformların ivme kazanmasına katkı sağlamıştır. Ancak 2005 sonrasında teşviklerin etkisi azalmış, 2010'lu yıllarda ise neredeyse tamamen ortadan kalkmıştır. Buna rağmen reformların bir süre daha devam etmesi, iç dinamiklerin önemini göstermektedir. Bu bağlamda iki temel iç faktör öne çıkmaktadır: AKP'nin toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarını araçsallaştırması ve kadın hareketinin rolü.

AKP iktidarının ilk döneminde toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği reformları, demokratik bir aktör olarak meşruiyet kazanmanın aracı olmuştur. Parti, selefi İslamcı partilerin kapatılmasından ders çıkararak ılımlı bir çizgi benimsemiş; AB üyeliğini, liberal değerleri, demokrasiyi ve hukukun üstünlüğünü ön plana çıkararak hem iç hem de dış aktörler nezdinde güven kazanmıştır. Bu dönemde yapılan reformlar, AKP'ye hem demokratikleşme söylemi üzerinden etki alanını genişletme hem de uluslararası düzeyde destek toplama imkânı sağlamıştır.

Partinin ikinci iktidar döneminde ise reformlar farklı bir işleve bürünmüştür. 2007 Cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimleri sürecinde yayımlanan e-muhtıra ile Anayasa Mahkemesi'nin kararı, AKP açısından ciddi bir tehdit oluşturmuştur. Bu tehditlere karşılık AKP, 2010 anayasa referandumuyla yargı yapısında köklü değişiklikler yapmış ve bu değişiklikleri demokratikleşme söylemleriyle meşrulaştırmıştır. Bu dönemde yapılan reformlar, Parti'nin otoriterleşme eğilimlerini örtbas etme ve muhafazakâr seçmeni mobilize etme işlevi görmüştür. Kadın hakları bu dönemde seküler ve eşitlikçi bir anlayış yerine muhafazakâr-dini bir çerçeveye oturtulmuştur.

2011 sonrasında AKP, toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarını hem iktidarını pekiştirmek hem de ideolojik sınırlarını belirlemek amacıyla araçsallaştırmıştır. Kadın hakları ve eşitlik söylemleri geri plana itilmiş; bunun yerine aile merkezli, muhafazakâr ve dini

referanslı bir cinsiyet rejimi inşa edilmiştir. Neoliberal politikaların yarattığı sosyal hizmet açığı bu rejim üzerinden kapatılmaya çalışılmış, çocuk, yaşlı ve hasta bakımının "doğal" olarak kadınların sorumluluğu olduğu söylemi yaygınlaştırılmıştır. Bu durum, kadınların eğitim ve istihdam imkânlarını kısıtlamış ve görünmez emek yükünü artırmıştır. Aynı dönemde pronatalist söylem güçlenmiş; "en az üç çocuk" çağrıları, erken evliliklerin teşviki ve doğurganlığı artırmaya yönelik destekler bu anlayışın bir parçası haline gelmiştir. Kürtaj ve doğum kontrolüne getirilen sınırlamalar da aynı çerçevede değerlendirilmiştir.

Bu dini-muhafazakâr cinsiyet rejiminin kurumsallaşmasında iki aktör özellikle öne çıkmaktadır. İlki, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'dır. 2011'de kurulan Aile ve Dini Rehberlik Büroları aracılığıyla dini söylemler kadınların özel alanına taşınmış; ev ziyaretleri ve evlilik okulları gibi faaliyetlerle toplumsal cinsiyet ilişkileri dini değerler üzerinden yeniden kurgulanmıştır. İkinci aktör ise hükümete yakın kadın örgütleridir. Bu örgütler "toplumsal cinsiyet adaleti" söylemini yaygınlaştırmış, muhafazakâr kadınları mobilize etmiş ve hükümetin cinsiyet rejiminin toplumsal düzeyde yerleşmesine katkıda bulunmuştur.

Türkiye'nin toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği politikalarını şekillendiren ikinci önemli iç faktör kadın hareketi ve sivil toplum kuruluşlarıdır. Türk kadın hareketi, 1980'lerden itibaren toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği alanında önemli bir rol oynamıştır. 1999'larda ise örgütlenerek yasa yapım süreçlerinde etkili olmuş ve kürtaj hakkı, şiddetle mücadele yasaları, Medeni ve Ceza Kanunu reformları gibi kazanımlar elde etmiştir. Uluslararası kadın konferansları ve CEDAW gibi mekanizmalar da hareketin güçlenmesine katkı sağlamıştır. Ancak 2000'lerin sonlarından itibaren bağımsız kadın örgütleri politika yapım süreçlerinden giderek dışlanmıştır. Bu boşluğu hükümete yakın sivil toplum kuruluşları doldurmuştur. Devlet desteğiyle öne çıkan bu örgütler güç kazanırken, bağımsız feminist örgütlerin görünürlüğü ve etkisi azalmıştır. Gezi Parkı protestoları ve 2016 darbe girişimi sonrasında baskılar artmış, yasal ve idari düzenlemelerle sivil toplum alanı daraltılmıştır. Bağımsız STK'ların kamu fonlarına erişimi kısıtlanırken, hükümete yakın kuruluşlar büyük miktarlarda kamu desteği almaya devam etmiştir. Böylece 1980'lerden 2000'lerin ortalarına kadar reform sürecinde belirleyici bir aktör olan kadın hareketi, 2010'lardan itibaren

otoriterleşme ve muhafazakârlaşma süreciyle birlikte zayıflamış ve bağımsız sivil toplum alanı ciddi biçimde daralmıştır.

Türkiye'nin toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği politikaları, aynı zamanda uluslararası örgütler ve küresel normlar tarafından da etkilenmiştir. Toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, 1980'lerden itibaren küresel kalkınma ve insan hakları gündeminin merkezine yerleşmiş ve küresel bir toplumsal cinsiyet rejimi ortaya çıkmıştır. Birleşmiş Milletler sistemi, bu rejimin kurumsallaşmasında belirleyici bir rol oynamıştır. BM'nin düzenlediği Dünya Kadın Konferansları devlet temsilcileri, sivil toplum aktörleri ve kadın örgütlerini bir araya getirerek uluslararası normların oluşmasına katkıda bulunmuştur. CEDAW ve Pekin Eylem Platformu gibi dönüm noktası niteliğindeki belgeler kadın haklarını küresel insan hakları rejiminin ayrılmaz bir parçası haline getirmiştir. Türkiye, 1985'te CEDAW'ı bazı çekincelerle onaylamış, 1990'larda ise anayasa ve ceza kanunundaki değişiklikler ile Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü'nün kurulması gibi adımları hayata geçirmiştir. Pekin Konferansı'nda ise, CEDAW'a koyduğu çekinceleri kaldırmayı taahhüt etmiş ve Medeni Kanun gibi temel yasalarda değişiklikleri gündeme almıştır. Bu süreç, kadın hareketini güçlendirmiş ve 2000'li yılların başındaki olumlu gelişmelere zemin hazırlamıştır.

2010'lu yıllardan itibaren ise Türkiye, Liberal Uluslararası Düzen'den ve onun bir parçası olan küresel toplumsal cinsiyet rejiminden uzaklaşmaya başlamıştır. Literatürde bu dönüşüm, dünya genelinde yükselen popülist ve otoriter eğilimlerle ilişkilendirilmektedir. Türkiye'nin Batı'dan uzaklaşması, literatürde üç sebebe dayandırılmaktadır: AB üyelik sürecinin tıkanması, çeşitli krizler sebebiyle Türkiye'nin Batı nezdinde güvenilirliğinin zayıflaması ve 2016'daki darbe girişimi sonrası yaşanan kopuş.

Uluslararası kuruluşlar da Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini desteklemektedir. BM ajansları, ILO ve Dünya Bankası gibi aktörler, kadınların istihdama katılımını artırmaya, karar alma süreçlerine dahil olmalarını sağlamaya ve adalete erişimlerini güçlendirmeye yönelik çalışmalar yürütmektedir. Ancak bu çabalar, kurumsal sahiplenme eksikliği, yerel kapasite yetersizliği ve bağımsız kadın örgütlerinin sürece yeterince dahil edilmemesi nedeniyle uzun vadede kalıcı bir dönüşüm

yaratamamıştır. Bu durum, dış desteğin ancak yerel aktörlerle güçlü iş birliği ve ulusal kurumların aktif katılımıyla sürdürülebilir hale gelebileceğini göstermektedir.

Tezin beşinci ve son bölümünde çalışmanın temel bulguları özetlenmekte ve araştırma sorularına yanıt verilmektedir. Bulgular, Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği reformlarının seyrinin tek bir faktörle açıklanamayacağını ortaya koymaktadır. Reformların yönünü, Avrupa Birliği'nin teşvik kapasitesi, iktidar partilerinin ideolojik ve stratejik tercihleri, kadın hareketi ve sivil toplumun gücü ile uluslararası normatif iklimin etkileşimi belirlemiştir. Bu etkileşim, 1999–2005 döneminde kapsamlı reformların önünü açarken, 2005 sonrasında seçici uyum, 2010'lu yıllardan itibaren ise geri dönüş dinamiklerini beraberinde getirmiştir. Çalışma ayrıca, Avrupalılaşma yaklaşımının süreci anlamada kritik bir boyut sunduğunu ancak tek başına yeterli olmadığını göstermiştir.

Türkiye örneği, reformların seyrini açıklamada AB etkisinin yerel siyasal irade ve küresel bağlamla kesiştiği ölçüde anlamlı olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu yönüyle tez, AB'nin normatif gücünün koşullu niteliğini açığa çıkarmakta ve reformların çok boyutlu dinamiklerle belirlendiğini göstermektedir.

Literatüre katkı bakımından çalışma, (1) Avrupalılaşma/de-Avrupalılaşma tartışmalarını iç faktörler ve küresel normatif iklimle birleştiren bütüncül bir çerçeve önermekte, (2) toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarının ideolojik boyutunu kadın hareketi, muhafazakâr dönüşüm ve hükümete yakın kadın örgütleri üzerinden görünür kılmakta, (3) Türkiye örneğini küresel otoriterleşme dalgası ve Liberal Uluslararası Düzen'in zayıflamasıyla ilişkilendirerek ulusal bir vakayı küresel tartışmalara bağlamaktadır.

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Soyadı / Surname : KAYA
Adı / Name : NERGİS NİL
Bölümü / Department : Avrupa Çalışmaları / European Studies

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