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Migration as a Leverage Tool in International Relations: Turkey as a Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Immigration, foreign policy and international relations have become embedded fields of study over the last few decades. There is a growing stream of research stressing how foreign policy impacts international migration, and how past migration flows impact foreign policy. This article reveals how the Justice and Development Party government in Turkey has leveraged migration as a tool in international relations. Based on the application of the findings of three different Horizon 2020 research projects, this article will depict the ways in which various domestic and international political drivers have so far impacted Turkey's migration policy and relationship with the EU.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Migration Diplomacy, Benevolence, Populism, Ottomanism

Uluslararası İlişkilerde Bir Kaldıraç Unsuru Olarak Göç: Türkiye Örneği

ÖZET

Göç, dış politika ve uluslararası ilişkiler, son birkaç on yılda yerleşik çalışma alanları haline geldi. Dış politikanın uluslararası göçü nasıl etkilediğini ve geçmiş göç akımlarının dış politikayı nasıl etkilediğini vurgulayan araştırmaların sayısı giderek artıyor. Bu makale, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi hükümetinin göçü uluslararası ilişkilerde bir kaldıraç olarak nasıl araçsallaştırdığını ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Üç farklı Horizon 2020 araştırma projesinin bulgularından yararlanılarak kaleme alınan bu makale, birtakım yerel ve uluslararası değişkenlerin Türkiye'nin göç politikasına ve AB ile ilişkilerine nasıl etki ettiği üzerine odaklanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arap Baharı, Göç Diplomasisi, Hayırseverlik, Popülizm, Osmanlıcılık

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Introduction

This article depicts the ways in which various domestic and international political drivers have so far impacted Turkey's migration policy and relationship with the EU. In doing so, the article will position migration-related political debates in the heart of the analysis, revolving around the changing position of Turkey in international relations, which seems to be shaped by various regional, global and local drivers. The drivers that will be discussed in this article are the Arab Spring, populism and Islamophobia in the EU, as well as neo-Ottomanism and Islamism in Turkey. Situated at the centre of these drivers, migration has become a tool leveraged by the Turkish government to attain both domestic and international objectives. Sometimes, this leverage has had a cohesive character as far as the Justice and Development Party (AKP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*)'s overtures towards the Middle Eastern countries are concerned, and sometimes coercive features as far as the AKP's drives towards EU member states are concerned over the last decade.

Immigration, foreign policy and international relations have become embedded fields of study over the last few decades. Referring to various cases in the contemporary world, both Michael S. Teitelbaum and Christopher Mitchell stressed how foreign policy impacts international migration, and how past migration flows impacted foreign policy.¹ On the one hand, military interventions clearly trigger both domestic and international migration. This is what many Latin American countries experienced in the 1970s (e.g. Chile). Turkey also experienced a similar set of mass emigration flows in the aftermath of the 1960 and 1980 military coups.² On the other hand, we also know very well how diasporic populations play an important role in the complex foreign policy decision-making processes of the sending countries. The Jewish diaspora, Chinese diaspora, Indian diaspora, Palestinian diaspora, Puerto Rican diaspora and Turkish diaspora are some examples demonstrating the intricate relationship between diasporic communities and their homeland states.³

Several other experts have also become interested in revealing the complex relationship between migration and international relations. Kelly M. Greenhill, Fiona B. Adamson and Gerasimos Tsourapas are some of these experts.⁴ Juliette Tolay has also elaborated on the relationship between Syrian mass migration and the images of state power in the Turkish case.⁵ Kelly M. Greenhill focused

1 See Michael S. Teitelbaum, "Immigration, refugees, and foreign policy", *International Organisation*, Vol. 38, No 3, 1984, p. 429-450; and Christopher Mitchell, "International migration, international relations and foreign policy", *International Migration Review*, Vol. 23, No 3, 1989, p. 681-708.

2 See Murat Erdoğan and Ayhan Kaya, *Türkiye'nin Göç Tarihi. 14. Yüzyıldan Günümüze Türkiye'ye Göçler* İstanbul, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015.

3 See William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora*, Vol. 1, No 1, 1991, p. 83-99; Ayhan Kaya, *Sicher in Kreuzberg: Constructing Diasporas*, Bielefeld, Transcript Verlag, 2001; Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003; and Robin Cohen, "New Roles for Diasporas in International Relations", *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Vol. 14, No 1, 2005, p. 179-183.

4 For a more detailed discussion on other international cases one could visit Kelly M. Greenhill's path-breaking works on states' use of migration flows as a tool of coercive diplomacy. See Kelly M. Greenhill, "Engineered Migration and the Use of Refugees As Political Weapons: A Case Study of the 1994 Cuban Balseros Crisis", *International Migration*, Vol. 40, No 4, 2002, p. 39-74; Kelly M. Greenhill, "The Use of Refugees As Political and Military Weapons in the Kosovo Conflict", Raju G.C. Thomas (ed.), *Yugoslavia Unraveled: Sovereignty, Self-Determination, Intervention*, Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2003, p. 205-242; and Kelly M. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2010. Also see Fiona B. Adamson and Gerasimos Tsourapas, "Migration Diplomacy in World Politics", *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 20, No 2, May 2019, p. 113-128.

5 Juliette Tolay, "Mass Migration and Images of State Power: Turkey's Claim to the Status of a Responsible Rising Power", *Rising Powers Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No 2, 2016, p. 135-149

on the use of migration by state actors to attain foreign policy objectives. Referring to different case studies such as the 1994 Cuban crisis, the 1999 Kosovo crisis and the EU-Turkey Refugee Statement (2016), she studied the ways in which migration flows are purposefully engineered to pursue certain political goals domestically and internationally.⁶ She calls this phenomenon “strategic engineered migration”. According to her, there are four different forms of engineered migration: “dispossessive engineered migration” in which the principal objective is the appropriation of the territory, or property of another group; “exportive engineered migration” in which the main objective is to reinforce a domestic political position, or to destabilize foreign government(s); “militarized engineered migration” the objective of which is to gain military advantage against an adversary, or to enhance one’s own force structure, via the acquisition of additional resources; and “coercive engineered migration,” which is created intentionally in order to coerce another state into providing specific political, military or economic advantages.⁷ Kelly M. Greenhill, Fiona B. Adamson and Gerasimos Tsourapas have also demonstrated that states that lack capability in other areas may at times attempt to leverage the issue of migration to enhance their bargaining position *vis-à-vis* more powerful states.⁸ It seems that Turkey falls into this category of states under the AKP rule, a party that tends to use migration as leverage to achieve goals in both international relations *vis-à-vis* the EU member states and the Arab world, as well as in domestic politics following the mass migration towards the Middle East before 2015 and towards Europe in 2015. However, the features of this tool for leverage under the AKP rule are not always the same. This article will demonstrate that the AKP’s use of migration as leverage has some cohesive elements as far as Turkish foreign policy objectives in the Middle East are concerned, and some coercive elements as far as the foreign policy objectives in the EU countries are concerned. The main point of this article is that the AKP’s failure to become a soft and smart power in international relations has provoked her to use migration as a coercive leverage tool in its foreign policy actions and objectives, both towards EU or in general.

The research for this article was previously conducted within the framework of three Horizon 2020 projects titled “FUTURE: The Future of EU-Turkey Relations”, “RESPOND: Multilevel Governance of Mass Migration in Europe and Beyond”, and “ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM: Youth Radicalisation in Europe”. The qualitative data gathered in this work, including speeches of leading political figures, legal texts, and relevant websites, were analysed through the discourse analysis method with specific emphasis on the concepts of migration, refugees, diplomacy, international relations, domestic policy and foreign policy.⁹ In this regard, this article will try to establish the relationship between the debates on migration and international relations in the Turkish context.

This article will first analyse the relevance of changing migration policies in Turkey with the quest to become a soft and smart power in international relations before and after the Arab Spring. Subsequently, the article will scrutinize the relationship between the revival of the Ottoman heritage

6 Greenhill, “Engineered Migration”; Greenhill, “The Use of Refugees”; and Kelly M. Greenhill, “Open Arms Behind Barred Doors: Fear, Hypocrisy, and Policy Schizophrenia in the European Migration Crisis”, *European Law Journal*, Vol. 22, No 3, 2016, p. 317–32.

7 Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration*, p. 13-14.

8 Greenhill, “Open Arms Behind Barred Doors”; and Fiona B. Adamson and Gerasimos Tsourapas, “Migration Diplomacy”.

9 For more discussion of discourse analysis in research methods see Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992; and Ruth Wodak, *The Discourses of Politics in Action: Politics as Usual*, London, MacMillan Palgrave, 2010).

and the growing emphasis of the Turkish state actors in the Muslim Middle East including Syria. The article will then discuss the growing visibility of an Islamic tone in the process of accommodating Syrian refugees since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, with a particular focus on the political discourses of ‘guesthood,’ benevolence and the *Ansar* spirit. The discussion on the political discourses employed in accommodating Syrians under temporary protection will be followed by the ways in which the AKP government responded to the augmentation of right-wing populist and anti-Muslim sentiments in European countries. This section will analyse the process of co-radicalisation between right-wing populist political discourses both in Turkey and the EU, which is likely to lead to the culturalisation of what is social, political and economic in international relations and in the Turkish diaspora. The article will conclude with an assessment of migration diplomacy enacted by the Turkish state actors on the basis of the EU-Turkey Statement on the refugees (put into force on 18 March 2016) and the Readmission Agreement between the EU and Turkey (signed on 16 December 2013). This last section will focus on the elaboration of the ways in which migration has been used by the AKP rule to accomplish foreign policy objectives in international relations as well as domestic policy objectives.

Arab Spring and Turkey’s Quest for being a Soft Power

The way the Turkish government has so far perceived migration and asylum matters indicates that foreign-and asylum-policy are intertwined, while at the same time generating differences in coping with refugees and migrants in general. It is evident that the Turkish foreign policy makers had not expected the Arab Spring at the end of 2010. Then Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu identified this process as a political “earthquake” in the Middle East.¹⁰ In accordance with this change, Ankara had to reconsider its “zero problems with neighbours” strategy, which entailed a combined approach to cooperative security relations and economic interdependence in international relations.¹¹

The Arab Revolutions forced Turkish foreign policy to take on a new role in the ‘new’ Middle East, which had serious implications on the region. Turkey did not have sufficient capabilities to be active beyond its role as a model of democracy in a Muslim society.¹² The Arab Spring also created a political vacuum in the Middle East, which was leveraged by the AKP, particularly after the Syrian civil war in 2011. An assertive foreign policy of Turkey and its willingness to be the ‘play maker actor to establish the order in the Middle East’ led to the ‘open-door’ and humanitarian asylum policy at the early stages of the Syrian mass migration. However, the failure of Turkish foreign policy in the region, along with the growing number of refugees has brought about the revision of the adopted policy towards ‘temporary protection,’ ‘voluntary return’ and ‘burden sharing.’ Turkey’s ‘open door’ policy towards the Syrian refugees could be interpreted in different ways. A multiplicity of drivers such as humanitarian, religious, political and ethno-cultural factors can be considered to explain the major assumptions of the policymakers in Turkey. In this regard, another important factor, which is often neglected, is Turkey’s quest to become a soft and smart power (i.e., the use of both hard and soft power

10 Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s humanitarian diplomacy: objectives, challenges and prospects”, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 41, No 6, 2013, p. 866.

11 Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Zero-Problems Foreign Policy”, *Foreign Policy* (2013), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/20/turkeys_zero_problems_foreign_policy (Accessed 19 May 2020).

12 Ariel Gonzales, “Forced Humanitarianism: Turkey’s Syrian Policy and the Refugee Issue”, *Caucasus International*, Vol. 5, No 1, Spring 2015, p. 39-49.

to attain foreign policy objectives) in the region. This has radically changed Turkey's official discourse on becoming a country of immigration.¹³

Joseph Nye defines power as the "ability to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes one wants".¹⁴ He further underlines that there are several ways to influence the behaviour of others. Moreover, Nye defined soft power as "the ability to affect others to obtain preferred outcomes by the cooperative means of framing the agenda, persuasion and positive attraction".¹⁵ In this regard, he suggests three building blocks for a country's soft power coexisting within a multiactor environment: a) culture; b) political values; and c) foreign policies of a country, which need to be operationalized in line with the contextual realities.¹⁶ Stephen Castles and Mark Miller – by referring to Joseph Nye's concept of soft power – assert that a state's immigration policies can also contribute to its soft power, its ability to achieve foreign policy and security objectives without recourse to military or economic means of persuasion in international relations.¹⁷ Furthermore, they set the examples for attracting foreign students and positive treatment of immigrants as a source of soft power to affect reputation.

Creating a visa-free environment can also be considered to be leverage to increase the soft power of states. Accordingly, in line with Turkey's changing foreign policy towards the Middle Eastern countries in the second half of the 2000s, Turkey abolished visas with its neighbouring and regional countries, such as Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, which were on the EU's blacklist and subject to strict Schengen visa regulations. At the expense of de-aligning its visa regulations with the European legislation by de-Europeanizing its foreign policy, Turkey aimed for economic gains from more integration in the region. This perception was reflected in the remarks made by one of the high-ranking bureaucrats of the Directorate General of Migration Management in a workshop organized in Ankara on 19-20 December 2014, by stating that "having an open-door policy to the migrants and refugees has a trade value for us. It pays off for the enhancement of the brand Turkey abroad." This statement corresponds to what Simon Anholt calls the use of migration as a reputational asset in nation-branding to build a truly soft and smart power for the purpose of attracting foreign investment.¹⁸ At the same time, Turkey's liberal visa policy triggered discussions on the possibility of establishing a "new Schengen area in the Middle East".¹⁹

Creating a brand for Turkey was one of the leading priorities of the AKP's rule in Turkey, and these efforts preceded the Arab Spring. The Turkish government took significant steps to eradicate some of the negative phrases about Turks in Europe. These stereotypical expressions include "to smoke like a Turk", "to swear like a Turk", "Mama, Turks are coming", and "Where a horse of a Turk

13 Ayhan Kaya, "Which way to go? Understanding Migration Policies and their influence on EU-Turkey Relations," Extended FEUTURE Voice, June 2019, https://feuture.uni-koeln.de/sites/feuture/Extended_FEUTURE_Voice_Ayhan_Kaya.pdf (Accessed 30 October 2020).

14 Joseph S. Jr. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York, Public Affairs, 2004, p. 2.

15 Joseph S. Jr. Nye, *The Future of Power*, New York, Public Affairs, 2011, p. 20-21.

16 Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 11.

17 Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, London, The Guilford, 2009, p. 213.

18 See Simon Anholt, *Brand New Justice: How Branding Places and Products Can Help The Developing World*, Oxford, Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005.

19 Seçil P. Elitok and Thomas Straubhaar, "Turkey: Change from an emigration to immigration and now to a transit country," *Working Paper*, Hamburg Institute of International Economics and Transatlantic Academy, Washington DC, 2010, p. 7.

passes the grass will not grow again.”²⁰ While nation-branding requires the innovation of national policies, these examples also highlight the centrality of everyday practices in formulating the national brand. As branding is comprised of two main stages, formulation of the national brand identity and the construction of national brand image, every day practices that are modified in line with the brand identity goals are fundamental to both stages.²¹

In the quest for branding Turkey to become a soft power, the AKP government also benefited from the discourse of “alliance of civilisations”, which was installed by the United Nations in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, as an antidote against the detrimental effects of the so-called Huntingtonian “clash of civilisations” paradigm. The discourse of “alliance of civilisations” deployed by the AKP paid off in the first half of the 2000s in a way that contributed to the Europeanisation of Turkey at a time when the EU had been inspired by a global vision.²² The overwhelming use of the very same discourse later distanced Turkey from the EU due to the parochial and inward-looking polity of the many EU member states. The process of the de-Europeanisation of Turkey has also been coupled with the efforts of creating *Brand Turkey*, at the expense of distancing Turkey from the West, - a brand emphasizing promotion of the country’s distinct culture, heritage and economic might. Presenting Turkey as an emerging country of immigration was also one of the essential elements of the “New Turkey” brand.²³ This is very obvious in the efforts of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in organizing the Global Migration Forum under the auspices of the UN in Turkey in the autumn of 2015 in order to present Turkey as the most courageous and generous countries for immigration, welcoming more than 3.5 million Syrians and other refugees.²⁴

Turkey’s willingness to become a country of immigration was originally targeting the attraction of qualified and skilled people. A new Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Law No. 6458)²⁵ that came into force on 1 April 2014 signifies the quest of the ruling government to turn the Turkish state into a soft power using migration and mobility as an important element of its foreign policy. This law, as well as the Law on International Labour Force, enacted in July 2016 (Law No. 6735)²⁶ include articles that promote and facilitate the migration of skilled people. To that effect, the new Law (6735) also introduced a new type of work permit, the “Turquoise Card”, to attract a qualified international workforce, easing the conditions of stay and work for the spouses and relatives of qualified international workers.²⁷ It is partly designed to attract an increasing number of qualified foreigners, including international students recruited by higher education institutions in Turkey. Yet, the

20 Ayşe Tecmen, *The Discursive Construction of Liminality in Turkey’s Nation Brand*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Bristol, 2015.

21 Ibid.

22 Ayhan Kaya, *Europeanisation and Tolerance in Turkey: The Myth of Toleration*, London, Palgrave, 2013.

23 Ayşe Tecmen, “The Relations Between Public Diplomacy and Nation Brands: An Investigation of Nation Branding in Turkey”, *İstanbul Bilgi University European Institute Working Paper Series*, No 10, İstanbul, 2018.

24 For further detail on the Global Migration Forum organized in Turkey on 12-13 October 2015, <http://www.gfmd.org/> (Accessed 6 May 2020).

25 For the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Law No. 6458), https://www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2017/02/law_on_foreigners_and_international_protection.pdf (Accessed 7 May 2020).

26 For the Law on International Labour Force (Law No. 6735), https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=103259&p_count=1&p_classification=17 (Accessed 30 October 2020).

27 Elena Sánchez-Montijano, Ayhan Kaya and Melike Janine Sökmen, “Highly Skilled Migration between the EU and Turkey: Drivers and Scenarios,” *FEUTURE Online Paper No 21*, April 2018, https://feuture.uni-koeln.de/sites/feuture/user_upload/Online_Paper_No_21_D6_2_final.pdf (Accessed 30 October 2020).

Syrian refugee crisis had delayed its entry into force and added a humanitarian element. The number of foreign students, as well as the way of treating immigrants, affects a state's reputation and adds to its soft power potential.²⁸ Following encouraging policies, the number of university students, particularly from Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia - as well as from the EU countries - studying in Turkey, increased notably.

Turkey's approach towards Syrians still seems to be novel compared to worldwide trends in international refugee regimes and to Turkey's past responses to similar refugee movements, which explicitly involved securitisation discourse and 'burden sharing'.²⁹ Turkey's shift from a security-centred, to a rather humanitarian, approach in foreign policy-making seems to be related to its assertive foreign policy as well as to the AKP's religious drive in the region. This approach allowed Turkey to present itself as a model country in its neighbourhood, playing a role as a regional mediator and contributing to the solution of humanitarian problems through diplomacy and welcoming migrants and refugees. However, the diplomatic initiatives of Turkey in Syria failed unexpectedly as it invested in the possibility that the opposition could gain power soon. This presumption has not been borne out, due to a fragmented opposition, which was unable to overcome Syrian regime forces. Turkey mistakenly assumed that the Assad regime would soon collapse, and refugees would return to Syria. Regarding their numbers, at the beginning of the civil war in Syria, the Turkish government expected a maximum of 100,000 Syrian refugees to come to Turkey, while today the actual number has increased to more than 3.5 million people residing in Turkey.³⁰

Revival of the Ottoman Past in Turkish Foreign Policy: Leveraging Ottoman Past in Regional Policy

The rupture caused by the Kemalist revolution to distance the newborn Turkish nation from the Ottoman past was repeatedly addressed by several AKP politicians in the last decade to build a 'New Turkey' and to 'close a hundred-year-old parenthesis' of the Kemalist Westernisation project. The mantra of 'Kemalist-modernist parenthesis' was already discussed by Davutoğlu in the early 1990s when he rejected the Western "modernist paradigm" because of the "peripherality of revelation".³¹ He argued that the West's emphasis on reason and experience versus divine revelation results in an "acute crisis of Western civilisation".³² Davutoğlu's intervention goes beyond the boundaries of modern Turkey, claiming hegemony in the Middle East, or in other words in the former Ottoman territories. He assumed that in the wake of the world wars, the imperial powers imposed their will upon the people of the Middle East, dividing them into artificial nation-states. They then subjugated the Middle East

28 Joseph S. Jr. Nye, *Soft Power*.

29 Kemal Kirişçi and Sema Karaca, "Hoşgörü ve Çelişkiler: 1989, 1991 ve 2011'de Türkiye'ye Yönelen Kitleli Mülteci Akınları, M. Erdoğan and A. Kaya (eds.), *Türkiye'nin Göç Tarihi, 14. Yüzyıldan 21. Yüzyıla Türkiye'ye Göçler*, İstanbul, İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2015, p. 295-314; and Ela Gökalp Aras and Zeynep Sahin Mencutek, "The international migration and foreign policy nexus: the case of Syrian refugee crisis and Turkey", *Migration Letters*, Vol. 12, No 3, 2015, p. 193-208.

30 Davutoğlu mentioned that Turkey's "psychological threshold" would be 100.000 refugees in 2013, <http://www4.cnnturk.com/2013/dunya/10/26/davutoglu.siginmacilar.konusunda.kirmizi.cizgi.asildi/728654.0/>, (Accessed 7 May 2020).

31 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms: the Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory*, Lanham, Md., University Press of America, 1993, p. 195.

32 Ibid.

by propping up despotic regimes. He declared the 100 years since the rise of the Turkish nationalists to be an aberration, a “parenthesis” that “must be closed.” As Davutoğlu warned, “[t]he future cannot be built with recently created concepts of [the] state that are based on nationalist ideologies wherein everyone accuses everyone else, and that first appeared with the Sykes-Picot maps, then with colonial administration, and then on artificially drawn maps. We will shatter the state of mind that Sykes-Picot created for us”.³³

Ahmet Davutoğlu – an important figure in foreign policy-making since the inception of the AKP rule in 2002 – developed the “zero problems” policy. Davutoğlu was the minister of foreign affairs and prime minister while he was leading these main assumptions and initiatives in Turkey’s foreign policy. This policy was laid out in Davutoğlu’s book *Strategic Depth: The International Position of Turkey*,³⁴ which is based on six core principles:

“a balance between *security and freedom*, *zero problems* with neighbours, a *multidimensional foreign policy*, a *pro-active regional foreign policy*, an altogether *new diplomatic style*, and *rhythmic diplomacy* [...]. Together, they formed an internally coherent set of principles - a blueprint, so to speak - that both guides our approach to regional crises and helps Turkey reassert itself as a preeminent country in the international system.”³⁵

Davutoğlu’s work criticises the Western-orientation of Turkish foreign policy for omitting the religious and historical ties within the region. He argues that this would fail to achieve Turkey’s rightful place in the religious-historical narrative that is neo-Ottomanism. This approach is also tied to the balance of power within the region and to the dichotomy between the West and the East. Therefore, leveraging Turkey’s Ottoman past in the establishment of regional ties is also articulated as an attempt to balance Western hegemony.

Drawing on Turkish history and its geography, Davutoğlu positions Turkey as the epicentre of historic events. His vision advocates a more balanced approach to international and regional actors, focusing on Turkey’s economic and political significance to its surrounding regions.³⁶ In contrast to the Kemalist ideology that anticipated isolation from regional conflicts, AKP’s foreign policy developed Turkey as a pro-active regional player that had the responsibility to mediate regional affairs. In turn, the AKP’s foreign policy vision was “pre-emptive rather than reactive”. In other words, it anticipates “a unique ‘strategic identity’ [that] blends both ideology and Realpolitik”.³⁷ Increased activism in the Middle East is also a product of economic pragmatism because when the EU lost its appeal after the economic crisis in the late 2000s, the East (Middle East, North Africa, and post-Soviet regions) became viable alternatives.³⁸ Furthermore, the “zero problems” approach has lost its momentum since

33 Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Büyük Restorasyon: Kadim’den Küreselleşmeye Yeni Siyaset Anlayışımız”, Paper delivered in Dicle University, Diyarbakır. 15 March 2013, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-diyarbakir-dicle-universitesinde-verdigi_buyuk-restorasyon_-kadim_den-kuresellesmeye-yeni.tr.mfa (Accessed 20 May 2020).

34 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu*, İstanbul, Küre, 2005.

35 Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Zero Problems in a New Era”, Foreign Policy Online Argument. 21 March 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/21/zero-problems-in-a-new-era/> (Accessed 20 May 2020, emphasis added).

36 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*; and Nicholas Danforth, “Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy: From Atatürk to AKP”, *Turkish Foreign Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No 3, 2008, p. 91.

37 Şaban Kardaş, “Turkey: Redrawing the Middle East Map or Building Sandcastles?”, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 17, No 1, 2010, p. 123.

38 Ziya Öniş, “Multiple Faces of the “New” Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique”, *GLODEM Working Paper Series*, No 4, Center for Globalisation and Democratic Governance, İstanbul, Koç University, 2010, p.

the early 2010s in light of the Arab Spring and domestic turmoil that demonstrated Turkey's vulnerability to civil unrest, as seen in the Gezi Protests in 2013, following this new pragmatic and neoliberal foreign policy approach.³⁹ In the aftermath of the Gezi Protests, the AKP leadership became more authoritarian in attaining its domestic and foreign policy objectives.⁴⁰ In this sense, first the Syrian civil war and then the Gezi movement became the turning points where the idea of using soft/smart power instruments failed along with the "zero problem approach". Since then hard power instruments replaced soft power instruments as tools to leverage in order to attain both domestic and foreign policy objectives.

Davutoğlu's vision also discursively constructs the Middle East in a way that suits the AKP's construction of Islamic identity in which Turkey's political, economic and socio-cultural reconnection with the region is articulated as a contribution to the country's position in international relations. During the AKP government, neo-Ottomanism became "predominantly a pejorative term by which Turkey's actual regional policy is being called by those who oppose or at least are suspicious towards that policy".⁴¹ As some understand neo-Ottomanism to be a metaphor for creating a favourable brand image for Turkey in the Middle East based on socio-cultural and historical ties, others believe it has colonial and Islamist connotations.⁴² However, conflicts of interpretation follow the growing influence of this narrative.

Despite the AKP's attempts to reconcile the East/West dichotomy in its foreign policy, the debates surrounding the possibility of an axis shift argument became apparent. The axis shift argument formulates the AKP's 'zero problems' approach as a neo-Ottomanist agenda leading to the 'Middle-Easternisation' of Turkish foreign policy.⁴³ This is predicated on the assumed mutual-exclusivity of the East and the West, which meant that Turkey's emphasis on Islam in national politics and involvement in the Middle East came at the expense of its domestic stakeholders and Western allies. The axis shift stresses that Turkey is not only turning to the Middle East, but also to the Muslim Middle East.⁴⁴ For instance, Naci Korum, Turkey's Ambassador to the UN between 2016-2018, noted that the region "shared a common destiny and contributed extensively to the world civilisation, in particular our common civilisation, the civilisation of Islam", thus the "Turkish-Arab brotherhood and friendship" is not understood in the West.⁴⁵

Neo-Ottomanist ties with the ex-Ottoman territories were also accompanied by questions on the country's allegiances, a so-called 'shift of axis', which was a popular criticism of the AKP's foreign policy in the early-2010s. This image attempts to reconcile Turkey's traditional relations between the

11-12.

39 For an elaborate analysis of the Gezi Protests see, Ergun Özbudun, "AKP at the crossroads: Erdoğan's majoritarian drift", *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 19, No 2, 2014, p. 155-167.

40 Ayhan Kaya, "Islamisation of Turkey under the AKP Rule: Empowering Family, Faith and Charity," Susannah Verney, Anna Bosco and Senem Aydın-Düzgüt (eds.), *The AKP Since Gezi Park: Moving to Regime Change in Turkey*, London, Routledge, 2019, p. 27-48.

41 Hajrutin Somun, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Balkans and "Neo-Ottomanism": A Personal Account", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13, No 3, 2011, p. 36.

42 Şaban Kardaş, "Turkey: Redrawing the Middle East Map", p. 128.

43 *Ibid.*, 115.

44 Nicholas Danforth, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy", p. 86.

45 Naci Korum, "Speech delivered in Kuwait: Arabs and the World, a Future Perspective", 12 February 2013, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-delivered-by-h_e_-naci-koru_-deputy-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey-at-the-meeting-entitled-_arabs-and-the-world.en.mfa (Accessed 15 May 2020).

Western centres and Eastern peripheries. The popularity of the axis shift argument in Europe and the United States mainly stems from their concerns about Turkey's reliability as an ally. These concerns are rooted in the Islamisation of Turkish domestic politics, which negatively affected "democratic freedoms and civil rights",⁴⁶ thus implying that Turkey's modernisation along the Western model is at a standstill if not in retreat. The axis shift has also been formulated as a leverage against the EU in the last decade.

Islamic Tone in Accommodating Syrians in Turkey: 'Guesthood' and Benevolence

The previously mentioned drivers of the Arab Spring, neo-Ottomanism and Islamism of the AKP, as well as the European populism and Islamophobia, that will be discussed shortly, have all constrained the culturalisation, religionisation and civilisationalisation of Turkish state actors in different spheres of life, including the acts and policies regarding Syrian refugees. The reception of Syrian refugees in Turkey is mainly based on a political discourse of tolerance and benevolence driven by path-dependent, ethno-cultural and religious premises dating back to the Ottoman Empire of the late 19th century, as well as to the establishment of the Turkish Republic in the 1920s.⁴⁷ The vocabulary, which has been used to identify the Syrian refugees, reflects somehow a continuity of categorizing newcomers on the basis of their ethno-cultural and religious identities as "migrants", "guests", and "foreigners" since the early days of the Republic. For instance, the Law on Settlement (*İskân Kanunu* in Turkish, 1934) is one of the foundational legal texts defining the ways in which the Turkish state has identified newcomers. It was adopted in regards to the arrival of ethnic Turks in the early years of the Republic (Law No. 2510 of 1934) and provides that only migrants of Turkish culture, with an objective of settling in Turkey, can obtain immigrant status (Art. 3), whereas those of non-Turkish origin will not be accepted as immigrants (Art. 4). This Law has been reformed in 2006 without substantially altering its main understanding of who can become an immigrant.⁴⁸

Moreover, the Law on Settlement continued to be the main legislative text dealing with immigration, determining who can enter, settle and/or apply for refugee status in Turkey. However, it also provides individuals of Turkish descent and culture with the opportunity to be accepted as 'immigrants' and refugees in Turkey. For instance, Uzbeks, Turkomans, Bulgarian-Muslims and Uighurs migrating to Turkey from different parts of the world are named as 'migrants' (*göçmen* in Turkish) in the official documents as well as in everyday life as they are considered to be of Turkish descent ethnically. In this regard, there are two other terms, which need to be elaborated further: 'guest' (*misafir*) and 'foreigner' (*yabancı*).

In the official literature, the term 'guest' has been hitherto used to refer to the refugees with Muslim origin but without Turkish ethnic origin coming from outside the European continent. Kurd-

46 Katinka Barysch, "Can Turkey Combine EU Accession and Regional Leadership?", Policy Brief, Centre for European Reform, 25 January 2010, <https://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/policy-brief/2010/can-turkey-combine-eu-accession-and-regional-leadership> (Accessed 19 May 2020).

47 Ayhan Kaya and Ozan Kuyumcuoğlu, "The Limits of Tolerance towards Syrian Refugees in Turkey: From Guesthood to Ansar Spirit", Luiza Bialasiewicz and Valentina Gentile (eds.), *Spaces of Tolerance: Changing Geographies and Philosophies of Religion in Today's Europe*, London, Routledge, 2020, p. 140-158.

48 See the reformed Law No 5543 on Settlement (*İskân Kanunu*) of 26 September 2006, www.nvi.gov.tr/Files/File/Mevzuat/Nufus_Mevzuati/Kanun/pdf/IskanKanunu.pdf (Accessed 17 May 2020).

ish refugees in the 2000s and Syrian refugees in the 2010s were called ‘guests’ since Turkey officially does not accept refugees coming from outside its western boundaries. Bosniac and Kosovar refugees seeking refuge in Turkey in the 1990s represented an exception as they were coming from the western borders of Turkey, and had the right to apply for asylum in Turkey according to the geographical limitation clause.⁴⁹ Turkey decided to keep, together with Congo, Madagascar, Monaco, the 1967 Additional Protocol of Geneva Convention on the protection of refugees.⁵⁰

The term ‘foreigner’ legally refers to the one that does not have Turkish citizenship. However, it is also used in the official texts as well as by the public to refer to those who are neither Turkish nor Muslim. These groups are not able to be incorporated into the prescribed national identity, which is mainly based on what can be called the holy trinity of Sunni-Muslim-Turkish elements. Accordingly, not only the non-Muslims coming from abroad but also autochthonous groups such as Greeks and Armenians are called ‘foreigners’, or ‘local foreigners’ in legal texts.⁵¹

To this extent, a more recent metaphor to qualify the role that the Turkish state and the pious Muslim-Turks should play for Syrians in Turkey has been the *Ansar spirit* (Arabic for helpers). As a metaphor, *Ansar* refers to the people of Medina, who supported the Prophet Mohammad and the accompanying Muslims (*muhajirun*, or migrants) who migrated there from Mecca, which was under the control of the pagans. The metaphor of *Ansar* originally points to a temporary situation as the Muslims later returned to Mecca after their forces recaptured the city from the pagans. Hence, the Turkish government has used a kind of Islamic symbolism to legitimize its actions for the resolution of the Syrian refugee crisis. The government leaders have consistently compared Turkey’s role in assisting the Syrian refugees to that of the *Ansar*. Framing the Syrian refugees within the discourse of *Ansar* and *Muhajirun* has elevated public and private efforts to accommodate Syrian refugees from a humanitarian responsibility to a religious- and charity-based duty.⁵² *Ansar* discourse has also served the AKP to attain foreign policy objectives in the Middle East by evoking common cultural, religious and historical heritage between the Turks and the Arabs. In this sense, the migration of refugees and Arab migrants were used as a tool for leverage in public diplomacy to underline the prevailing image of Turkey as a Muslim country.

The former Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, in his speech in Gaziantep, one of the most popular destinations for the Syrian refugees on the Syrian border, publicly stated that the inhabitants of Gaziantep became a city of *Ansar*: “Gazi[antep] is an *Ansar* city now. God bless you all.”⁵³ Similarly, President Erdoğan used the same phrase in his speeches in 2014 and afterwards: “In our culture, in our civilisation, guest means honour, and blessing. You [Syrian guests] have granted us the honour of being *Ansar*, but also brought us joy and blessing. As for today, we have more than 1.5 million Syrian and Iraqi guests.”⁵⁴

49 See <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-in-turkey> (Accessed 19 May 2020).

50 Kemal Kirişçi and Sema Karaca, “Hoşgörü ve Çelişkiler”.

51 Ayhan Kaya and Ozan Kuyumcuoğlu, “The Limits of Toleration”.

52 Ibid.

53 Akşam, 28 December 2014, <http://www.aksam.com.tr/siyaset/davutoglu-gazi-sehir-artik-ensar-sehiridir/haber-367691> (Accessed 7 May 2020).

54 Hürriyet, 8 October 2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/erdogan-suriyeli-siginmacilara-seslendi-27342780> (Accessed 7 May 2020).

The political discourse of Ansar continued until the emergence of the political discourse of voluntary return that began to be prioritized by the AKP government in the aftermath of the loss of the metropolitan cities (İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Adana, Mersin, Antalya) in the local elections held in 2019.⁵⁵ Then Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmuş referred to the same Ansar rhetoric when he introduced the right to work granted to the Syrian refugees under temporary protection: “The reason why the Syrian refugees are now settled in our country is hospitality and Ansar spirit that our nation has so far adhered to. Other countries cannot do anything when encountered with a few hundred thousand refugees. But contrary to what the rich and prosperous countries could not do for the refugees, our country did its best for the refugees as a generous host, friend, brother and neighbour.”⁵⁶

Although the Turkish state was successful in implementing the rules of the Temporary Protection Regulation (No. 2014/6883) aligning with the EU *acquis*, the discursive frames used by the AKP government and relevant state actors in approaching Syrians residing in Turkey were leading to the de-Europeanisation of migration and asylum processes. As will be shortly elaborated, the framing of the refugee reality by state actors as an act of benevolence and tolerance has also shaped public opinion in a way that has led to the exposure of increasing discontent and tensions against refugees. Such animosities were more visible among the secular-minded Kemalist social groups who used the refugees to demonstrate their dissident voices against the AKP rule.⁵⁷

The growth of socio-economic and political problems in Turkey seems to have increased intolerance among Turkish citizens towards all kinds of refugees and migrants, exacerbating racist, xenophobic and Arabophobic sentiments in the country. Current developments in Turkey with regard to the perception of refugees by the majority of Turkish citizens indicate that Turkey is now at the verge of starting a new chapter called “Turkey’s refugee crisis”. Growing animosity against the refugees in Turkey became more evident when the Turkish security forces opened the borders on February 28, 2020.⁵⁸ The Turkish Minister of Interior systematically announced the number of refugees who left the Turkish territory starting from the first day of the mass migration towards the border. The number that he announced on the third day after the Turkish border was opened, 1 March 2020, was more than 100,000. This number was contested by the Greek authorities trying to push back the refugees at sea and land borders as well as by the UNHCR. Their claim was that the highest number of refugees trying to cross the border was at most around 20 thousand.⁵⁹

The prevalence of the political discourse of guesthood, tolerance and Ansar spirit has also created a robust expectation among the Turkish citizens that the Syrians refugees were temporarily in their country. However, the Syrians have almost become permanent residents in Turkey – a status that is likely to create tension among the native population. Hence, the politically-engineered discourse of

55 For further discussion on the political discourse of return see, Ayhan Kaya, “Reception: Turkey Country Report,” RESPOND Working Paper Series 2020/37, <https://www.respondmigration.com/wp-blog/refugee-reception-policies-practices-responses-turkey-country-report> (Accessed 17 May 2020).

56 *Yeni Asır*, 11 January 2016, https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/ekonomi/suriyeli-siginmacilara-calisma-izni-geliyor_379230 (Accessed 30 October 2020).

57 *Ibid.*

58 See *The Guardian*, 28 February 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/28/tensions-rise-between-turkey-and-russia-after-killing-of-troops-in-syria> (Accessed 31 April 2020).

59 See *The Independent*, 1 March 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkey-border-greece-migrants-refugees-edirne-syria-war-erdogan-a9366961.html> (Accessed 31 April 2020).

'guesthood' and Ansar spirit is no longer acceptable for the natives. Being stuck in limbo going back and forth between temporariness and permanency, Syrian refugees were exposed to several lynching attempts as well as to the prevalence of stereotypes, prejudices, communal conflicts and other forms of harassment since 2017. The massive increase in the number of refugees outside camps and the lack of adequate assistance policies toward them has aggravated a range of social problems. Refugees experience problems of adaptation in big cities and the language barrier has seriously complicated their ability to integrate into Turkish society.⁶⁰

There are several problems Syrians have been facing in everyday life, including a growing concern about underage Syrian girls being forced into marriage (partly due to their own culture and partly due to the pressure coming from some segments of the Turkish society) as well as fears that a recent constitutional court ruling decriminalizing religious weddings without civil marriage will lead to a spread of polygamy involving Syrian women and girls. The sight of Syrians begging in the streets is causing resentment among local people, especially in the western cities of Turkey. There have also been reports of occasional violence between refugees and the local population. In turn, this reinforces a growing public perception that Syrian refugees are associated with criminality, violence and corruption. These attitudes contrast with the observations of local authorities and security officials that criminality is surprisingly low among the refugees and that Syrian community leaders are very effective in preventing crime and defusing tensions between refugees and locals.

The political discourses of guesthood and Ansar spirit were based on the notion of hospitality and welcome culture. As Ross Langmead put it very well, "hospitality is a strong concept which includes justice-seeking, political action, inclusion around our tables, intercultural friendship, pursuing a hospitable multicultural approach to [religious] life, practical assistance, long-term commitment, learning from those who are different, sensitivity to the power dynamics of 'welcome', a willingness to 'let go' as well as 'embrace', interfaith dialogue and discovering the intertwining of the guest and host roles which is embedded in theological understandings of God's activity amongst us."⁶¹ Hospitality and 'welcome culture' were not only visible in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, but also in many European countries such as Germany, Sweden and Austria following the heartbreaking images of baby Ailan Kurdi shook the west in the summer of 2015.⁶² In both non-EU and EU countries, it was the Qur'anic, Biblical and theological understandings of guesthood that played an important role among the host communities.⁶³

Current developments in Turkey demonstrated that migration has been a leverage used by the Turkish government in foreign policy-making and also that the political discourse of Ansar no longer has a societal resonance. When 34 Turkish soldiers were killed in an air strike by Syrian

60 See Murat Erdoğan, *Türkiye'deki Suriyeliler*. İstanbul, İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2017; Susan Rottmann and Ayhan Kaya, "We can't integrate in Europe. We will pay a high price if we go there", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Online First, April 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feaa018>.

61 Ross Langmead, "Refugees as Guests and Hosts Towards a Theology of Mission among Refugees and Asylum Seekers", in M. Frederiks and D. Nagy (eds.), *Religion, Migration and Identity: Methodological and theological explorations*. Brill, 2016, p. 171.

62 Helena Smith, "Shocking images of drowned Syrian boy show tragic plight of refugees," *The Guardian*, 2 September 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/02/shocking-image-of-drowned-syrian-boy-shows-tragic-plight-of-refugees> (Accessed on 20 May 2020).

63 Jennifer B. Saunders, Susanna Snyder and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (eds.), *Intersections of Religion and Migration*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2016.

government forces in the northwestern Idlib province on February 27, 2020, the Turkish army immediately responded with explosive drones targeting the regime forces. One day after the incident, Turkish state actors, primarily the Minister of Interior, announced that they have opened the borders to let the refugees head towards the EU via the land and sea borders with Greece and land borders with Bulgaria. As soon as the news spread around the country, many buses, taxis and cars full of refugees were already on the way to the western borders of Turkey, mostly towards Edirne, the northwest land border, and towards Çanakkale, the western sea border near the Greek island of Lesbos. The situation at the Turkish-Greek border led to the rise of a new refugee crisis in the EU. Following “Refugee Crisis II”, the foreign ministers of the EU Member States officials decided to meet to discuss the Idlib crisis. In the meantime, the EU Commission made announcements supporting Greece with 700 million Euro and Turkey with an additional 500 million Euro.⁶⁴ Using mobility as diplomatic leverage, the EU Commission also announced that they would reconsider restarting the visa-liberalisation and visa-facilitation talks with Turkey.⁶⁵ The crisis was eventually resolved after the Turkish President asked the security forces to seal off the European borders, following his meeting in Brussels with the top EU actors on 17 March 2020.⁶⁶ In Refugee Crisis II, Turkey exercised and leveraged hard power to gain soft power in a way. It seems that by opening its borders, Turkey made gains in the short run on its foreign policy objectives. Whether these gains will remain intact in the long run is a pending question of course given the fact that this action has made many refugees suffer even more.

The latest border crisis demonstrated that the Turkish governmental actors are inclined to use migration in both foreign policy and domestic policy objectives. While migration and refugees provide the ruling political elite in Turkey with an instrument to pressure the European Union member states, they are also being used domestically to reset the political agenda whenever there is a crisis threatening the legitimacy of the government, such as the murder of 34 Turkish soldiers in Idlib. Hence, the primary premises of the Turkish state actors in opening the European borders for refugees were based on the idea of setting the agenda in international relations as well as in domestic politics about countering the internal pressures resulting from the burgeoning socio-economic crisis in the country.⁶⁷

64 See New York Times, 4 March 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/04/world/europe/europe-migrants-turkey-greece.html> (Accessed 31 March 2020).

65 See Deutsche Welle, 10 March 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/turkey-wants-a-new-refugee-deal-before-march-summit/a-52703968> (Accessed 31 March 2020).

66 See The Guardian, 17 March 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/17/erdogan-in-talks-with-european-leaders-over-refugee-cash-for-turkey> (Accessed 31 March 2020).

67 For a detailed explanation for the negative impact of the pandemic on migrants and refugees in Turkey see, Kemal Kirişçi and Murat Erdoğan, “Turkey and COVID-19: Don’t forget refugees”, Brookings Institute, 20 April 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/04/20/turkey-and-covid-19-dont-forget-refugees/> (Accessed 17 May 2020); Özgehan Şenyuva, “Turkey’s Two-Level Game in the Refugee Dispute with the EU,” The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 26 March 2020, <https://www.gmfus.org/publications/turkeys-two-level-game-refugee-dispute-eu> (Accessed 30 October 2020); and in the world see, Lorenzo Guadagno, “Migrants and the COVID-19 pandemic: An initial analysis”, Working Paper, Migration Research Series, No 60, Geneva, International Organisation for Migration, <https://publications.iom.int/books/mrs-no-60-migrants-and-covid-19-pandemic-initial-analysis> (Accessed 17 May 2020).

Growing Populism and anti-Muslim Sentiments in Europe

As was already addressed by various scholars such as Gabriel Sheffer, Robin Cohen, William Safran, Kelly B. Greenhill, Fiona Adamson and Damla Aksel, the other side of the process of using migration as leverage is the diasporic communities.⁶⁸ In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, increasing anti-Muslim sentiments, global financial crisis, refugee crisis, and right-wing populism have all impacted the perception of Turkey in EU member states and public. The process of de-Europeanisation of the Turkish state has also transformed the perception of some of the members of the Turkish diaspora residing in the EU countries about their countries of settlements as well as the Turkish state. The last decade has brought about a process of co-radicalisation,⁶⁹ escalating between the AKP leadership and some of the European political figures, especially Christian democrats and right-wing populists, on the basis of religion.

Social-economic factors such as the rise of unemployment, poverty, inequality, injustice, the growing gap between citizens and politics and the current climate of political disenchantment are often used to explain the growth of right-wing populism in Europe. From the 1980s onwards, the introduction of neo-liberal policies has contributed to social and economic insecurity.⁷⁰ These policies implied that individuals were expected to take care of themselves within the framework of existing free market conditions. This led to the fragmentation of society into a multitude of cultural, religious and ethnic communities in which individuals sought social security and their identity. In turn, ruling elites, which include vote-seeking political parties, exploited these uncertainties and the basic need for social protection by adopting discriminatory discourses and stigmatizing the 'others', especially Muslim migrants and their descendants.

Growing scepticism against diversity, multiculturalism and Islam has also posed obstacles in Turkey's quest for Europeanisation. Diversity has become one of the challenges perceived by a remarkable part of the European public as a threat to social, cultural, religious and economic security of the European nations. There is apparently a growing resentment against the discourse of diversity, often promoted by the European Commission and the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, many scholars, politicians and NGOs. The stigmatisation of migration has brought about a political discourse, which is known as 'the end of multiculturalism and diversity'.⁷¹ This is built upon the assumption that the homogeneity of the nation is desirable, yet at stake and should be restored by alienating those who are not part of a 'state-group', which is ethno-culturally and religiously homogenous. After a relative prominence of multiculturalism both in political and scholarly debates, a turn of coming to terms with nostalgic deprivation can be witnessed in the debate. Evidence of diminishing belief in the possibility of a flourishing multicultural society has changed the nature of the debate on successful integration of migrants in their host societies.⁷²

68 Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics*; William Safran, "Diasporas"; Robin Cohen, "New Roles for Diasporas"; Ayhan Kaya, *Sicher in Kreuzberg*; Kelly M. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration*; Fiona B. Adamson, "The Growing Importance of Diaspora Politics", *Current History* 115 (784), 2016, p. 291–97; and Damla Aksel, *Home States and Homeland Politics*.

69 For more discussion on the notion of co-radicalisation see Tom Pyszczynski, Abdolhossein Abdollahi, Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, Florette Cohen and David Weise, "Mortality salience, martyrdom, and military might: The great Satan versus the axis of evil," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 32, No 4, 2006, p. 525-537.

70 Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

71 Ayhan Kaya, "Backlash of Multiculturalism and Republicanism in Europe", *Philosophy & Social Criticism Journal*, Vol. 38, No 4-5, 2012, p. 399-411.

72 Ayhan Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe: Lost in Diversity and Unity*, London, Routledge, 2019.

The rise of right-wing populist and Islamophobic rhetoric in Europe has also negatively impacted the AKP's European perspective. As a political party, which originally gained legitimacy with its culturalist and civilisational perspective in a period of time constrained by Huntington's paradigm of the clash of civilisations, the AKP also invested in the culturalisation and religionisation of what is social, political and economic in nature by highlighting the cleavages between "crescent" and "cross".⁷³ The civilisational and religious dichotomy that is somehow ideologically promoted by the AKP and the right-wing European populist parties has triggered the process of co-radicalisation between Turkey and the EU countries. One of the venues of co-radicalisation between Turkish and some European state actors was the migrant communities of Turkish-origin and their descendants residing in Europe. The AKP elite politicized, polarized and consolidated some of the members of the Turkish diaspora before the constitutional referendum of 16 April 2017, the result of which led to the introduction of a presidential system in Turkey. The votes from abroad were determinant in the referendum result.⁷⁴ The exposure of these polemics demonstrates the way in which a populist political style works by dividing, polarizing and co-radicalising societal and political groups.⁷⁵

Revitalizing the Ottoman heritage, past, myths, memories, and Islam, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan gave many migrants of Turkish origin the power to stand against the earlier feelings of humiliation created by the migrant receiving states and native populations. However, there is evidence indicating that official lobbying activities of the Turkish state among the Turkish-origin migrants are likely to be more destructive than constructive in the way in which they make the Euro-Turks compete on ideological grounds.⁷⁶ The destructive nature of the polarisation initiated by the home-state actors became visible, not only for polarized segments of the Turkish diaspora, but also for the native populations of the European countries prior to the constitutional referendum in Turkey held on 16 April 2017. Campaign activities of the AKP were mostly blocked by the German, Dutch, Austrian, Swedish, Belgian and Danish local and national state actors on the basis that the campaigns were disrupting the public order in their countries. This tension between EU member states and the Turkish state was exacerbated after statements made by President Erdoğan in which he used the analogy of "Nazis" to refer to the acts of the Dutch and German states banning the referendum campaigns of the AKP abroad.⁷⁷

The AKP elite became more civilisationalist, occidentalist, Islamist, culturalist and neo-Ottomanist in the current international context, which is characterized with Islamophobia and populism. Such political extremities displayed by the AKP elite as well as some members of the Turkish diaspora in European cities have shaped political debates in Europe, especially among right-wing populist parties, concerning

73 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*; and Murat Yetkin, "Cross vs. Crescent, Again? Seriously?", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 12 June 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/murat-yetkin/cross-vs-crescent-again-seriously-133156> (Accessed 14 April 2020).

74 For an opinion on this topic see the interview with Dr. Yaşar Aydın, a Turkish-origin political scientist from Germany, <https://www.dw.com/tr/sosyolog-ayd%C4%B1n-yurtd%C4%B1%C5%9F%C4%B1-oylar%C4%B1-sonu%C3%A7-%C3%BCzerinde-belirleyici/a-38132004> (Accessed 30 October 2020).

75 Ayhan Kaya, "State of the Art on Radicalisation: Islamist and Nativist Radicalisation in Europe," Working Paper 12, İstanbul Bilgi University, ERC AdG Islam-ophob-ism Research, 2020, <https://bpy.bilgi.edu.tr/en/publications/working-paper-12-state-art-radicalisation-islamist/> (Accessed 30 October 2020).

76 Fiona B. Adamson, "Sending States and the Making of Intra-Diasporic Politics: Turkey and Its Diaspora(s)." *International Migration Review*, OnLine First, 8 October 2018; and Damla Aksel, *Home States and Homeland Politics: Interactions between the Turkish State and its Emigrants in France and the United States*, London, Routledge, 2018.

77 For a detailed discussion on this issue see The Guardian (15 March 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/15/recep-tayyip-erdogan-rails-against-dutch-in-televised-speech-netherlands-srebrenica> (Accessed 18 May 2020).

the loyalty and dual-citizenship rights of members of the European space of Turkish origin. For instance, while the junior partner in the Austrian government, right-wing populist FPÖ (Austrian Freedom Party) orchestrated a campaign to investigate thousands of Austrian citizens of Turkish origin on suspicion of illegally holding dual citizenship,⁷⁸ the Dutch government started to display acts of intolerance against migrants and dual citizens of Turkish origin, who receive benefits in the Netherlands without being completely transparent about their financial situation and property.⁷⁹ Apparently, these reciprocal acts are different illustrations of co-radicalisation of politics between Turkish and European states. Such reciprocal acts and discourses harmed EU-Turkey relations as well as EU-Middle East relations by prompting some parts of the political elite on both sides to become co-radicalised against each other.

Migration Diplomacy: Readmission Agreement and Turkey-EU Refugee Statement

The EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement and the EU-Turkey Statement of 18th March (2016) are shaping Turkish and European migration and asylum policies today. Both documents were signed in a period with many public discussions in the background, ranging from Islamophobia, populism, ISIS recruits, radicalisation of Islam or Islamisation of radicalism, to the process of Islamisation and the ISIS and PKK threats becoming more visible in Turkey. Both agreements were exploited by the EU as well as Turkish officials to appease their populations. The agreements aimed at easing the political and societal instability caused by the refugee crisis. The AKP government has used the issues related to the mobility of Turkish citizens and visa liberalisation with the EU as a bargaining chip in domestic politics. Such a use seems to be motivated by the belief that the readmission agreement, coupled with the visa liberalisation debate, would have the potential to shift public opinion in favour of the AKP and secure an electoral win. Similarly, one could witness the success of the strategic use of ‘migration diplomacy’ as a bargaining tool over and during the membership negotiation process between the EU and Turkey,⁸⁰ as well as over the electoral win of the AKP in the general elections of 1 November 2015.

The AKP administration has partly perceived the Syrian refugees as another bargaining chip to be used when needed, for example, in making a deal with the EU to resolve the refugee crisis. In a meeting between Erdoğan and Merkel in İstanbul prior to the 1 November 2015 general elections, the two leaders had a mutual understanding of sharing the burden of refugees and financially supporting Turkey to better accommodate them. Further, they agreed to provide Syrian refugees with better access to housing, education, health services and the labour market. The shuttle diplomacy between German and Turkish counter-parts at the highest level led to the formulation of the EU-Turkey Statement on the Protection of Refugees, which entered into force on 18 March 2016.⁸¹ The statement agreed by both sides has given Turkey an upper hand in both economic and political terms. It has been

78 For a detailed discussion on the Austrian Government’s effort to strip off Austrians of Turkish origin with dual nationality see <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/11/24/dual-nationality-turks-stripped-citizenship-far-right-austrias/> (Accessed 22 May 2020).

79 See <https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2255954-miljoenen-aan-buitenlands-bezit-verzwegen-bij-aanvraag-uitkering.html> (Accessed 23 May 2020).

80 Ahmet İçduygu and Damla Aksel, “Two-to-Tango in Migration Diplomacy: Negotiating Readmission Agreement between the EU and Turkey”, *European Journal of Migration and Law*, Vol. 16, No 3, 2014, p. 361.

81 For the content of the EU-Turkey Statement see, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/> (Accessed 24 April 2020).

used by the AKP leadership in different occasions as a diplomatic tool to leverage other aims and to achieve goals related to migration.⁸²

Conclusion

This article mainly scrutinized the impact of three drivers on Turkish migration policies: the Arab Spring, European right-wing populism, and AKP's Islamism and neo-Ottomanism. Accordingly, it was found out that the first driver, the Arab Spring, coupled with the civil war in Syria, has directly impacted Turkish foreign policy aspirations, triggering Turkey's quest to become a "soft power" in the region. Following these changing foreign policy aspirations, Turkey's migration policies have become more liberal and humanitarian because of Turkey's aspirations to become a soft power.

The second driver is the growing popularity of Islamophobic and populist tendencies in the EU, which directly resonate on the discourse of the leading political elite as well as on the formation of diaspora politics of the Turkish state. The analysis has highlighted that such populist and Islamophobic attitudes in the EU prompt qualified descendants of Turkish origin migrants to search for alternative places for settlement and work. In early 2010s, Turkey became a popular destination for such groups. However, the current political situation in Turkey has interrupted this tendency. On the other hand, it is also found that the Turkish political elite has become more Islamist and occidental in their discourse using populist tendencies to consolidate their pious Muslim constituencies. This article also focused on the changing patterns of diaspora politics of the Turkish state, which has lately become more neo-Ottomanist and Sunni-Islamist in a way that extended the polarizing discourse of the Turkish state in domestic level to the diaspora groups.

The third driver is the acts of benevolence of Turkish state actors driven from AKP's Islamist and neo-Ottomanist acts, discourses and policies. These acts of benevolence and charity parallel the discourse of "Ansar Spirit" reminding the leading political elite of the early Muslims of Medina welcoming the Prophet Mohammad and his entourage coming from Makkah. It is argued that it is this act of benevolence, which has likely comforted many Syrian refugees as well as the cultural intimacy, which they have witnessed in their neighbourhoods in Turkey.

These three drivers have so far been very decisive in the formation of Turkey's migration policies and foreign policy aspirations in international relations. Despite all these political and ideological changes in the mind-set of the Turkish political elite, Turkey has continued to collaborate with the EU on the issues related to management of refugee crisis since 2011. The EU-Turkey Refugee Statement enacted on 18 March 2016 seems to be the confirmation of the strong cooperation between the two sides. However, the source of cooperation between the EU and Turkey, making the two sides work together is not value-based, but lies within their mutual interests. Hence, the EU-Turkey Refugee statement could be interpreted as an indication of the process of de-Europeanisation rather than Europeanisation. One could also see that the AKP, another right-wing populist party, has been very successful in leveraging different moments of crises, such as the previously mentioned polemics in Europe, growing Islamophobic tendencies and attacks, in order to obtain foreign policy goals at the expense of exploiting the refugees residing in Turkey.

82 See Kelly M. Greenhill, "Engineered Migration"; "The Use of Refugees"; and *Weapons of Mass Migration*.

To conclude, this article claimed that migration has been used as a tool to leverage in two different ways. One is based on the idea of *leveraging migration for attraction and persuasion* as it has been implemented in the Middle East by the use of a set of Sunni-Islamist and neo-Ottomanist discursive frames. The other way of using migration as a tool for leverage was based on the idea of *leveraging migration for coercion* as it has been mostly implemented against the EU member states. To put it differently, one could also argue that the AKP leadership has used migration as a geopolitical tool to leverage both soft power and hard power.