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**Oksana MEMISH**

*PhD (History), Senior Lecturer of the Department of Archeology and Special Branches of Historical, Bohdan Khmelnytsky National University of Cherkasy, 81 Shevchenko Boulevard, Cherkasy, Ukraine, postal code 18031 (okcana\_82@ukr.net)*

**ORCID:** 0000-0003-1838-4877

**Researcher ID:** HTP-7814-2023

**Scopus-Author ID:** 57716443800

**Andii KASIAN**

*PhD (History), Senior Lecturer of the Department of Archeology and Special Branches of Historical, Bohdan Khmelnytsky National University of Cherkasy, 81 Shevchenko Boulevard, Cherkasy, Ukraine, postal code 18031, (kasyan\_andriy@ukr.net)*

**ORCID:** 0000-0002-8073-7138

**Researcher ID:** ITV-1752-2023

**Оксана МЕМІШ**

*кандидатка історичних наук, старша викладачка кафедри археології та спеціальних галузей історичної науки Черкаського національного університету імені Богдана Хмельницького, бульвар Шевченка, 81, м. Черкаси, Україна, індекс 18031 (okcana\_82@ukr.net)*

**Андрій КАСЯН**

*кандидат історичних наук, старший викладач кафедри археології та спеціальних галузей історичної науки Черкаського національного університету імені Богдана Хмельницького, бульвар Шевченка, 81, м. Черкаси, Україна, індекс 18031 (kasyan\_andriy@ukr.net)*

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**POLICY OF TURKEY ON "THE KURDISH ISSUE" SETTLEMENT  
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COPENHAGEN CRITERIA ENFORCEMENT  
(THE END OF THE 20th – THE BEGINNING OF THE 21st CENTURY)**

**Abstract.** *In the article there has been analyzed the main stages of the European integration process in Turkey, the evolution of Turkey in the issue of compliance with the Copenhagen criteria, as well as the main measures taken by the Turkish government regarding the Copenhagen criteria implementation in order to obtain a full membership in the EU from the end of the 1990s to the 2000s. The purpose of the research is to analyze the attempts made by the leadership of Turkey in order to settle "the Kurdish issue" in the context of the Copenhagen criteria implementation, which became an effective alternative to the traditional force scenario to its solution. Economic and legal criteria were key in this context. Since the 1990s and until nowadays, the Turkish government has implemented a number of economic,*

political and social projects aimed at solving “the Kurdish issue” by integrating the residents of South-Eastern Anatolia into the Turkish society successfully, as well as overcoming uneven social economic development of the Turkish regions. **The methodology of the research** is based on the principles of historicism, scientificity, an interdisciplinary principle, a valuable approach and the use of general scientific (analysis, synthesis and generalization) methods.

As a result of the scientific analysis carried out with involvement of numerous original sources, the authors came to the following **conclusion**: taking into account the experience of reforms in the 2000s – 2010s, it became obvious that in the case of continuation of Turkey’s European integration aspirations, “the Kurdish issue” could be solved only in a long term by increasing the level of well-being and education among the population of South-Eastern Anatolia, creating a developed network of health care institutions, modern infrastructure of the region, ensuring a real access of population to the work of local authorities, forming a law enforcement system that would function on the basis of the principles of a social justice and equality of all before the law.

**Key words:** Turkey, European Union (EU), European Economic Community (EEC), European integration, Copenhagen criteria, “the Kurdish issue”, South-eastern Anatolia, Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), South-eastern Anatolia Project (Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi, GAP).

### ПОЛІТИКА ТУРЕЧЧИНИ ЩОДО ВРЕГУЛЮВАННЯ “КУРДСЬКОГО ПИТАННЯ” У КОНТЕКСТІ ВИКОНАННЯ КОПЕНГАГЕНСЬКИХ КРИТЕРІЇВ (КІНЕЦЬ ХХ – ПОЧАТОК ХХІ ст.)

**Анотація.** У статті проаналізовано основні етапи євроінтеграційного процесу в Туреччині, еволюцію Туреччини у питанні відповідності Копенгагенським критеріям, а також основні заходи турецького уряду щодо виконання Копенгагенських критеріїв для здобуття повноправного членства в ЄС з кінця 1990-х – у 2000-х рр. **Метою наших пошуків** є дослідити спроби врегулювання керівництвом Туреччини “курдського питання” у контексті виконання Копенгагенських критеріїв, які стали дієвою альтернативою традиційному силовому сценарію його розв’язання. Ключовими в цьому контексті виступають економічні та правові критерії. З 1990-х рр. і дотепер турецьким урядом втілюється у життя низка економічних, політичних і соціальних проєктів, що мають на меті розв’язання “курдського питання” шляхом успішної інтеграції жителів Південно-Східної Анатолії до турецького соціуму, а також подолання нерівномірного соціально-економічного розвитку регіонів країни. **Методологічною основою** дослідження є принципи історизму, науковості, міждисциплінарності, ціннісний підхід та використання загальнонаукових (аналізу, синтезу й узагальнення) методів.

У результаті проведення наукового аналізу, здійсненого із залученням численних оригінальних джерел автори дійшли таких **висновків**: з урахуванням досвіду проведення реформ 2000 – 2010-х рр. стає очевидно, що в разі продовження євроінтеграційних устремлень Туреччини курдське питання можна розв’язати лише у довгостроковій перспективі шляхом підвищення рівня добробуту та освіти серед населення Південно-Східної Анатолії, створення розвиненої мережі закладів охорони здоров’я, сучасної інфраструктури регіону, забезпечення реального доступу населення до роботи органів місцевої влади, формування правоохоронної системи, яка б функціонувала на основі принципів соціальної справедливості та рівності всіх перед законом.

**Ключові слова:** Туреччина, Європейський союз (ЄС), Європейське економічне співтовариство (ЄЕС), євроінтеграція, Копенгагенські критерії, “курдське питання”, Південно-Східна Анатолія, Робітнича партія Курдистану (РПК), Проєкт Південно-Східної Анатолії (Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi, GAP).

**The Problem Statement.** Due to activation of Turkey’s European integration aspirations, the “Kurdish issue” actualized naturally, which was closely related to the political, legal, socio-economic and cultural situation of the Kurdish population in the country. In the 1990s the force scenario for solving this issue proved to be ineffective, caused significant public condemnation of the world community and turned out to be unacceptable in the context of the Copenhagen criteria implementation for EU membership.

Nowadays despite obvious success of the reforms and a certain liberalization of the government's policy regarding a civilized settlement of the "Kurdish issue" based on democratic principles, Turkey has not been accepted into the European Union yet. Hence, in spite of Turkey's desire to join the EU, which the country expressed since the above-mentioned organization emerged; the unresolved "Kurdish issue" in its final form carries on hampering the European integration process.

**The Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.** The issue of Turkey's integration into the European Union, as well as the reforms carried out by the Turkish government along this path, was the subject of a scientific interest among political scholars, historians, economists, sociologists and cultural scholars for a long time. The analysis of the entire array of recent publications on this issue gave reason to single out the following groups among them: 1) the Western European and North American group (Faucompret E., Konings J., 2010; Rumford C., 1999); 2) the Turkish group (Terdemir O; Toktas, Aras, 2010; Yildiz, 2005; Yildiz, 2012; Yilmaz, Soyaltin, 2014); 3) the Russian group (Gadzhiev, 2007; Gadzhiev, 2009; Kudriashova, 2004; Kudriashova, 2006; Kudriashova, 2010; Kunakov, 1999; Mamedova, 2017); 4) the Arabic historiography of the issue (Al'-Azavi Khaider, 2014).

The above-mentioned articles were singled out by the authors from a very large array of foreign publications as those that reflect the research problem the most objectively.

There should be mentioned publications of domestic scholars on this issue (Volchok, 2007; Yermakova, 2018; Kovalenko, 2013; Mkhytarian, 2005; Chubrykova, 2013).

At the same time, it should be noted that there is less focus on scientific study of modern Turkey problems in this country, including the experience of implementing the European integration project.

In scientific works analysis and tonality on Turkey's European integration aspirations testify to a dichotomous division into "optimists" and "skeptics" regarding the possibility of Turkey's real accession to the EU. The same polarity is inherent in the analysis of measures taken by the Turkish authorities regarding the Copenhagen criteria implementation and the "Kurdish issue" settlement.

**The purpose of the research** is to analyze the attempts made by the leadership of Turkey in order to settle the "Kurdish issue" in the context of the Copenhagen criteria implementation, which became an effective alternative to a traditional force scenario for its solution. Economic and legal criteria were key in this context. Since the 1990s and until nowadays, the Turkish government implemented diverse economic, political and social projects aimed at solving the "Kurdish issue" by integrating the residents of South-Eastern Anatolia into the Turkish society successfully, as well as overcoming uneven social economic development of the country's regions.

**The Results of the Research.** An active course of Europeanization and Westernization of Turkey began after the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923. In contrast to the Ottoman Empire, the approach of the Republic of Turkey leadership to the "Kurdish issue" settlement for a long time was based not on the principles of Islam, but on secularism and nationalism.

A new impetus of the European aspiration of the Republic of Turkey was received after World War II, due to the support by the United States largely. In February of 1952, after the accession of Turkey to NATO, the country began to be considered as a counterweight to the USSR on the southern flank of the North Atlantic Alliance. Hence, it is quite logical that in

addition to a close military cooperation, the issue of a further intensive integration of Turkey into the European economic and cultural space appeared on the agenda. For the first time, the Republic of Turkey applied for membership in the European Economic Community (EEC) on July 31, 1959, although the military coup of the following year was a drawback concerning taking practical steps to realize Turkey's European integration aspirations. In this regard, the applications for Associate Membership were submitted again in 1961 and 1962. During the negotiations, the parties discussed the terms of the Association Agreement comprehensively, which was signed in September of 1963. The Agreement defined the goals of the association, the form of interaction between the participants and the main stages of Turkey's integration into the EU.

Turkey applied for a full membership in the EU in 1987. In June of 1993 the EU Summit in Copenhagen became a new milestone in the relations between the EU and the Republic of Turkey, as a number of EU membership criteria adopted at the meeting were put forward to official Ankara. In addition to the point on a developed market economy, there were also political criteria that required candidate countries to achieve stable democracy, to observe human rights, to respect the rule of law, and protect the national minorities rights.

In fact, the Treaty on the European Union stipulates only two criteria for membership in the Union directly. Hence, the state applying for membership must be European (a geographic criterion) and respect and adhere to the values on which the EU is based (a political criterion). However, according to Art. 49 of the Treaty, the European Council may extend or add new terms of membership. Hence, the additional membership criteria were formulated at the meetings of the European Council in the 1990s in order to select the most "worthy" candidates for joining the Union, compliance with which should indicate the state's ability to fulfill the duties of EU member state. First of all, it was about the so-called "Copenhagen membership criteria", which were adopted by the European Council in Copenhagen in June of 1993 for candidate states from Central and Eastern Europe:

- stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect and protection of the minorities (a political criterion);
- presence of a functioning market economy, as well as the ability to withstand a competitive pressure and market forces within the EU (an economic criterion);
- ability to commit to membership, including commitment to objectives of a political, economic and monetary union (a legal criterion).

In addition, EU membership requires that candidate states achieve stability of institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect and protection of the minorities, existence of a functioning market economy, as well as ability to cope with competitive pressures of market economy within the Union (Legal questions of enlargement of the European Union).

In this context, it should be emphasized that the "Kurdish issue", known in the European community, became a serious obstacle on the way of Turkey's accession to the EU.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, the European Parliament repeatedly criticized the Turkish government for ignoring the "Kurdish issue", and in some cases even introduced sanctions in response to the bloodshed committed during attempts to resolve this conflict by force. After all, most often the EU representatives appeal to the "Kurdish issue" in cases when the insufficient level of a democratic development in Turkey is discussed (Tekdemir, 2019, pp. 876–900).

The population of South-East Anatolia welcomed Turkey's European integration aspirations mostly. K. Yildiz's point of view is that for this region the pro-European reforms

would bring social peace due to the political settlement of the "Kurdish issue". At the same time, ignoring this vital aspect could lead to the fact that many of the expected benefits of the EU membership for Turkey would be lost (Yildiz, 2005, p. 28).

According to Yu. Kudriashova, in the short term the EU's demands for the "Kurdish issue" settlement were reduced to "removing all legal obstacles that prohibit the Turkish citizens from using their native language on television and radio". The problem is that there was no concept of the "minority" in relation to any ethnic group in the Turkish constitution. However, under the international community influence and awareness of the need to recognize reality, society and government institutions understood the need for reforms in this important area gradually (Kudriashova, 2010, p. 116). In this regard, through compilation of relevant legal norms of the EU countries, the minimum limits of granting relevant rights to the national minorities in Turkey were ensured.

Turkey made significant progress in the direction of the Copenhagen criteria implementation in 2001, when the Turkish deputies by an overwhelming majority of votes introduced 34 amendments to the Constitution, including a significant limitation of the death penalty (this type of punishment remains valid only in cases of treason and participation in terrorism); the right to radio broadcasting in the languages of the national minorities is guaranteed; restrictions on the activities of parties and trade unions were eliminated; the equality of men and women is enshrined in civil law; the laws of the military dictatorship could be challenged in court. In addition, a resolution of the Turkish Parliament allowed a native language as a language of instruction at schools, as well as radio and television broadcasting in a native language, in particular: Kurdish, Armenian, Greek and Hebrew, in places where the minority ethnic communities live compactly.

The population of Southeastern Anatolia achieved additional freedoms gradually: in 2002, the right to use the Kurdish language when communicating in public places, legalization of their own printed publications, the lifting of the ban on TV and radio broadcasts in the Kurdish language, permission to study the Kurdish language, but in private schools only. In 2004, private Kurdish language courses were conducted in Istanbul and the cities of Southeast Anatolia. In January of 2009, the first state-run Kurdish TV channel began broadcasting. The Turkish government expects that it will be able to attract a significant percentage of the audience of private Kurdish TV channels financed, in particular, by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which promote the creation of an independent Kurdish state. It should be noted a fairly high level of freedom of the local Kurdish television, which broadcasts, in particular, rallies in the south-east of the country, participants of which demand independence openly (Kudriashova, 2010, pp. 127–128).

Along with expanding the rights of the Turkish Kurds in the field of education and culture, the changes affected electoral process and access of the Kurdish population to participate in a domestic political life of Turkey. Hence, in 2007 25 of 27 Parliamentarians, who entered the Grand National Assembly without party lists were the ethnic Kurds, who were previously barred from being elected to the Turkish Parliament (Yilmaz, Soyaltin, 2014, pp. 11–29).

In this context, it should be noted that owing to vigorous reforms of the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP), the majority of the Turkish Kurds are quite loyal to the country's official authorities.

Hence, in the 2000s, the Turkish government, in the context of the Copenhagen criteria implementation, as well as with the aim of finding tools for the "Kurdish issue" peaceful settlement, formed the foundations of a legal framework that would provide guarantees for

the development of Kurdish culture, as well as access of the Kurdish population to participate in the political life of Turkey.

As a result, in the early 2010s, in Turkey there was decline in escalation of the Kurdish terrorism. This is due not only to the democratic transformations of the 2000s, but also to the coming to power of moderate Islamists, who enjoy the support of a significant percentage of the Kurdish electorate. In the early 2010s, the government adopted a compensation programme for those, who suffered as a result of the actions of special services during the campaign to defeat the PKK (Yildiz, 2012, pp. 151–174).

In the “Kurdish issue” there is a chief focus in the context of the socio-economic component implementation of the Copenhagen criteria.

First of all, it should be noted that in the 1990s – 2000s, the budgets of the provinces inhabited by the Kurds, in particular Southeastern Anatolia, were the most deficient among all provincial budgets in Turkey. The above-mentioned region has been the most economically backward until recently. The Turkish government shifted responsibility for a depressed state of the economy in the Kurdish areas to the PKK for a long time, which, based on the official point of view, had a destructive effect on the region’s economy functioning. Hence, the main goal of South-east Anatolia administration was the formation of a solvent middle class.

An unstable political situation and a related lack of investment resources in the Kurdish areas hindered their industrial development for a long time. During the period of the 1960s – 1990s, the infrastructure in South-east Anatolia was poorly developed, which did not allow creating enough jobs. The industrial backwardness of the Kurdish regions of Turkey encouraged reproduction of traditional structures of the Kurdish society, which in turn hindered ethnic assimilation. The main economic problems in the provinces inhabited by the Kurds were a lack of investment, inadequate governance by the central government, and high unemployment in the last third of the 20th century. The average unemployment rate in the Kurdish-inhabited provinces reached almost 20%, and more than half of the employed population was engaged in seasonal work. In the Kurdish provinces irrigation of agricultural lands was often carried out without consideration of local population interests, primarily among its vulnerable strata, as a result of which it was deprived of profitable agriculture. It is also worth noting that under the conditions of a general electricity balance of Turkey, existing volumes of generated electricity were redistributed, first of all, in favour of the industrialized west of Turkey. A difficult economic situation, lack of an adequate number of jobs, consequences of armed conflicts that did not subsided for decades were the main reasons for the migration of the population from the Kurdish provinces. Deprived of their means of livelihood, the Kurds headed for big cities and even foreign countries. The Kurdish migrants, accustomed, as a rule, to a traditional economy and not adapted to life in cities, faced the threat of marginalization and lumpenization.

In the context of solving the problem of eliminating these crisis phenomena, one of the most effective non-force tools for solving the “Kurdish issue” in the context of fulfilling the economic component of the Copenhagen criteria was the Southeastern Anatolia Project implementation (Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi, GAP), which is a multi-sectoral integrated regional a development project based on the concept of sustainable development of the southeastern region of Turkey. In the 1990s – 2010s, through the implementation of the GAP, it was possible to reduce disparities significantly in the socio-economic development of the regions of Turkey by increasing the income and living standards of South-eastern Anatolia residents (Bölge Kalkınma İdaresi Başkanlığı).

It should be noted that GAP is based on the philosophy of a sustainable development of a human potential, which is aimed at creating conditions for a comfortable existence and development of future generations according to the Copenhagen criteria implementation. The components of this strategy are balanced economic development, environmental protection, job creation and infrastructure development.

The socio-economic effect of GAP at the expense of large-scale hydropower works of irrigation of hundreds of thousands of hectares of formerly desert, but nowadays fertile lands, manifested itself in the fact that: 1) the project made it possible to overcome the economic disparity between different regions of Turkey and achieve a social balance; 2) in South-Eastern Anatolia the investment climate improved significantly, in particular, ensuring the influx of investments from member countries and EU institutions; 3) the project ensured the creation of more than 3 million new jobs and improved the level of material well-being of the population of South-east Anatolia – in the past one of the most economically poor and politically unstable regions of the country; 4) the project, due to the economic and political stabilization of the region, contributed to establishing a dialogue between the Turkish government and the Kurdish population; 5) GAP strengthened Turkey's potential to become the "granary of the Middle East" and, in the future, the "granary of the EU".

The Turkish government carried out a number of reforms during the 2000s – 2010s in the context of the legal component of the Copenhagen criteria, in particular in the field of the national minorities' rights protection. Thus, in 2001, there were developed amendments to the Constitution of Turkey, as well as the so-called nine "harmonization packages", one of which for the first time established the existence of the Kurds as an ethnic minority at the legislative level. As a result, there were allowed television and radio broadcasts in the Kurdish language, as well as the Kurdish language as a language of instruction at private schools (Memedova, 2017, p. 205). The reform of basic secondary education ensured a significant reduction in the illiteracy rate among residents of South-eastern Anatolia over 15 years of age from 12,4 to 4,7% during the period of 2008 – 2019. However, the problem of education among women is still not fully resolved. Health care reform made health care more accessible to much of the Kurdish community, and the infant mortality rate fell from 42% (2000) to 12,9% (2019) (European Commission Turkey 2013 Progress Report). The reform of the law enforcement system led to the police powers limitation when arresting criminals, the procedure simplification for investigating cases related to corruption, reduction of the number of military members of the National Security Council, introduction of numerous changes to the penal code and anti-terrorist legislation. The European community especially welcomed the abolition of the death penalty in Turkey, in October of 2005. There were also introduced mitigating amendments to the Civil Code and the Law "On the Press", the equality of men and women was officially declared, the state of emergency was cancelled in the south-eastern regions of the country, the supremacy of international law was declared, measures were taken to prevent the torture of prisoners (Memedova, 2017, p. 205).

The Turkish government faced with a low level of private investment issue, allocated significant budget funds for the economic development of South-east Anatolia during the period of 2006 – 2013. At the same time, there was focus on the development of transport network in the provinces with a significant share of the Kurdish population. The Turkish government declared such regions as open economic zones, hence, pursued the goal of attracting more foreign capital to the regions.

In the 2000s a characteristic feature of the Turkish government's policy was attempts to form an opinion in the country about the need for democratic coexistence of different

ethnic groups with their nationalist views, as well as a more tolerant attitude towards different political views and aspirations. Along with the lifting of the state of emergency in all South-Eastern provinces since 2004, the country held seminars and training programmes for the officials of state and judicial institutions, internal security agencies on issues of democratization and ensuring human rights both throughout the country and specifically in the South-East the region.

It should be noted that since 1998, the European Commission has been publishing annual reports on Turkey's development, noting the country's progress on the way to the Copenhagen criteria implementation. Taking everything into account, it should be noted that Turkey has been implementing large-scale internal reforms aimed at bringing its socio-economic indicators, legislation and everyday practice into compliance with EU criteria and norms since the 1990s. In the South-Eastern provinces significant socio-economic and political transformations contribute to the formation of a civil society foundations, overcoming the Kurdish separatism and Islamic radicalism in their various manifestations.

The European Commission decided on Turkey's compliance with the Copenhagen political criteria back in the fall of 2004. The Head of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, said the following: "The European Commission believes that Turkey meets the political criteria sufficiently and recommends the start of negotiations on its admission to the European Union" (Address given by Romano Prodi, 2004). On December 17, 2004, at the meeting in Brussels, EU heads of state and government decided to start negotiations on Turkey's accession to the EU, which were to start on October 3, 2005, and also recommended the European Commission to prepare "Framework for Negotiations with Turkey" (European Commission, 2004).

K. Yildiz came to a positive conclusion after analysing the measures taken by the Turkish government to settle the Kurdish issue during the period of 2004 – 2005 and stated the following: "whatever the motivation of the reform process in Turkey, including the minimum package of reforms implementation dictated by the EU, Turkey in a very short time has implemented a series of noteworthy reforms: certain, though not exhaustive, improvements have been made in the field of human rights; the law enforcement system has been reformed, and the ban on broadcasting and teaching in the Kurdish language, at least formally, has been lifted" (Yildiz, 2005, p. 33).

The report of the Independent Commission "Turkey in Europe" (2009) also gave a generally positive assessment of measures to resolve the "Kurdish issue" in the context of the Copenhagen criteria. The independent commission noted the easing of restrictions on the Kurdish culture expression, the opening of several private Kurdish language centres in Turkey, the possibility of placing inscriptions in the Kurdish language in public places freely, etc. The commission stated the following: "The Kurdish language bumper stickers, music, publications, holidays, Kurdish radio and television – all this first became legal, then tolerated, and then universally accepted. The government started the implementation of the World Bank's poverty reduction programme successfully. These positive developments are not always noticed or appreciated in Europe" (Turkey in Europe, 2009, pp. 22–23).

In the early 2010s, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) initiated the "Çözüm süreci" ("The Resolution Process"), which was an extension of the dialogue with the Kurdish public representatives. In a TV interview R. Erdoğan even stated that the government was ready for a dialogue with the imprisoned PKK leader A. Öcalan at the end of 2012. In 2014, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey adopted the Law on Combating Terrorism and

Strengthening Social Integration ("Terörün Sona Erdirilmesi ve Toplumsal Bütünleşmenin Güçlendirilmesine Dair Kanun"). The law defined a number of steps in the political, legal, socio-economic, psychological, cultural and security spheres with the aim of easing the socio-political tension in South-Eastern Anatolia and countering the terrorist activities of the PKK (Terörün Sona Erdirilmesi, 2014).

One of the most urgent issues that EU representatives focused on in the context of Turkey's compliance with the requirements of the Copenhagen criteria was participation of the Kurdish population representatives in the political life of Turkey. The establishment of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party in 2012, (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP), which received the support of 13,12% of voters in the June of 2015 elections, that for the first time in the history of Turkey led to the entry of its representatives to the coalition government, was also evidence of positive developments in the early 2010s regarding the Kurdish issue resolution. Therefore, the People's Democratic Party received 80 seats in Parliament, and according to the results of the extraordinary elections held in November of the same year, the party won 59 seats out of 550 (Kurdish political representation, 2021).

According to O. Chubrykova, the EU analysis presented in the 2009 – 2013 annual Report on progress towards the EU standards were balanced sufficiently. Hence, numerous steps taken by the Turkish government were noted, in particular, the adoption of the fourth package of laws on the reform of judicial sphere, beginning of the process aimed at solving the "Kurdish issue" and the terrorism issue in the country, as well as the beginning of the ombudsman institute functioning and implementation of the national body on human rights issues. The initiative to implement the so-called "democratization package" announced at the end of September of 2013 was approved. At the same time, there was recorded a critical attitude towards the events around Taksim Square. The Report contained a call for speeding up the implementation of reforms designed to improve the situation with the provision of basic freedoms and promote more active involvement of all groups of society in a political life. In addition, the Report recognized Turkey as an efficient market economy, a crucial part of the EU's competitiveness, and at the same time emphasized its vulnerabilities, in particular, a significant deficit in payments balance. Progress in adapting legislation in the areas of free movement of goods, financial services, energy, and regional policy was emphasized (Chubrykova, 2013, p. 46).

Turkey is not a full member of the European Union for the time being. Relations between Turkey and the EU are the subject of wide discussion in international expert and scientific circles. Mostly the experts consider the current state of relations between Turkey and the EU, focusing on forecasts regarding the probability of Turkey's accession to the European Union. The progress of negotiation process and implementation of reforms, as well as cultural, religious and political reasons, which are the pitfalls for Turkey's advancement to the EU are explained in detail.

Analyzing the current circumstances, factors and obstacles on the way to joining the EU for Turkey, we should single out the following directions:

- the Republic of Cyprus recognition issue;
- instability of democratic institutions in terms of guaranteeing and protecting human rights and freedoms;
- a complex of religious issues (among the EU countries, there are significant fears about the possible strengthening of the influence of Islamist ideology after the adoption of Turkey);

- the issue of the foundations of traditional Turkish culture compliance with the principles of a new European identity;
- the issue of a territorial delimitation with Greece in the Aegean Sea;
- the 2016 coup attempt and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's reaction to it.

It should be noted that Turkey has not joined the fundamental agreements and programmes operating in the EU yet, namely the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter of Regional languages or minority languages among the controversial aspects of the “Kurdish issue” settlement in the context of the Copenhagen criteria implementation. However, it should be noted that since the 2000s, the Turkish government carried out some reforms in this direction. Thus, at the beginning of October of 2001, amendments were made to Article 34 of the Constitution, which granted the right to radio broadcasting in the languages of national minorities, by the majority vote of Parliament members. Although the corresponding provision was adopted with a caveat: “The right to use any language may be limited to protect the national security and public order” (Kudriashova, 2004, p. 127).

It should be noted that the Turkish government made attempts to delay the solution of the “Kurdish issue” at first. An eloquent evidence of this is the fact that in 1995, the EU directly linked the issue of Turkey's European integration with the Turkish government's adoption of measures for the political settlement of the “Kurdish issue”, but the Turkish authorities officially recognized the fact of the existence of such an issue in the country in 2005 only.

Haider Adil Kadim Al-Azavi noted rightly that the relations of the Republic of Turkey with the European Union are an important component of Ankara's regional policy in Europe. However, along this path, Turkey's aspirations to ensure sustainable economic development and political stability collide with the demands of Brussels and fears of ordinary Europeans. Turkey remains “alien” for a large part of Europeans – due to subjective and objective factors. Turkey needs to overcome the barrier of negative stereotypes and fears that originate almost from the time of the capture of Constantinople by Ottoman troops in 1453. After all, Western European and Turkic (or in a broader sense, Islamic) culture are significantly different from a civilizational point of view (Al-Azavi Khaider Adil Kadim, 2014).

**The Conclusion.** Thus, attempts by the leadership of Turkey to settle the “Kurdish issue” in the context of the Copenhagen criteria implementation are an effective alternative to the scenario of its solution by force. From the 1990s until present days, the Turkish government implemented diverse economic, political and social projects aimed at solving the “Kurdish issue” by integrating the residents of South-Eastern Anatolia into Turkish society successfully, as well as overcoming uneven socio-economic development of the country's regions. A crucial step on the way to a social and legal development of the South-eastern region was the loosening of restrictions on the activities of parties and trade unions, as well as establishment of equality between men and women in civil legal relations. The new Civil Code, taking into account the recommendations of the EU, expands the boundaries of freedom of thought, speech, press and peaceful assembly; strengthens measures to prevent torture, defines effective means to prevent violations of human rights by state authorities.

Taking into account the experience of the reforms of the 2000s – 2010s, it becomes obvious that in the context of Turkey's European integration aspirations, the “Kurdish issue” could be solved only in the long term by increasing the level of well-being and education among the population of Southeast Anatolia, creating a developed network of security institutions health, modern infrastructure of the region, provision of a real access of population to local

authorities work, formation of a law enforcement system that would function on the basis of principles of a social justice and equality of all before the law.

A significant positive experience of implementing these tasks, analyzed above, gives reason to express a positive statement that despite all their complexity, in the final case they will be successfully solved.

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