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## **Business as Usual?**

### **The Present and Future Impact of Brexit on Anglo-Turkish Relations**

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#### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyse how Brexit has affected Anglo-Turkish relations. It evaluates elements of continuity and possibilities of change in bilateral relations. In the first two sections, the article offers background information on the Brexit referendum and the history of Anglo-Turkish relations. It then discusses the potential risks and opportunities for foreign policies of both countries with regards to their relations with each other. In the final section, it analyses the significance of Anglo-Turkish commercial ties and areas of further economic cooperation. The article concludes that despite the obstacles that were posed by Brexit, Anglo-Turkish relations have continued as usual. There is potential for the deepening of relations in economy, trade and security. However, the future of bilateral relations will also depend on the willingness of both sides to engage with each other and Europe while also developing realistic expectations from one another in an era of global uncertainty.

**Keywords:** Britain, European Union, Turkey, Brexit, Foreign Policy, Trade.

#### **Introduction**

Global politics and the economy have undergone major crises in the aftermath of the 2007/2008 financial crash. As populism and economic nationalism escalated in many countries, Brexit became one of the flagrant examples of epoch-shifting global turmoil. This study aims to analyse how Brexit has affected Anglo-Turkish relations in this era of global uncertainty. It evaluates elements of continuity, as well as possibilities of change in Anglo-Turkish relations and the foreign policies of both countries.

Recently, there has been a significant increase in the number of studies on Brexit, as well as its consequences for the international world order, politics of the European Union (EU), and the United Kingdom's (UK) relations with other countries.<sup>3</sup> However, there is limited research examining the specific impact of Brexit on Turkish-UK relations. Aiming to fill this gap in the literature, this article provides an outline of the past, present and future of political and economic relations.

In order to analyse elements of continuity and change post-Brexit, the article first offers background information on the Brexit referendum and the history of Anglo-Turkish relations. It then discusses the potential risks and opportunities for foreign policy, before analysing the significance of Anglo-Turkish trade relations and areas of further economic cooperation.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Tim Oliver, "European and International Views of Brexit," *Journal of European Public Policy* 23, no. 9, 2016: pp. 1–8.



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### **The Road to Brexit: EU-UK Relations and the Referendum Campaign**

The results of the Brexit referendum on 23 June 2016 revealed that 52% of the voters were in favour of leaving the EU. The outcome was narrow and gave the impression to those who favoured staying in the Union that with a better campaign and more suitable political atmosphere, the results could have favoured remaining in the EU.<sup>4</sup> In reality, the results were influenced by contingent factors leading up to the vote as well as long-term uneasiness between the EU and the UK. Therefore, explaining the reasons behind Brexit requires an analysis of both the background of EU-UK relations and the referendum campaign itself.

#### ***Background of EU-UK Relations***

When the UK first joined the European Community in 1973, it already had an exceptional relationship with it, due to its decision not to be a founding member of the communities in 1957. This hesitation was a result of the self-perception that Britain could be detached from European affairs and continue to be a global and transatlantic power. While this self-perception delayed British membership, it also determined its subsequent relations with the EU.<sup>5</sup> Once in the EU, the UK preferred a wider Union with more members, which cooperated with each other economically while also safeguarding their security interests. This position at times put the UK at odds with the increasingly deepening supranational project of European integration.

While the UK approached political integration with caution, it also established limits to economic deepening. On at least two occasions, the reluctance in economic integration resulted in exceptions. First, reminiscent of its membership decision, the UK initially did not participate in the European Monetary System (EMS), which took effect in 1979. When it did so 11 years later, the experience was short-lived, and the UK withdrew from the EMS after currency fluctuations in 1992. Subsequently, the UK opted out of the single currency agreed by the EU in the 1993 Maastricht Treaty. Second, due to disputes about the contributions of the UK to the EC budget, Britain negotiated a rebate, whereby its payments were reduced to better reflect its revenues from the EU.<sup>6</sup> Despite the rebate, the controversy over how much Britain contributed to the EU budget continued, flaring up once again during the Brexit referendum campaign.

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Mance and Jim Pickard, "How David Cameron could have avoided an EU leave vote," *Financial Times*, 25 June 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/4f8634c6-3873-11e6-9a05-82a9b15a8ee7>.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Kenealy, "How did we get here? A brief history of Britain's membership of the EU," *European Futures*, 24 May 2016, <https://www.europeanfutures.ed.ac.uk/how-did-we-get-here-a-brief-history-of-britains-membership-of-the-eu/>.

<sup>6</sup> Gianluigi Vernasca, "The UK's EU rebate – explained," *The Conversation*, 6 June 2016, <https://theconversation.com/the-uks-eu-rebate-explained-58019>.



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For the majority of the British public and the governing elite, the EU was a limited economic project. As a result, when the 2007/2008 financial crisis triggered a Eurozone crunch in 2009, it also precipitated heightened scepticism toward the EU.<sup>7</sup> This cynicism toward the Union was not unique to the UK; however, given the background of already existing suspicions, it set Britain on a unique path of holding a referendum on the matter.

### *The Brexit Referendum*

The Conservative Party decision to hold the Brexit referendum in the summer of 2016 was in part due to a sense of general political crisis.<sup>8</sup> Prior to the 2015 general elections, Britain's two-party system seemed to be on shaky ground. In the last decade, the combined votes of the Conservative and Labour Parties had declined. In the aftermath of the 2010 general elections, for the first time since the Second World War, a coalition government was formed between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. Fearing the possibility of defeat or another coalition government, the Conservative leadership pledged in 2013 to hold a referendum on leaving the EU if it was re-elected to power.

Along with the decline of the two-party system, Euroscepticism after the 2009 financial crisis resulted in the rise of the radical right "challenger" UK Independence Party (UKIP). The party's vote share increased from 3% in 2010 to 13% in 2015. The growing success of UKIP in polls was also evident from its 27% vote share in the European parliamentary elections.<sup>9</sup> For the Conservative leadership that also included Eurosceptics, UKIP was a threat to its parliamentary majority in the 2015 elections. Thus, the promise of a referendum on Britain's membership in the EU was an attempt to stop the decline of the two-party system and curb the increasing popularity of Eurosceptic political groups.

While the background conditions and the contingent political factors paved the way for the ballot, the Brexit referendum campaign impacted the results. The Remain campaign focused on the economic risks of Brexit, trying to tap into the public sentiment that perceived the EU as a limited economic project.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, the Leave campaign adopted a populist stance<sup>11</sup> and stressed the possible benefits of leaving the EU, such as a reduction in the number of immigrants, more employment, taking back control of the borders, and transferring the funds saved from the EU budget to the National Health Service (NHS).

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<sup>7</sup> Sofia Vasilopoulou, "UK Euroscepticism and the Brexit referendum," *The Political Quarterly* 87, no. 2, April-June 2016, pp. 219-227.

<sup>8</sup> Will Jennings and Martin Lodge, "Brexit, the tides and Canute: the fracturing politics of the British state," *Journal of European Public Policy* 26, no. 5, 2019, pp. 772-789.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Evans and Jonathan Mellon, "Immigration, Euroscepticism, and the rise and fall of UKIP," *Party Politics* 25, no. 1, 2019, pp. 76-87.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Glencross, *Why the UK Voted for Brexit: David Cameron's Great Miscalculation*, London: Palgrave Pivot (2016), pp. 35-46.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Freeden, "After the Brexit referendum: revisiting populism as an ideology," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 22, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-11.



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Despite these assurances, the immediate aftermath of the referendum proved unexpectedly difficult to handle. As the first country disintegrating from the EU, negotiating the terms of the withdrawal took four and a half years to complete. Within the UK political system, Brexit negotiations consumed three prime ministers. David Cameron had to resign after his defeat in the poll. His successor, the pro-Remain politician, Theresa May, struggled to receive parliamentary approval for her terms of withdrawal from the EU and was replaced by Boris Johnson. It was Johnson, one of the prominent names of the Leave campaign, who oversaw the official separation from the EU on 31 January 2020.

One of the major points of tension between the UK and the EU was the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. This border had been frictionless since the 1998 Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement. The EU had facilitated the necessary conditions of the agreement through the single market which guaranteed the free movement of people and goods across the Irish border.<sup>12</sup> With Brexit, one of the most pressing issues became the future of the Belfast Agreement as the UK re-established its borders. The matter was tentatively resolved with a protocol that ensured that Northern Ireland would remain integrated into the EU in some areas of trade.<sup>13</sup>

In December 2020, just days before the end of the transition period and the UK's complete withdrawal from the EU, the two entities signed a free trade and cooperation agreement.<sup>14</sup> For the time being, in 2021, this agreement regulates post-Brexit relations between the UK and the EU. However, the terms of this agreement and relations are subject to reviews and evaluation in the future.<sup>15</sup> The UK's relations with the EU will continue to evolve in response to bilateral dynamics and domestic political change. Like in the past, the UK's future relations with the EU will continue to be exceptional.

### A Brief History of Anglo-Turkish Relations

Similar to the UK's relations with the EU, Anglo-Turkish relations have been unique as well. The two countries have had historical ties and experiences, which saw wars, conflict and close cooperation. Despite episodes of tension, however, over the centuries, relations were mostly friendly because, as the British Ambassador to Turkey Sir Dominick Chilcott nicely summarised, the two countries' "interests haven't clashed generally. But [they have] both had

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<sup>12</sup> Katy Hayward, "The pivotal position of the Irish border in the UK's withdrawal from the European Union," *Space and Polity* 22, no. 2, 2018, pp. 238-254.

<sup>13</sup> Tom Edgington and Chris Morris, "Brexit: What is the Northern Ireland Protocol and why are there checks?," *BBC News*, 15 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-53724381>.

<sup>14</sup> Anna Isaac, "10 key details in the UK-EU trade deal", *Politico*, 27 December 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/10-key-details-uk-eu-brexit-trade-deal/>.

<sup>15</sup> Sam Lowe, "Brexit trade deal means 'freedom', but at a cost: the arguments will be far from over," *The Guardian*, 27 December 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/commentisfree/2020/dec/27/britain-trade-deal-eu-arguments-brexit-renegotiation>.



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the common interest of preventing any one power on the European continent becoming so dominant that it threatens ... both [of them].”<sup>16</sup>

Affirming their understanding of each other’s significance, formal commercial and diplomatic relations were established four centuries ago when Queen Elizabeth I was granted a treaty of peace and friendship by Sultan Murad III in 1583.<sup>17</sup> Commercially as well, relations were institutionalised early on, for example, through the foundation of the British Chamber of Commerce in Turkey (BCCT) established in 1887 as the second oldest British Chamber abroad in the world.<sup>18</sup>

### *Bilateral Relations in the Twentieth Century*

However, bilateral relations started off on the wrong foot at the start of the twentieth century. Britain and Turkey were on opposite sides of World War I and Anglo-Turkish antagonism had intensified throughout the second decade of the century. Köymen argues that there are three reasons that could be pointed out for this hostility. First, the Turks blamed Britain for the atrocities caused by the Greek troops in Anatolia during and in the aftermath of WWI. Second, the Turkish nationalists believed that the riots that erupted simultaneously with the Greco-Turkish War were caused by Britain. Third, although occasionally it was disowned by the Foreign Office, British Prime Minister Lloyd George’s personal dislike of the Turk that was derived from Venizelos’ direct influence on him, led to decisions made by his extremely negative emotional attitudes, which in return escalated the mutual resentments.<sup>19</sup>

Although they fought against each other in World War I, the UK and Turkey have maintained good bilateral relations since then. One of the most crucial challenges of the bilateral relationship was the demilitarisation of the Straits in the 1930s. However, as Barlas and Yilmaz argue, “the British Chiefs of Staff believed that the importance of Turkish friendship with Britain outweighed the disadvantages of complete remilitarization of the Straits.” As a result, “the British did not object and in July 1936 at Montreux accepted the new status of the Straits” which then “was the turning point in Turkish-British

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<sup>16</sup> Amanda Jane Yeşilbursa, “Perspectives on Anglo-Turkish diplomatic relations: An interview with Sir Dominick Chilcott (KCMG), British Ambassador to Turkey”, *Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations* 1, no. 1, January 2020, pp. 97-107 (p. 97).

<sup>17</sup> Çiğdem Balm, “Perspectives on Anglo-Turkish diplomatic relations: An interview with His Excellency Mr. Ümit Yalçın, the Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,” *Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations* 1, no. 2, June 2020, pp. 87-91 (p. 88). See also Arthur Leon Horniker, “William Harborne and the beginning of Anglo-Turkish diplomatic and commercial Relations,” *The Journal of Modern History* 14, no. 3, 1942, pp. 289-316.

<sup>18</sup> BCCT, “About us”, <https://www.bcct.org.tr/about-us/the-british-chamber-of-commerce-in-turkey>.

<sup>19</sup> Oya B. Köymen, “Anglo-Turkish relations: 1919-1922”, *The Turkish Yearbook* 8, 1967, pp. 14-28 (p. 27-8).





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rapprochement.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, in the aftermath of World War II, the UK and Turkey became allies as both countries joined NATO and the Council of Europe. The foundation of CENTO was also an important aspect of the Anglo-Turkish rapprochement in the 1960s.<sup>21</sup>

The Cyprus issue has also been an important part of Anglo-Turkish relations as both Britain and Turkey (together with Greece) are signatories of the Treaty of Guarantee on the protection of the independence of Cyprus which was promulgated in 1960. Today, there is also a significant number of Cypriot Turks living in London. According to Home Office estimates in 2001, the number of Cypriot Turks living in the city is around 300,000 –twice the number of those in Cyprus.<sup>22</sup> The escalated political violence towards Kurds, Alevis, and the leftists in the 1970s and 1980s in Turkey also made the UK a destination of asylum for the Turkish dissent and minority groups. Today, approximately 150,000 Turks live across the UK, though mainly concentrated in London.<sup>23</sup>

### *Bilateral Relations in the Twenty-First Century*

Up until Brexit, Anglo-Turkish relations were most crucially shaped by the EU. Turkey signed the Ankara Agreement with the EEC in 1963, which formulated Anglo-Turkish relations on a number of areas, including migration. Furthermore, the UK, as a full member between 1973 and 2020, has been one of the strongest supporters of Turkey’s EU membership. Both Labour and Tory governments supported Turkey’s accession to the Union along with an understanding of its strategic importance. For example, both David Miliband,<sup>24</sup> the Foreign Secretary of the Labour government under Gordon Brown’s premiership, and David Cameron,<sup>25</sup> the Prime Minister of several Conservative governments, showed their support on multiple occasions.

Despite the supportive relations at official levels, other political parties and the public approached Turkish membership of the EU with scepticism. Turkey’s candidate status became a contentious subject during the Brexit referendum campaign as pro-Leave campaigners argued that Turkey’s accession to the EU would cause an influx of migrants

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<sup>20</sup> Dilek Barlas and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, “Managing the Transition from Pax Britannica to Pax Americana: Turkey’s Relations with Britain and the US in a Turbulent Era (1929–47)”, *Turkish Studies* 17, no. 3, 2016, pp. 449–73, (p. 456-57).

<sup>21</sup> Cihat Göktepe, “The ‘forgotten alliance’? Anglo-Turkish relations and CENTO, 1959–65”, *Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 4, 2006, pp. 103–29.

<sup>22</sup> House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, “Implications for the Justice and Home Affairs Area of the Accession of Turkey to the European Union,” *Tenth Report of Session 2010–12*, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> İbrahim Sirkeci, Tuncay Bilecen, Yakup Çoştu, Saniye Dedeoğlu, M. Rauf Kesici, B. Dilara Şeker, Fethiye Tilbe, and K. Onur Unutulmaz, *Little Turkey in Great Britain*, London: The Transnational Press London, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Euractiv, “Miliband: Turning Turkey away from EU ‘unconscionable,’” 27 Oct 2009, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/uk-europe/news/miliband-turning-turkey-away-from-eu-unconscionable/>.

<sup>25</sup> BBC, “Cameron 'anger' at slow pace of Turkish EU negotiations,” 27 July 2010, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-10767768>.



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towards the UK. The campaign suggested that leaving the EU would be the only solution to prevent this undesirable outcome.

Ironically, the number of applicants from Turkey for residence/work permits in the UK via the Ankara Agreement, which stopped at the beginning of 2021, increased sixty times (6000%) in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum.<sup>26</sup> This was mostly due to Turkey's own political turbulence after the 2016 coup attempt. Shortly after the Brexit poll, Gülenist-linked army officers in Turkey unsuccessfully tried to overthrow the Erdoğan government. In response to the putsch, the Turkish government declared a state of emergency, which was extended eight times between 2016 and 2018. The purges by the Decree-Law continued to go beyond the Gülenists, including many left groups.

Immediately after the coup attempt in Turkey on 15th July 2016, the UK Government gathered the Cabinet Office Briefing Room and discussed emergency decisions on security and counter-terrorism in close cooperation with Turkey. Only three days after the coup attempt, Sir Alan Duncan, the State Minister Responsible for Europe and the US at the Foreign Office, visited Turkey to deliver a special message of solidarity. This was the first official visit after the coup attempt at the ministerial level from Europe to Turkey. Thereupon, Prime Minister Yıldırım thanked Prime Minister May in his interview with The Guardian on 27 July 2016.<sup>27</sup> He highlighted that May sent one of her ministers specifically to show solidarity with Turkey. Yıldırım also criticised other Western countries for not showing enough and genuine support to Turkey in the aftermath of the coup attempt.

In the decade before the coup attempt and despite concerns over rising authoritarianism in Turkey, the UK governments have approached Turkey for more advanced trade and security cooperation. A Strategic Partnership Document was signed by the countries in 2007 and it was renewed in 2010. The Document listed the relationship under these titles:<sup>28</sup>

- Bilateral Relations,
- Bilateral Trade and Investment,
- Turkey's EU Membership,
- Regional Stability and Peace,
- Cyprus,

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<sup>26</sup> Euronews, "Ankara Anlaşması'na başvuruda yüzde 6 bin artış," 27 January 2021, <https://tr.euronews.com/2018/03/23/turkiye-den-ankara-anlasmas-na-basvuruda-yuzde-6-bin-art-s>.

<sup>27</sup> Başbakanlık Basın Merkezi, "Başbakan Yıldırım'ın The Guardian'a verdiği mülakat," 27 July 2016, <http://www.bbm.gov.tr/Forms/pgNewsDetail.aspx?Type=5&Id=18179>.

<sup>28</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations between Turkey and the United Kingdom," 2011, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-the-united-kingdom.en.mfa>.



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- Defence,
- Global Security,
- The Illicit Trade of Small and Light Weapons,
- Combating Illegal Migration,
- Energy Security and Low-Carbon Fuel Future,
- Intercultural Dialogue
- Education and Culture.

Whilst signing the renewal of the Document with the then Prime Minister of Turkey Erdoğan, David Cameron described Turkey as the “BRICS of Europe” and he wished to double the bilateral trade volume in the next five years.<sup>29</sup> Subsequently, Turkey and the UK have increased their trade volume (see below) with repeated pledges to work on intensifying relations. For example, Cameron and Erdoğan agreed to advance the commercial relationship between the UK and Turkey in the post-Brexit era when they met during the Warsaw NATO Summit in July 2016.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, bilateral relations between the UK and Turkey have remained stable in the twenty-first century despite Brexit and the intensified democratic backsliding in Turkey.<sup>31</sup> This rapprochement is increasingly significant not only for the augmentation of Britain’s soft power in the post-Brexit era,<sup>32</sup> but also for the future of a sustainable and stable Turkish foreign policy in the age of global challenges.

### The Political Impact of Brexit on Foreign Relations

While Brexit has no immediate and direct impact on Turkey, as a candidate country of the EU and a European neighbour, Ankara’s relations with both London and Brussels will change after Brexit, with possible consequences for its foreign relations with the EU and beyond. The negative and positive impacts of Brexit on Turkey would reflect the long-term alliance and cooperation between Ankara and London in foreign and security policy. Although it is hard to predict the future, potential risks and opportunities for Turkey exist in terms of its relations with the rest of the Western alliance.

<sup>29</sup> Gov.uk, “Strengthening UK-Turkey relations,” 09.02.2011, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/strengthening-uk-turkey-relations>.

<sup>30</sup> Gov.uk, “PM meeting with President Erdogan of Turkey,” 09 July 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-meeting-with-president-erdogan-of-turkey-9-july-2016>.

<sup>31</sup> Görkem Altınörs, “Devamlılık mı Kırılma mı? Brexit Sonrası Dönemde Birleşik Krallık-Türkiye İlişkilerinin Karşılaştırmalı Dış Politika Analizi,” *Pamukkale University Journal of Social Sciences Institute* 40, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Yaprak Gürsoy, “Reconsidering Britain’s Soft Power: Lessons from the Perceptions of the Turkish Political Elite,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 2020.





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### *Risks for Turkey's Membership of the EU*

The most important risk facing Turkey is the loss of a like-minded power as an ally within the EU. As explained above, the UK had preferred a relatively loosely integrated intergovernmental EU with strong security ties to the US. Partly as a result of this preference, and despite more sceptical public opinion, Britain had been one of the chief champions of Turkey's membership in the EU.<sup>33</sup>

With Brexit, Turkey had lost an important advocate of its bid at a time when prospects of membership already declined. Since 2006, Turkey-EU relations faced three main obstacles, which appear to be irreconcilable for the time being. First, the EU has raised concerns over Turkey's democracy and human rights. While these issues are related to general humanitarian concerns, they also have a concrete bearing on membership since it is enshrined in the EU through the Copenhagen criteria that candidates cannot accede unless they are full democracies and until they share the same political liberal values with the rest of the members.<sup>34</sup>

Second, Turkey's assertive foreign policy in its neighbourhood and Syria have raised concerns in the EU over the mutual defence and security goals. On the one hand, accusations that Turkey supports Islamic groups against Damascus led to questions on whether there are any shared foreign policy interests and values between the EU and Turkey. On the other hand, the influx of refugees from Syria and the wider Middle East, necessitated the EU to cooperate with Turkey from a transactional point of view. The two entities signed a migration agreement in 2016, which ensured that relations continued despite problems in the accession negotiations.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, as a result of the membership of Cyprus in 2004, Turkish negotiations with the EU came to a halt. Turkey has refrained from extending the 1963 Ankara Agreement to the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus. Practically, the resolution of the conflict on the island became one of the primary conditions for Turkey's possible accession to the EU in the future. From a broader perspective, the ongoing dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean

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<sup>33</sup> Ziya Öniş, "Turkey-EU Relations: Beyond the Current Stalemate", *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 4, 2008, pp. 35-50 (p.44); Sevilay Z. Aksoy, "The prospect of Turkey's EU membership as represented in the British newspapers The Times and The Guardian, 2002–2005," *Journal of European Studies* 39, no. 4, 2009, pp. 469-506.

<sup>34</sup> Natalie Martin, "From Containment to Realpolitik and Back Again: A Realist Constructivist Analysis of Turkey–EU Relations and the Migration Issue," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 57, no. 6, 2019, pp. 1349-1365.

<sup>35</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, "Order from Chaos," *Brookings*, 17 March 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/03/17/as-eu-turkey-migration-agreement-reaches-the-five-year-mark-add-a-job-creation-element/>.



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between Turkey and EU member states, including Cyprus, Greece and France, put further strains on Turkey's accession negotiations.<sup>36</sup>

In such areas of dispute, as a member of the EU, the UK could have played an important mediating role between Brussels and Ankara. Because of the legacy of its colonial rule, as well as its status as one of the guarantor powers, the UK has historical ties with both the Greek and Turkish communities of the island. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Cypriot accession, the UK made "attempts to end the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots."<sup>37</sup> As a result, the UK is relatively equidistant from both sides, allowing it to be well placed in taking up a balancing role in resolving the dispute. Therefore, from Ankara's perspective, Brexit complicates EU's involvement in the Cypriot dispute since no EU member is seen impartial anymore. Thus, Brexit has negative consequences for Turkey's accession beyond the mere loss of an advocate in the EU. Since membership is directly linked to the resolution of the de facto separation of island of Cyprus, Brexit has the potential to further complicate relations between the EU, Turkey and Cyprus.

### *Opportunities for the UK and Turkey within and beyond NATO*

While Turkey's relations with the EU have deteriorated in recent years, similar tensions also occurred within NATO and with the US. Turkey's position in the Western alliance has been questioned since 2011, due to Ankara's foreign policy changes after the Arab Spring, the 2016 coup attempt and its cooperation with Russia. Turkey's position against the Egyptian government following the 2013 coup in the country and against Kurdish forces in Syria clearly indicated different national interests and ideological predispositions between Ankara and Washington. The purges and domestic security practices of the government after the 2016 failed coup further put in doubt Turkey's adherence to common Western values of democracy and human rights in similar ways to the reactions of EU members. As Ankara sought new allies, including the purchase of the S-400 defence system from Moscow, relations significantly worsened with a long list of grievances on both sides, getting harder to detangle and reverse.<sup>38</sup>

In this context of Turkey's foreign and security relations, there is an opportunity for the UK to play a more active role in balancing Turkey's relations with the EU and NATO allies.

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<sup>36</sup> Thanos Dokos, Nathalie Tocci, Anja Palm and Can Kasapoğlu, "Greek-Turkish Relations and the Cyprus dispute: impact on Turkey-EU scenarios," *FEUTURE Online Paper*, December 2018, [https://feuture.uni-koeln.de/sites/feuture/user\\_upload/Online\\_Paper\\_No\\_27.pdf](https://feuture.uni-koeln.de/sites/feuture/user_upload/Online_Paper_No_27.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> James Ker-Lindsay, "A Difficult Transition to a New Relationship: Britain and Cyprus in the European Union", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 15, no. 2, 2007, pp. 185-200 (p. 191).

<sup>38</sup> Yaprak Gürsoy and Ilke Toygür, "Turkey in and out of NATO? An instance of a turbulent alliance with Western institutions," *Analyses of the Elcano Royal Institute (ARI)*, 11 June 2018, [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/riecano\\_en/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_in/zonas\\_in/ARI73-2018-Gursoy-Toygur-Turkey-in-out-NATO-turbulent-alliance-Western-institutions](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/riecano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/ARI73-2018-Gursoy-Toygur-Turkey-in-out-NATO-turbulent-alliance-Western-institutions).



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The extent to which the UK would be willing to play such a role would depend on its own interests and goals in becoming a global power. Since the Brexit referendum, foreign policymakers in the UK have focused on enhancing Britain's soft power with the intention of embracing the chance of formulating foreign and security policy independently of the EU. For instance, the 2018 National Security Capability Review outlines Global Britain as the “vision ... for a secure and prosperous United Kingdom, with global reach and influence.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the Integrated Review of Security, Defence Development and Foreign Policy published in March 2021 describes UK's vision for 2030 in following terms: “departure from the European Union (EU) provides a unique opportunity to ... exploit the freedom that comes with increased independence, such as the ability to forge new free trade deals.”<sup>40</sup>

In this new vision of Global Britain, the significance of the UK's ties with the US and Europe are stressed as unchanging elements of foreign and defence policy. It is further highlighted that “the UK has a seat in every major multilateral organisation”<sup>41</sup> including NATO, the UN Security Council, and the Commonwealth. Through the Global Britain vision, the UK intends to strengthen its relations with non-EU countries while also utilising its position and relations within international organisations and European partners. The priority nations listed are, first, the US, and then, European neighbours and allies, including Turkey. Thus, the Global Britain vision would make it possible for the UK to play a more positive role between Turkey – a country it considers as a strategic partner — and the EU and NATO. London's historical connections and common foreign policy goals with Washington would also place it in a distinctive position to mediate between Turkey and the USA. In addition to positive prospects in Western security cooperation for Turkey, there is also a chance to strengthen bilateral ties between London and Ankara through defence deals, such as Turkey's purchase of TF-X fighter jet engines from the UK.<sup>42</sup>

Despite these optimistic scenarios, however, Ankara needs to be cautious in its expectations. Although London appears to have stronger connections to Ankara than other Western capitals, for the time being, the chances for Britain to oppose its European and American allies are weak. In case of a dispute, the UK is more likely to maintain its

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<sup>39</sup> HM Government, “National Security Capability Review,” March 2018, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/705347/6.4391\\_CO\\_National-Security-Review\\_web.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/705347/6.4391_CO_National-Security-Review_web.pdf), p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> HM Government, “Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy,” March 2021, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/975077/Global\\_Britain\\_in\\_a\\_Competitive\\_Age-\\_the\\_Integrated\\_Review\\_of\\_Security\\_\\_Defence\\_\\_Development\\_and\\_Foreign\\_Policy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age-_the_Integrated_Review_of_Security__Defence__Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf) p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Patrick Wintour, “Turkey plans to speed up fighter jet project with Britain,” *The Guardian*, 11 December 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/11/turkey-fighter-jet-project-britain>.



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equidistance while supporting a multilateral approach in line with NATO and the UN. Thus, the UK may not be as proactive and as willing to throw its weight behind Ankara as expected.

Nevertheless, Brexit may still provide political openings for Turkey through passive means and by setting positive examples. First, the nature of Turkey-EU relations is in flux because of the freezing of Turkey's accession process and the development of a new transactional approach. Moreover, the Customs Union between Turkey and the EU is being reconsidered because of its restrictive elements. Turkey and the EU are in search of a new and accommodating relationship taking into account their historical trade relations and Turkey's decades-long candidacy.<sup>43</sup> Although the Trade and Cooperation Agreement signed between the UK and the EU in December 2020 established in some respects a less integrated association than that of Turkey's relationship with the EU, London and Brussels will continue to evaluate and negotiate elements of the agreement. Thus, in the long run, the UK's arrangement with the EU has the potential to stimulate similar accords between Turkey and the EU. In the immediate aftermath of the referendum and the subsequent period, officials from both sides have expressed their willingness to take Brexit as an example for the future of Turkish-EU relations, suggesting that such modelling might be possible and desirable in the future.<sup>44</sup>

Second, as Turkey seems to be further detached from liberal democratic nations of the West, maintaining political and economic ties with a European democracy would have implications beneath the surface. Continued bilateral visits and the signing of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Ankara and London (see below) were criticized by opposition groups in both countries because they neglected concerns over Turkey's democracy and human rights conditions. In its memorandum to the Parliament explaining the FTA, the UK Department of International Trade addressed these concerns by stating that "we regularly raise human rights issues with Turkey at all levels."<sup>45</sup> Regardless of the probable impact of raising such problems behind closed doors, previous research has shown that among Turkish politicians, Britain is considered as an important role model with its political system and democracy.<sup>46</sup> Thus, a continued partnership between the two countries would potentially

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<sup>43</sup> Meltem Müftüleri-Baç, "Remolding the Turkey-EU Relationship," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (2018): 119-128.

<sup>44</sup> See for examples, Burcu Arık, "Erdogan: Turkey may have Brexit-like referendum on EU," *Anadolu Agency*, 26 March 2017, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/archive/erdogan-turkey-may-have-brexit-like-referendum-on-eu/3085> and Duvar English, "Germany's CDU leadership hopeful suggests UK model for Turkey-EU partnership," 4 January 2021, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/germanys-cdu-leadership-hopeful-friedrich-merz-suggests-uk-model-for-turkey-eu-partnership-news-55733>.

<sup>45</sup> Gov.uk, "Explanatory memorandum: UK/Turkey: Free Trade Agreement," *International Treaty UK/Turkey: Free Trade Agreement [CS Turkey no.1/2021]* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukturkey-free-trade-agreement-cs-turkey-no12021>, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Yaprak Gürsoy, "Reconsidering Britain's Soft Power."



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safeguard the diffusion of liberal values from the UK through subtle persuasion and by setting up a positive example at a time when such flows from the EU have deteriorated.

Finally, and beyond the mediator role, the advantage of having another non-EU ally in NATO may strengthen Turkey's position in strategic partnerships. Further cooperation between the EU and NATO has created problems for Turkey as a non-EU NATO member.<sup>47</sup> In particular, the accession of Cyprus to the EU has led Ankara to block Nicosia's participation in the Partnership for Peace programme aiming to build cooperation between NATO and Euro-Asian countries. In response, Cyprus blocked Turkey's inclusion in the European Defence Agency and the sharing of classified information between the EU and Turkey. This resulted in a stalemate between the EU and NATO in furthering defence cooperation. Brexit now has the potential to break these types of deadlock, in especially schemes such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), where Britain and Turkey will both share the same status as a third party possibly collaborating with the EU.<sup>48</sup> Britain's future position in EU-NATO cooperation can provide a positive model for Turkey's status as well.

To conclude this section, the direct impact of Brexit on Turkish politics is mostly associated with Ankara losing an important ally in the EU when such a partner was perhaps needed the most. However, Brexit may also lead to new and unexpected opportunities due to the ability of the UK to act more independently of the EU and becoming a model for the future of EU-Turkey relations and domestic politics. It should be kept in mind, however, that the ability to reap the benefits of Brexit would depend on the continuation of good relations between London and Ankara, as well as the UK's ability and willingness to engage with Europe and Turkey, not only in trade but also in foreign and security policy.

### **Economic Relations post-Brexit**

In Anglo-Turkish relations, bilateral trade and the economic interactions have marked one of the most concrete aspects of high degrees of cooperation between the two nations. For both countries, economic partnership is significant for various domestic and foreign reasons. Although Brexit threatened this partnership, the worst-case scenario was avoided by the signing of the FTA in December 2020.<sup>49</sup> The future of bilateral trade would depend on the renewal and expansion of the FTA with the likelihood of spilling over to other areas of cooperation in politics.

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<sup>47</sup> Antonio Missiroli, "EU-NATO cooperation in crisis management: No Turkish delight for ESDP," *Security Dialogue* 33, no. 1, 2002, pp. 9-26.

<sup>48</sup> Senem Aydın-Düzgüt and Alessandro Marrone, "PESCO and security cooperation between the EU and Turkey", *Global Turkey in Europe Working Paper 19*, September 2018, [http://research.sabanciuniv.edu/38203/1/PESCO\\_and\\_Security\\_Cooperation.pdf](http://research.sabanciuniv.edu/38203/1/PESCO_and_Security_Cooperation.pdf).

<sup>49</sup> Bethan McKernan, "UK signs free trade agreement with Turkey," *The Guardian*, 29 December 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/dec/29/uk-signs-free-trade-agreement-with-turkey>.



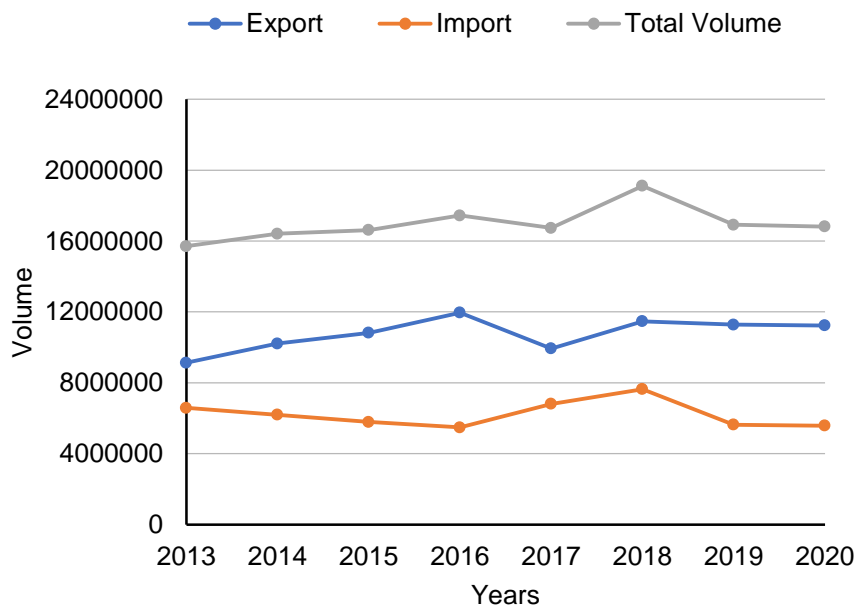
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### *The Significance of Bilateral Trade for the UK and Turkey*

Trade volume between Turkey and the UK has been on a rising trend. According to the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce data, the trade volume between Turkey and the UK was £9.4 billion at the end of 2009.<sup>50</sup> After mutual declarations of increasing cooperation, the trade volume increased to £16.1 billion in 2016 and further to £18.6 billion in 2019, according to the data provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>51</sup> Today, more than 2,900 British companies are operating in Turkey which makes the UK one of the largest investor countries and “the fifth in line among the countries which have invested in Turkey the most.”<sup>52</sup>

Bilateral trade with the UK is particularly significant for Turkey due to two factors. First, Britain is the sixth biggest trade partner and the second (after Germany) biggest exporting market, according to the figures in 2019.<sup>53</sup> As it can be seen in the below figure, Turkey has a significant foreign trade surplus with the UK.

**Figure: Turkey’s foreign economic relations with the UK (Data collated from <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/> in May 2021).**



Furthermore, trade with the UK covers a wide range of Turkish goods. In 2018, the top three items Turkey exported to the UK consisted of land vehicles (24.13%), garments and

<sup>50</sup> İTO, *Birleşik Krallık Ülke Etüdü*, 2011, İTO, İstanbul.

<sup>51</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Relations between Turkey and the United Kingdom”.

<sup>52</sup> Balım, “An Interview with His Excellency Mr. Ümit Yalçın,” p. 88.

<sup>53</sup> Eralp Yazar, “Post-Brexit Turkey-UK ties show signs of new strategic partnership,” *Daily Sabah*, 21 Feb 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/news-analysis/post-brexit-turkey-uk-ties-show-signs-of-new-strategic-partnership>.





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textiles (22.19%) and electronic devices and machinery (12.08%) whereas the top three items imported included power generating machines and devices (20.38%), non-monetary gold (19.84%) and metal scraps (12.72). Given these figures, the UK is an important trading partner for Turkish businesses and industrialists based on purely economic interests.

The second reason why the UK is an important trading partner for Turkey is more political in nature. Since Turkey opted for a new presidential system in 2018 and severed its ties with the US and the EU, it has suffered from a currency and debt crisis predominantly caused by a notoriously acute high current account deficit. Currently, Turkey is suffering from an economic downturn characterised by high inflation, devaluation of the Turkish Lira and loan defaults.<sup>54</sup> This has increased tendencies towards economic nationalism in some sectors, further intensifying due to the Covid-19 pandemic since 2020. In this setting, transnational capitalist groups in Turkey still desire to be part of the US-led liberal international order, including the Customs Union. This is counteracted by emerging capital groups that desire to expand their businesses further domestically and beyond the Customs Union internationally, including the Middle East. Ironically, however, both groups view a post-Brexit FTA with the UK as a viable option. For the first group, cooperation with the UK still implies ties with the international liberal trade order whereas for the second group, it suggests an opportunity beyond the Customs Union they can benefit from. Thus, there is an economic and political convergence among government and business circles on the importance of developing commercial ties with the UK.

Especially after the Brexit referendum, the significance of bilateral trade has been emphasised from both sides and at every level of diplomacy. For example, Turkey's Ambassador to London made a speech at the Turkey-UK Science and Innovation Platform on 21 November 2016. In his speech, Ambassador Abdurrahman Bilgiç highlighted the importance of the growth in the UK's trade with Turkey after Brexit.<sup>55</sup> The Ambassador also spoke at the opening of Beko's new Research and Development Centre in the UK and he underlined that the UK is the second-largest market for Turkish exports and that this situation strengthens despite the fluctuations in the global market. He also described the UK as one of the few developed countries with which Turkey has a foreign trade surplus in foreign economic relations.<sup>56</sup>

Similar sentiments were voiced from the British side as well. After the Brexit referendum and the coup attempt in Turkey, in September 2016, Boris Johnson visited Turkey

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<sup>54</sup> Özgür Orhangazi and A. Erinç Yeldan, "The Re-making of the Turkish Crisis," *Development and Change*, 2021.

<sup>55</sup> Londra Büyükelçiliği, "Ambassador's Statement at 'Turkey-UK Science and Innovation Platform'", 21.11.2016, <http://londra.be.mfa.gov.tr/ShowSpeech.aspx?ID=12070>.

<sup>56</sup> Londra Büyükelçiliği, "Ambassador's Statement at the opening of BEKO's Research and Development Centre", 14.12.2016, <http://londra.be.mfa.gov.tr/ShowSpeech.aspx?ID=12077>.



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as the UK Foreign Minister. Besides the symbolism of solidarity with Turkey, the talks covered security and counter-terrorism, including fighting against ISIS, the Syrian civil war, and the migrant crisis. The visit also highlighted the importance of developing better and advanced mutual commercial and economic relations. For example, Johnson mentioned that his washing machine at home was a Turkish brand (Beko) and he wished to sign a “jumbo” FTA with Turkey to continue developing commercial relations after Brexit.<sup>57</sup> Johnson then met with the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu to discuss economic relations. Following the meeting, Johnson said:

[a]nd of course we talked about all the optimistic things that we could do together and above all the economic inter-penetration between Britain and Turkey which is growing the whole time. I mean, it is not just the 2.5 million Brits we send here every year. I think our trade has been increasing 70% in the last 5 years and that is something that we need now to expand.<sup>58</sup>

A few months after Boris Johnson’s contacts in Ankara, Prime Minister Theresa May visited Turkey. Similar to the previous high-profile encounter, trade and counter-terrorism were the most important issues. Again, the official trip was symbolic, as *The Independent* argued; May was the first foreign leader who travelled to Ankara in the aftermath of the coup attempt and the consecutive purges.<sup>59</sup> However, the visit also had a concrete trade agenda. May expected to open new business channels and trade opportunities worth billions of pounds. This is when the deal to produce fighter jets in Turkey, worth £100 million, was signed. After meeting with President Erdoğan, May also announced that a joint working group would be established in order to discuss and negotiate the post-Brexit FTA between Turkey and the UK.<sup>60</sup>

The goodwill of deepening trade was not exclusive to the British cabinet. In 2017, the UK House of Commons published a document entitled “UK’s Relations with Turkey” which emphasised the importance of growing trade relations with Turkey in the post-Brexit era. The document stated that “[d]espite the damage caused by the coup attempt and government’s response, Turkey represents an economy that the UK will find difficult to ignore.”<sup>61</sup> A special emphasis was made on the £100 million worth fighter jet deal in terms of deepening the “strategic” partnership.

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<sup>57</sup> Gov.uk, “UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson’s visit to Turkey,” 29.09.2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-foreign-secretary-boris-johnsons-visit-to-turkey>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Independent, “Theresa May approves £100m fighter jet deal with Erdogan despite human rights abuses,” 28 Jan 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/theresa-may-agrees-100m-fighter-jet-deal-with-turkeys-erdogan-despite-human-rights-concerns-a7551006.html>.

<sup>60</sup> BBC, “İngiltere ve Türkiye arasında 125 milyon dolarlık savunma anlaşması,” 28 Feb 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-38772811>.

<sup>61</sup> Parliament.uk, “A ‘strategic’ relationship, and its implications for Turkey and the UK,” 23.03.2017, [https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmfa/615/61506.htm#\\_idTextAnchor031](https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmfa/615/61506.htm#_idTextAnchor031).



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It is clear from the bilateral visits, speeches of government officials and published cabinet statements, that for the UK, Turkey constitutes an important trading partner. This is in part due to the Global Britain vision of the UK which emphasises increasing trade relations with non-EU countries. With its geographical proximity, high degrees of people-to-people interaction and strong historical relations, Turkey is an ideal country to forge deeper economic ties with. Through foreign direct investment and joint ventures, Turkey also provides the potential to expand further towards North Africa and the Middle East –regions where Turkish businesses have already initiated and completed valuable projects and commercial links.

### ***Post-Brexit Risks Avoided: The Future of Bilateral Trade***

One of the reasons for the high volume of trade between the UK and Turkey was the Customs Union, which allowed for unrestricted trade of goods. Brexit brought about three risks because the UK would leave the Customs Union. First, Turkey could have lost its competitive edge in its trade with the UK, which would now also trade with non-EU countries, such as in Asia, in equal terms. Second and relatedly, Turkey did not have the capacity to sign a separate FTA with the UK because of the conditions of the Customs Union agreement, which restricted Ankara's signing of FTAs unless the EU also had similar deals. Third, Turkey could have lost some of its foreign trade advantage with the third countries because of the disruption in the supply chains caused by Brexit.<sup>62</sup>

This worst-case scenario was avoided thanks to the preparation of an FTA, which was ready to be signed as soon as the UK agreed its own divorce deal and trade agreement with the EU. Through this foresightedness and mutual work conducted after the referendum, the two countries signed an agreement quickly before the end of 2020. Although the deal was criticised by some in the UK for ignoring rising authoritarianism in Turkey,<sup>63</sup> it was mostly hailed by both sides as a great achievement. For example, President Erdoğan announced it as the second most important free trade agreement in Turkish history after the Customs Union with the EU.<sup>64</sup> It was also welcomed by manufacturers, such as Stuart Rowley, the president of Ford of Europe who declared that:

Ford welcomes the announcement today of a trade agreement between the UK and Turkey, and the speed with which it has been concluded underscores its importance to the economic prosperity of both countries. As Europe's leading commercial vehicle brand, Ford's Dagenham engine

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<sup>62</sup> Yaprak Gürsoy, *Brexit: Türkiye-Birleşik Krallık-AB İlişkilerinde Siyasi ve Ekonomik Riskler ve Fırsatlar*, İstanbul, DEİK, 2019.

<sup>63</sup> Simon Tisdall, "Global Britain' is willing to trade away everything. Including scruples," *The Guardian*, 3 Jan 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/03/global-britain-is-willing-to-trade-away-everything-including-scruples>.

<sup>64</sup> Bloomberg HT, "Erdoğan: İngiltere ile serbest ticaret anlaşması imzalıyoruz," 28 Dec 2020, <https://www.bloomberght.com/erdogan-yarin-ingiltere-ile-serbest-ticaret-anlasmasi-imzaliyoruz-2271567>.



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manufacturing facility in east London exports much of its diesel engine production to our Ford Otosan joint venture in Turkey where the engines are fitted into Ford Transit vehicles, many of which are then exported from Turkey to the UK. Given that Ford and Ford Otosan business constitutes more than 10 per cent of the total trade volume between the UK and Turkey, this trade agreement is extremely significant for us and will help to secure jobs in both countries.<sup>65</sup>

Despite these positive sentiments, the current FTA's main purpose is to preserve the existing bilateral trade and to help manufacturers avoid any potential losses caused by Brexit. The ultimate goal is to prepare bilateral trade for a more comprehensive phase-2 FTA which would go beyond economic relations and enhance the strategic partnership. Now that economic ties are freed from the restrictions of the Customs Union, there are opportunities, including advanced trade in services and agriculture and an increase in foreign direct investment. There are already signs that relations can move in this direction. For example, according to British Ambassador to Turkey Sir Dominick Chilcott, a new FTA would also cover "trade in agricultural goods, trade in services, investment and the digital economy."<sup>66</sup>

In a few years, it is expected that bilateral trade would reach over £21 billion as announced by the ministers of trade, who also declared their will for a more comprehensive and ambitious FTA in the future.<sup>67</sup> Speaking about the FTA, British Trade Secretary Liz Truss argued that:

[t]oday's deal covers trade worth more than £18 billion, delivers vital certainty for business and supports thousands of jobs across the UK in the manufacturing, automotive and steel industries. It paves the way for a more new, more ambitious deal with Turkey in the near future, and is part of our plan to put the UK at the centre of a network of modern agreements with dynamic economies.<sup>68</sup>

Given the evidence, as far as bilateral trade is concerned, in the post-Brexit era, there is a strengthening continuity in Anglo-Turkish relations.

### Conclusion

The global political economy and international affairs have faced unparalleled challenges since the financial crash in 2007/2008. Undoubtedly, Brexit was one of them. The impact of Brexit on Britain's relations with the EU and beyond is still a curious case for academics and policymakers. The multilateralism of post-Brexit affairs will remain salient for years to come. The purpose of this study was to analyse how Brexit has affected Anglo-Turkish relations. We assessed the elements of continuity and possibilities of change in

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<sup>65</sup> BCCT, "UK and Turkey Sign Trade Deal," 2021, <https://www.bcct.org.tr/news/uk-and-turkey-sign-trade-deal/70799>.

<sup>66</sup> Serkan Demirtaş, "Trade deal to boost Turkey-UK strategic partnership: British envoy", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 11 Jan 2021, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/trade-deal-to-boost-turkey-uk-strategic-partnership-british-envoy-161524>.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> BCCT, "UK and Turkey Sign Trade Deal".



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bilateral relations and the foreign policies of both countries. We first offered background information on Brexit as well as a concise history of Anglo-Turkish relations. Against the backdrop of Brexit and global uncertainties, we then examined the potential risks and opportunities for the foreign policies of both countries and with regards to their relations with each other. Finally, we analysed the significance of Anglo-Turkish trade relations and areas of further economic cooperation.

We contended that despite the difficulties that were posed by post-Brexit uncertainties, Anglo-Turkish relations have continued as usual. It is safe to argue that there is potential for deeper relations in the areas of economy, trade and security. As we maintained above, the EU and Turkey's candidacy for membership is one of the main aspects of Anglo-Turkish relations. In terms of the political impact of Brexit on foreign relations, the close cooperation between the UK and Turkey has continued as usual, although there are risks imposed by Brexit too. Turkey's relations with the Western world have seen challenges. Negotiations with the EU have stalled recently because of the Cyprus issue and Turkey's assertive foreign policy in its neighbourhood, democratic backsliding and human rights problems. As a strong supporter of Turkey's membership bid, the UK could have played a significant role within the EU. However, for the same reason that Turkey and the UK are close partners, the UK leaving the EU can bring opportunities as well. As a non-EU country, the UK can play a more active role in mediating between Turkey and the EU, US, and NATO. This becomes even more important for Ankara at a time when it further detaches from the liberal democracies of the Western world. Finally, as a non-EU NATO member, Britain may play a more proactive role in Cyprus. Although it is worth mentioning that the more Turkey moves away from democratic values and the Western world in general, the less the UK can do as a proactive mediator. Similarly, the post-Brexit UK's ability to act as a global actor depends on its adherence to the Global Britain vision which is closely linked to its good relations with the EU. The possibilities of Britain being a mediator between Turkey and the EU are weaker where the UK's own relationship with the EU is confrontational.

In terms of bilateral foreign economic relations between the UK and Turkey, there is continuity too. Turkey's foreign economic relations with the UK has witnessed a growing trend in the last decade. We argued above that this is significant for two reasons. First, Turkey has a trade surplus with the UK. Second, in times of economic downturn, close cooperation with the UK is still a viable option for the major capital groups in Turkey. It is also plausible to argue that there was a similar sentiment of willingness from the British side, although close economic relations with Turkey at a time when it slid into authoritarianism was criticised by some. Nonetheless, the signing of a post-Brexit FTA was welcomed from both sides. The FTA was not only to avoid the economic risks that were posed by Brexit, but it was also to prepare the countries for a phase-2 FTA in the near future with the purposes of developing



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further and deeper economic relations. However, like political cooperation, the future of bilateral commercial relations will also depend on the willingness of both sides to engage with each other and Europe in a multilateral and liberal trading order. They also need to carefully develop realistic expectations from one another whilst closely working with the EU and NATO in the era of post-pandemic recovery.

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