



WORKING GROUP B

AN ASSESSMENT OF EUROPE'S CATALYST ROLE, EAST AND SOUTH

## Turkey, 1987-2002: European impact on Turkey's politics

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The Helsinki Summit of the European Council in 1999 marked a turning point in Turkey-European Union relations. Establishing Turkey's candidate status, the Summit placed the country within the stream of 'conditionality-compliance' principles. The political reforms Turkey made to meet the Copenhagen criteria (1993) for accession gained significant momentum following the Summit. As a result of this, in the recent literature on Turkey-EU relations there has been a general tendency to emphasize the role of European conditionality to explain the recent political changes in Turkey. However, this ignores the fact that there was a gradual political transformation already taking place in Turkey over previous years, reflecting societal pressure for political change. In fact, the 'conditionality' argument seriously undervalues the progressive democratization already taking place in Turkey. Such misplaced emphasis could endanger the fragile reforms, through downgrading the role of domestic actors and their capability of engineering political change, the possibility of elite socialization with European values and the internalization of reforms in Turkey. This article aims to develop a critical explanation of the impact of the EU on Turkey's politics between 1987 and 2002. With a framework based on Moravcsiks' writings on the European human rights regime and Risse's theory on communicative action in world politics, it will be argued that the main dynamics driving recent democratization in Turkey were its newfound location within the European human rights regime - a result of having granted the right of individual petition to European Court of Human Rights, just before its 1987 membership application - and the increasing power of European argument as an alternative way of resolving domestic political conflicts. Actually the EU pressures in the post-Helsinki period were coupled with the domestic (societal) demands of political change and elite socialization under the transnational pressures arising from commitments to international legal structures. Finally, the crisis of the Turkish state that resulted from corrupt party politics, a situation almost akin to civil-war in the southeast, a disastrous earthquake in 1999 and the economic crisis of 2001 brought the groundbreaking reforms of August 2002, including the abolition of the death penalty, extension of the rights over religious property of the non-Muslim minorities (Greeks, Armenians and Jews) and rights of broadcasting in languages other than Turkish – particularly referring to regional dialects and the Kurdish language.